

Free Grace Broadcaster

ISSUE 248

COMMUNION WITH GOD

*Truly our fellowship is with
the Father, and with his
Son Jesus Christ.*

1 John 1:3

Our Purpose

*“To humble the pride of man,
to exalt the grace of God in salvation,
and to promote real holiness in heart and life.”*

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COMMUNION WITH GOD

248

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WHAT IS COMMUNION WITH GOD?

Matthew Barker (1619-1698)

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another.—1 John 1:7

THE subject I am to treat upon is communion¹ with God—how to attain it and how to maintain it in as constant a course as we may be capable of in this world...The subject is high and copious² [and] much spoken of. But, I fear, [it is] not so well understood and less experienced, though the subject mainly relates to Christian experience...Now, this is the way to have fellowship and communion with God, as the text saith: “If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another.”

Now, by “one with another,” some say the apostle means the saints to whom he writes: “We and ye shall have fellowship together, we apostles and ye believers”...But we must rather understand that the apostle here speaks of the fellowship that God hath with His people and they with Him...An ancient Greek manuscript hath in the text “with Him,” that is, “God and we shall have fellowship with one another.” And [so] we are to understand it in that sense. For the apostle is not speaking here of the communion that the saints have with one another, but of our communion and fellowship with God, as in the verse 6: “If we say we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.” He then adds, “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another.”

I shall now proceed to speak to the subject itself: What is this communion with God? The word in the Greek, [translated] *fellowship*...signifies “common.” So, it imports³ something that is common and mutual between God and us, as communion among men imports something mutual on each side. So, our communion with God is either active or passive: *active* in what passeth from us to God, and *passive* in what is communicated from Him to us.

1. *Active on our part.* [This] consisteth in the divine operations of our souls toward God, when the faculties of the soul are tending to-

¹ **communion** – spiritual communication.

² **copious** – abounding in information.

³ **imports** – means.

ward Him and terminated upon Him, when the mind is exercised in the contemplation of Him and the will in choosing and embracing Him, and when the affections are fixed upon Him and center in Him. [It is] by our desires we pursue after Him, by our love we cleave to Him, and by delight we acquiesce and solace⁴ ourselves in Him.

2. *Passive on God's part.* Our communion with God consists in our participation of Him and in His communicating Himself to us. This communication of God to us in our communion with Him is specially in these three things: light, life, and love.

(1) *In light:* I mean the light of spiritual knowledge and understanding, whereby we are enabled to discern spiritual things *spiritually*. This is called “God’s shining into our hearts” by the apostle (2Co 4:6) and “seeing light in God’s light” by the psalmist (Psa 36:9).

(2) *In life:* Whereby we are made partakers of the life of God, though in a lower degree, and are no longer “alienated from the life of God” as the apostle declared the Gentiles to be (Eph 4:18). And by this “life of God,” we must understand that which the Scripture calls sanctification;⁵ for holiness is the life of God in man. For when God sanctifies a man, He quickens the soul that was dead in sin and makes it partake of the divine life, or “the life of God,” which elsewhere is called “a partaking of the divine nature” (2Pe 1:4) and a renewing [of] man “in knowledge after the image of him that created him” (Col 3:10).

(3) *In love:* God communicates His love also in the sense and taste of it to the soul, which the apostle calls “shedding abroad the love of God in the heart” (Rom 5:5). So that, in this communion with God, we have not only the theory of His love in our minds, but some taste and experience of it in our hearts! Under this is comprehended all that peace, joy, and consolation that springs out of this to the soul, arising from the communication of the sense of His love to us. The apostle James expresseth this communion with God in both parts of it when he saith, “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you” (Jam 4:8). And Christ expresseth them both also in these words: “If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him” (Joh 14:23). He expresseth the *active* part of communion with God by our

⁴ **acquiesce and solace** – submit and comfort.

⁵ **sanctification** – Sanctification is the work of God’s Spirit whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God and are enabled more and more to die to sin and live to righteousness. (See *Spurgeon’s Catechism*, Q. 34 and Free Grace Broadcaster 215, *Sanctification*, both available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.)

loving Him and keeping His commandments, and the *passive* part by His own and His Father's coming to us to make their abode with us. The apostle John expresseth them by our dwelling in God and God's dwelling in us. We dwell in God either by faith in Him, whereby we make Him the object of our trust, confidence, and dependence; or especially by our love to Him, as he there expresseth it: "He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God" (1Jo 4:16); and then God's dwelling in us is communion with God in the other part of it, consisting in a communication of Himself to us.

But we must think soberly of this communion with God. It is not a transformation of the soul of man into the divine essence and being, as if man was made God, swallowed up into Him, and lost his own existence and being in God. Neither is it a mixture of God's being with the being of the creature, as water and wine are mingled together, so that the nature of them both is lost in that mixture. For it is not thus with angels in heaven or the glorified spirits there. They still retain their own distinct nature and being, though they are in the highest communion with God! Neither is it thus between the human and the divine nature of Christ,⁶ as if these two were mingled together and did lose their proper and distinct natures in each other, though the human and divine nature of Christ have a most near union and communion with each other.

From *Puritan Sermons*, Vol. 4 (Wheaton, IL: Richard Owen Roberts, Publishers, 1981), 38-56; in the public domain.

Matthew Barker (1619-1698): English Nonconformist theologian and pastor; born in Great Cransley, Northamptonshire, England, UK.



Get and keep communion with God. Your strength to stand and your strength to withstand all assaults is from your communion with God. Communion with God is that that will make you stand fast and triumph over all enemies, difficulties, dangers, and deaths.—*Thomas Brooks*

There is communion and fellowship with all the persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and their love, severally and distinctly. This is the communion that John held forth and that the Comforter promised unto the apostles and brought them into, and that the apostle...would wind us up to and put us upon seeking after. Now there is an implicit communion with all these persons, so that if my heart be affected with the love of one, I may know the love of all the rest.

—*Thomas Goodwin.*

⁶ A reference to the Incarnation of Christ in which He "was and continues to be God and man in two distinct natures and one person, forever." (See *Spurgeon's Catechism*, Q. 20, and FGB 234, *Incarnation*, both available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.)

WHERE SPIRITUAL LIFE BEGINS

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early.—Isaiah 26:9

THERE is, in the people of God, a principle of communion with God. For, first, this is where their spiritual life begins. “I will arise and go to my father” (Luk 15:18) was the token that the prodigal was really restored in heart. When he cleansed himself, touched himself up, joined himself to a citizen of that country, and began to work instead of wasting his substance in riotous living, it was a considerable improvement. It is always a good thing for a man to work rather than to waste his time in the indulgence of his vices; but he had not then begun to live spiritually. It was when he remembered his father that the gracious work was begun in his soul: the cry of his spirit was, “I will arise and go to my father.”

Beloved, if any of you are seeking after righteousness by your own works or by your prayers, I do not know that this is a token of a new life. It may be that you are even in the dark, seeking after God if haply¹ you may find Him there. But when there rises in your spirit this thought, “I must find God, I must come to God, I must confess my sin unto the Lord, I must lay myself at the Lord’s feet, I must meet with Him,” then we hope the best things of you. So long as you are content with ministers, priests, sacraments, books, prayers, and all that you can do, you are satisfied with the mere shell. But when there awakens in your spirit this desire, “It is God Whom I have offended; unto God will I make my confession. It is from God that I need pardon; O that I knew where I might find Him! I would come even to His seat”; when there is formed within your spirit this resolve: “I will seek the Lord’s face until He turns to me in love and accepts me as His child”—then it is that spiritual life begins.

Your first true dealings with God, after a spiritual fashion, are infinitely more important than all the outward forms of religion, whatever they may be. I am not judging one form more than another; but, if you are content with the externals and do not come to the internals, if you do not come to close grips with God and humble yourself before Him, you know not as yet what spiritual life really means. This,

¹ haply – perhaps.

then, is where spiritual life begins: coming into communion with God.

And, beloved, this is where the life of the real Christian grows and makes advances. We behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, and that gives us hope, that gives us peace, that gives us rest. And in proportion as we know more of God, as He reveals Himself in the person of His dear Son, our graces grow. Faith has for its meat and its drink the knowledge of God. Knowing Him and His exceeding great and precious promises, we come to rest in Him more fully. Ignorance is the enemy of faith; but a knowledge of God greatly strengthens and increases our confidence in Him. You do not grow in grace, my brethren, by listening to fine oratory, even though it be of a sacred kind. The real growth comes to you when God the Holy Ghost Himself dwells with you. It is not when you have been so many minutes on your knees or have read so many chapters in the Bible that you necessarily grow; but it is when you have spoken with God, and God has spoken with you—when He Who is the Alpha of your spiritual life is all the letters of it right up to the Omega! He hath wrought all our works in us, and without Him we can do nothing. He is the truly strong man who lives near to God. That man can do anything who throws himself back on the all sufficiency of the Most High. Rest upon yourself or trust in anything below the stars, and you will dwindle and decay; but rest in God, and come into close contact with the Divine Invisible, let your rock and refuge be His throne, and you will go from strength to strength by the power of God the Holy Ghost that shall dwell in you.

Next, beloved friends, it becomes to the believer the [prevailing character] of his life to please God. That is a beautiful testimony that is borne concerning Enoch: “Before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God” (Heb 11:5). Many have not yet even thought of doing such a thing as this, and there are some who may have thought of it who perhaps have not yet attained to it. But what a blessed thing it is for a man to be brought so to trust in the Lord Jesus, so to seek the glory of the Savior, so to yield his will to God’s will, and so to feel that God is his all and in all that he comes to please God! You know what it is to be pleased with your child and pleased with what he has done. It is not perfect. From your standpoint you can see many imperfections, but still it is most acceptable as coming from your child. He has done it with all his heart, and you are well pleased with him. Well now, that should be the [prevailing character], and it *is* the [prevailing character] of the life of every man who has really been renewed in the spirit of his mind by the work of the

Spirit of God. Jesus could truly say of His Father, “I do always those things that please him” (Joh 8:29). And in proportion as we grow more like Jesus, this becomes a true description of our lives: they are well pleasing unto God. What a contrast there is between the man who pleases God and the ungodly man! The ungodly man does what pleases himself, what pleases his wife, or what will please his neighbors; but the Christian man, although he is willing to please his neighbor for his good to edification, yet aims first at this mark: *not to please men, but to please God*. This makes his life altogether different from the life of the man who has not God in all his thoughts.

Again, beloved, this principle of communion with God becomes the very flower of our lives. When are we happiest? There is no room for question here: every believer knows that he is happiest when nearest to his God. I hope that, for the most part, we enjoy such full communion with God that our peace is like a river; but there are times of great tidal waves of fellowship when we get nearer to God than at other seasons...We can sometimes say, “Whether in the body, or out of the body, [we] cannot tell: God knoweth” (2Co 12:3); and we ourselves then know nothing else but God—we seem wrapped up in Him! I am not speaking of any mysticism, although it does happen that among the mystical writers this experience is most often spoken of; but this is a joy that belongs to all believers when they enter into the secret place of the Most High and abide under the shadow of the Almighty (Psa 91:1). The Christian man is not at his best when he is healthiest, when he is wealthiest, when he has been most successful, or when he has had the praise of men; but this is the day in which the flower of his life has come to the climax of its beauty and pours out its sweetest perfumes, now is his life, life indeed, now that he is drinking in that lovingkindness of God that is better even than life itself. See, then, as the worldling finds his highest enjoyment here or there, the Christian finds the summit of his joy in fellowship with his God.

I must not leave this point until I have said one other thing about this principle of communion with God. This is the hunger, and this is the thirst of the Christian: “My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God” (Psa 42:2). To get near to God is the great passion of our spirit. To accomplish this to the full, we would beard² grim death in his den. Yes, sometimes, we could almost use the extravagant language of Rutherford,³ when he declared that if God were on the other side, to

² **beard** – from the idea of taking a lion by the beard in his den; so, to confront someone on his own ground.

³ **Samuel Rutherford** (1600-1661) – Scottish Presbyterian pastor, theologian, and author.

get at Him, he would swim through seven hells! For nothing can keep back the [passion] of a heart that is all aflame with love to God and feels that all its heaven lies in communion with Him.

Well now, dear friends, if you and I are conscious that this is true, that there is in us a principle of fellowship with God, then notice that this proves that there has been a divine renewal wrought in us. It was not so once. Alas, it was very much otherwise! If news could have been truly proclaimed that God was dead, some of you would have been very happy to hear it because you would have been no more worried with thoughts of eternity and of the Day of Judgment. But now, what an awful thing it would be for you if, even for a moment, you indulged the thought that there was no God! Why, you would have lost everything! All joy would have vanished from you in an instant if God were not real to you. Then what a change this is—a radical change, one that could only have been wrought by supernatural power! [It is] as great a change as when the dead rise from their corruption and come forth into newness of life!

This proves your sonship, too, for no man cries after God and longs for fellowship with Him except it be upon the principle of “Abba, Father” (Gal 4:6). Slaves do not crave the presence of their masters; it is sons who long to be with their father. You are a true son of the Highest if you hunger and thirst after God.

This proves your holiness, too...If your heart pants after God, you have been made a partaker of the divine nature, [since] you are now striving after holiness; or else I am sure you would not be seeking after God.

This proves your heavenliness, too, for that same desire that draws you to God is drawing you to heaven. What is heaven but to be with God? And He Who now is drawing you with cords of a man and with bands of love to His own glorious self is by that very process drawing you towards the place where He reveals His face. He is also making you fit for that beatific vision⁴ that shall be your everlasting [happiness].

From a sermon delivered at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington,
on Thursday evening, September 15, 1887.

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892): Influential English Baptist preacher; born at Kelvedon, Essex, England, UK



⁴ **beatific vision** – direct knowledge of God enjoyed by the blessed in heaven.

LET US EAT AND BE MERRY

Benjamin Keach (1640-1704)

Let us eat, and be merry.—Luke 15:23

THIS certainly denotes that sweet fellowship and communion every believer hath with God when he closeth with Him in Jesus Christ or that sweet joy and comfort when he first comes home, [that is], converted. He then receives most choice and sensible¹ communion with God and Jesus Christ. The Father's love is manifested to him, and the love of the Son is manifested to him; for then he feeds plentifully upon all the blessings of a crucified Savior.

My brethren, there are three degrees or gradual steps of the happiness of believers: 1. *Union with God and Jesus Christ*—the prodigal² was now brought into a state of union with the Father and the Son by the Holy Spirit. Here our happiness begins; this is the first step or spring of it. 2. *Communion*—This is the next: “Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1Jo 1:3). 3. *Full and perfect fruition*³ of God forever—This completes our eternal happiness.

The first two we partake of here while we are in this world. The last we shall receive in the world to come. *Union* is the spring or way of our happiness; *communion* is a sensible taste thereof; and *fruition* is the fullness and perfection of it.

“Let us eat, and be merry.” Communion is often set forth in God's word by eating. “If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me” (Rev 3:20). We will eat together, rejoice, and be merry; i.e., he shall have sweet communion with Me and I with him. The word *communion* is by some rendered “fellowship,” by others “converse.”⁴ They are convertible⁵ terms or words of the same import.⁶

DOCTRINE: Returning sinners, [i.e.,] true believers, have communion with the Father and the Son. Let us eat and rejoice together, that is, the sinner with the Father and the Son, and the Father and the

¹ **sensible** – perceived by inward feeling.

² **prodigal** – one who spends his money extravagantly and wastefully; read Luke 15:11-32.

³ **fruition** – realization of that which is desired.

⁴ **converse** – spiritual or mental communication.

⁵ **convertible** – interchangeable.

⁶ **import** – meaning.

Son with him. They have mutual communion one with another.

What is necessary, as previous to this eating or gracious communion?

1. No wicked man can have communion with God and Jesus Christ. “Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee?” (Psa 94:20), that is, [those] that delight in sin and wickedness—no, this cannot be. “What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial?”⁷ (2Co 6:14-15).

(1) Can there be communion and sweet fellowship where there is enmity one against the other? (2) Can that person have communion with God that hath not the nature of God or a likeness of God in him? No, human creatures may as soon have fellowship with filthy brutes or with swine as unholy sinners can have communion with God.

2. No person can have communion with God until he hath union with Him. “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amo 3:3). Utter enemies to each other can have no fellowship together. “The carnal mind is enmity against God” (Rom 8:7). And God is an enemy to all the workers of iniquity; His face is set against them, and His wrath is kindled and ready to seize them. Therefore, there must be a mutual or reciprocal⁸ reconciliation to one another. First, God in Christ is reconciled to His elect: the atonement is made. He is also actually reconciled to the person of this or that man or woman that believeth in Jesus Christ. Whilst the prodigal abode in his swinish nature, he was not actually reconciled to his father; but now they are united in heart, in love, and in affections, and so can eat together or have fellowship one with another.

3. None, it appears from hence, can have fellowship with God that are not renewed, [that is,] born again or regenerated.⁹ The prodigal’s heart is now changed, he hath a new nature and can now taste and relish spiritual things. Sin now hath become bitter to him, yea, loathsome and abominable; and God is become the object of his love and delight. He can tell you now that God is good—that root of bitterness, that aversion that was in him unto God and spiritual things, is gone. Now he loves as God loves and hates as God hates. Before, he was alienated from the life of God and also favored the things of the flesh.

⁷ **concord...Belial?** – Do Christ and Belial (Jewish name for the devil) agree on anything?

⁸ **reciprocal** – given by each of two people to the other.

⁹ **regeneration** – God’s gracious act of creating spiritual life in a sinner by the Holy Spirit’s power; see FGB 202, *The New Birth*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

4. **None can have communion with God or with Jesus Christ until they have espoused¹⁰ Him or are married to Him.** Marriage is antecedent to conjugal¹¹ fellowship and communion.

5. **Saving knowledge of God in Christ is necessary to this fellowship.** The choicest fellowship flows from intimate knowledge and acquaintance persons have of one another. There may be a remote knowledge where there is no communion; but to the nearest and choicest communion, there is a real and choice acquaintance. “Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee” (Job 22:21), that is, all true good—that which is the sweetest, even communion with God and His Son Jesus Christ. My brethren, the image of God doth in part consist in knowledge: “And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him” (Col 3:10).

6. **A man must actually be brought into the bonds of the covenant¹² before he can have communion with God.** Can a sinner eat and be merry or have fellowship with God, while he remains under the Covenant of Works,¹³ [that is,] under the Law or the curse of the Law? No, evangelical communion is not bottomed¹⁴ upon the legal covenant. All unbelievers are in the first Adam: “As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse” (Gal 3:10). Therefore, no unbeliever can eat with God and Jesus Christ or be merry with them. Can a condemned malefactor¹⁵ be merry? Or will the king admit him to eat at his table? Sirs, a man must have faith. He must believe and see his pardon or have ground to believe he is freed from the sentence of condemnation before he can rejoice and have fellowship with God. No man is actually in the Covenant of Grace that believes not, nay, that believes not in Christ: “The wrath of God abideth on him” (Joh 3:36).

7. **No man can have communion with God without sincere love to God.** Communion flows from that dear love and affection one person hath to another. As love increaseth, fellowship increaseth; and as love

¹⁰ **espoused** – taken as a spouse; married.

¹¹ **antecedent to conjugal** – before marital relations.

¹² **Covenant of Grace** – God’s gracious, eternal purpose of redemption, conceived before the creation of the world, first announced in Genesis 3:15, progressively revealed in history, accomplished in the person and work of Jesus Christ, the benefit of which is applied to all that believe in Him (Gen 3:15; 12:1-3; 2Sa 7:5-17; Jer 31:31-34; Gal 3).

¹³ **Covenant of Works** – covenant God established with Adam in the Garden of Eden before his fall into sin. It established man’s obligation to obey God with the penalty of death for disobedience (Gen 2:16-17).

¹⁴ **bottomed** – founded.

¹⁵ **malefactor** – criminal.

decays, communion or fellowship decays or grows cold also, or it is not so sweet and desirable. Oh, how were the heart, love, and affections of the father drawn out towards his son and the heart, love, and affections of the son set upon his dear father! “His father...fell on his neck, and kissed him” (Luk 15:20), put the best robe upon him, richly adorned him, and now he eats, drinks, and is merry with him! Now they are united in love and so have communion together.

8. It is necessary also that a believer knows the nature of that union from whence this communion flows. There is...a six-fold union: (1) There is a union between the head and the body with its members... and the food we eat, like the natural union between the tree and the branches from whence the tree communicates its sap to the branches. (2) There is a moral union, which is between one man and another; they cleave together in cordial love and affections, as Jonathan, who loved David as his own soul. (3) There is a conjugal union, [which] is between a man and his wife. (4) There is a political union, which is between a king and his subjects. (5) There is a hypostatic union,¹⁶ which is between the divine person of the Son of God and His human nature. (6) There is a mystical and spiritual union, [which] is between Christ and His church, [which includes] every believer. It is from hence our spiritual communion flows, though it is set forth by a natural and moral union, yet it is nearer and more intimate...

I proceed to prove [that] there is such a fellowship or communion between God and a believing sinner and show wherein it doth consist. They are not only united in love, affections, and conjugal bonds, but [they] are made one spirit with Christ. “He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit” (1Co 6:17). Not made one spirit essentially, but mystically: it is as if there was but one soul in two bodies! The same Spirit that is in the Head without measure is in every member in some measure. “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us” (Joh 17:21).

Now, where there is such a near union, there must needs be a most sweet communion. My brethren, true fellowship consisteth in community or communion. Now there is...community between Christ and believers.

1. They enjoy each other. Christ is theirs, and they are His. “I will be their God, and they shall be my people...My beloved is mine, and I am his” (Eze 37:27; Song 2:16). God gives Himself and all He hath

¹⁶ **hypostatic union** – the Greek word *hypostasis* means “person.” Hypostatic union then means that in Christ, godhead and manhood unite (union) in one Person (hypostasis).

to believers, and they give themselves to Him. Christ also gives Himself and all He hath to us: (1) His person to espouse us and so raises our glory; (2) His treasure and fulness to enrich us; (3) His righteousness to clothe us; (4) His power to uphold and defend us; (5) His wisdom to direct us; (6) His Spirit to quicken, to renew, to enlighten, and to lead us; (8) His love to delight and console us, (9) His glory to crown us; (10) His angels to minister to us.

And we give Christ our hearts. “My son, give me thine heart” (Pro 23:26). We give Him ourselves and all we are. “They...gave their own selves to the Lord” (2Co 8:5). We give our whole souls, strength, affections, even all our faculties, powers, and members of our bodies. [We give] our judgments to judge and choose Him; our understandings to know Him; our wills to close with and obey Him; our affections to desire, love, and cleave to Him; our thoughts to contemplate Him; our consciences to be kept awake and stir us up to serve and live to Him; our tongues to speak for Him, pray to Him, and to praise Him; our eyes to look up to Him and to be employed for Him; our hands to minister to Him in His ministers and poor saints; our feet to travel to His sanctuary and visit His poor members, etc.

Sirs, Christ took our nature on Him: He [is, therefore,] bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh (Eph 5:30). He gives us His Spirit and His likeness, so we partake of the divine nature, etc. (2Pe 1:4). Christ’s riches are ours, and our poverty was His: “He became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” (2Co 8:9). Christ’s righteousness is ours and our sin was His. He was made “sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2Co 5:21). His blessedness is ours, and our curse fell upon Him: He was “made a curse for us...that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ” (Gal 3:13-14). He became a servant that we might become sons. He bore our cross that we might wear His crown. He took our shame that we might have His glory: “The glory which thou gavest me I have given them” (Joh 17:22). He was abused that we might be exalted. He was crowned with thorns that we might be crowned with eternal life. Thus, there is a community of persons and of what each [has].

2. There is a community of love and affections...Let me speak to [this] more particularly because communion consisteth in this: (1) God and Christ love believers, and they love God and Christ. They have a mutual love to each other, signified by their eating or supping together. “Thou...hast loved them, as thou hast loved me...I will love him...and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and

make our abode with him...Lord thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee” (Joh 17:23; 14:21, 23; 21:17). (2) Their love runs all in one channel, and it is fixed upon the same objects: what God loves, Christ loves, and that, believers love also. What God hates, Christ hates, and that believers hate also. (3) The nature or quality of their love is the same: Christ loves believers with strong, great, sincere, constant, single, or simple love. [He loves] with a sympathizing love, a complacent¹⁷ love, an unchangeable and everlasting love.

So, the love of every believer to God and Christ is great: it is a superlative¹⁸ love, sincere, single, simple, constant, cordial¹⁹ love. [It is] full of delight and abiding. Such as the cause is, such the effect is. “We love him, because he first loved us” (1Jo 4:19). Our love is but the fruit and reflection of His love on our souls. (4) Christ loves a believer in every state: when poor as well as when rich, in dishonor as well as in honor, on a dunghill as well as on a throne; when old as well as young, in a prison as well as in a palace. So, believers love Christ in all states and changes [that] He passed through: when in the manger, when tempted, when betrayed, when spit upon, when scourged, and when hanged on the cross, as well as now, [when] He is glorified at the Father’s right hand in heaven. (5) Christ loves not the souls of believers only, but their bodies also. Yes, and He loves their graces and all the holy and spiritual duties and services they perform to His glory. So, believers love the person of Christ, the offices of Christ, the Word of Christ. They love Him as He is a Priest, as He is a King, as He is a Prophet,²⁰ and whatsoever He is in Himself, hath done, is doing, or is made to them! They love...His people, His church, His ministers, His poor, His ordinances, His worship, His promises, His interest, His name, and His kingdom, and [they] long for it.

[Furthermore,] (1) He calls them His friends: “Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you” (Joh 15:15). And they call Him their friend: “This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem” (Song 5:16). (2) They walk together: “Enoch walked with God...three hundred years...I will...walk in them” (Gen 5:22; 2Co 6:16). (3) They “sit together in heavenly places” (Eph 2:6). (4) They eat together, as in my text; they sup together: “I will come in to him,

¹⁷ **complacent** – contented; satisfied.

¹⁸ **superlative** – surpassing all other; supreme; most eminent.

¹⁹ **cordial** – hearty; sincere; affectionate.

²⁰ See FGB 183, *Christ the Mediator*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

and will sup with him, and he with me” (Rev 3:20). They feed on His merits, and He feeds upon their duties and on their graces. “I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk” (Song 5:1). Their graces refresh and delight His soul. “Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck” (Song 4:9). (5) They visit each other. Christ visits them in ways of mercy, and they visit Him in way of duty. (6) Christ loves to hear their voice: “O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock...let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely” (Song 2:14). And they love to hear His voice: “It is the voice of my beloved that knocketh” (Song 5:2). “My sheep hear my voice...and they follow me” (Joh 10:27), that is, they love, approve, and delight to hear My voice. (7) Also, precious love tokens pass mutually to each other. He kisses them “with the kisses of his mouth” (Song 1:2), which is a token of His love and affection; and they kiss the Son as a token of their love and subjection...(8) They have mutual desires after each other. “So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty” (Psa 45:11). And what saith a believer? “With my soul have I desired thee in the night” (Isa 26:9).

From An Exposition of the Parables and Express Similitudes of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (London: Aylott and Co., 1858), 420-428; in the public domain.

Benjamin Keach (1640-1704): English Particular Baptist preacher and author; born at Stokeham, Buckinghamshire, England, UK.



The Lord loves the fellowship of His people. He invites them to commune with Him: “Come, my people.” He points out the way to fellowship: “Enter thou into thy chambers and shut thy doors about thee.” That is, get alone with thy God. Then, He provides for this communion: Christ is our hiding-place. And He Himself comes to meet us: “Come my people.” I invite you, beloved, tonight if you can, or as soon as ever you can, to have a special season given up to nothing else but fellowship with God that you may now begin again a fellowship that afterwards shall not easily be broken. Pray. If you feel that you cannot pray, read. Let God speak to you. Get into conversation with Him somehow. A conversation, you know, needs two to engage in it. Hear what God says to you, read a passage from His Word, and then pray. If you find you cannot pray, praise. Say something to Him, and then read again, and let Him speak to you.

But come not away until He has spoken to you, and you have very distinctly spoken with Him. Let this be the burden of your prayer: “Lord, I want to come to Thee; I want, through Jesus Christ my Mediator, to have fellowship with Thee and to abide in Him in nearness to Thee.” May the Lord help you in this matter, for truly there is no life like it!

—Charles H. Spurgeon

COMMUNION WITH THE FATHER

John Owen (1616-1683)

THE chief way by which the saints have communion with the Father is love—free, undeserved, eternal love. This love the Father pours on the saints. Saints are to see God as full of love to them. They are to receive Him as the One Who loves them and are to be full of praise and thanksgiving to God for His love. They are to show gratitude for His love by living a life that pleases Him.

This is the great truth of the gospel. Commonly, the Father, the first person in the Trinity, is seen as only full of wrath and anger against sin. Sinful men can have no other thoughts of God (Rom 1:18; Isa 33:13-14; Hab 1:13; Psa 5:4-6; Eph 2:3). But in the gospel, God is now revealed especially as love, as full of love to us. To bring home to us this great truth is the special work of the gospel (Ti 3:4).

God is love. In 1 John 4:8, “God” refers to the Father. This is clear from the following verse, where God is seen as distinct from His only begotten Son Whom He sends into the world. “Now,” says John, “the Father is love. He is not only infinitely gracious, tender, compassionate, and loving in His nature, but also He is One Who gives Himself supremely and especially to us freely in love.” So, John declares this in the following verses. This is love, this is that which I would have you specially to note about the Father. The Father shows His love to you in sending “his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him” (4:9). The Father “loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (4:10). And what is especially to be noted is that God’s love for us was before all that Christ has purchased for us (Eph 1:4-6).

Love is distinctly ascribed to God the Father. In 2 Corinthians 13:14, Paul ascribes grace to our Lord Jesus Christ, fellowship to the Holy Spirit, but love to God the Father. The fellowship of the Spirit is mentioned with the grace of Christ and the love of God because it is by the Spirit alone that we have fellowship with Christ in grace and with the Father in love.

The Father Himself loves us. In John 16:26-27, Jesus said, “I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.”

But doesn't Jesus contradict Himself? Has He not plainly said, "I will pray the Father [for you]" (Joh 14:16)?

Jesus had spoken many gracious words to His disciples. He had given them many comforting and faithful promises. He had revealed heavenly truths to them. So, they were fully convinced of His great love for them and that He would continue to care for them. They knew that He would not forget them when He had gone from them back into heaven. But now all their thoughts were on the Father. How would He accept them? How would He treat them?

Jesus, in effect, says, "Don't worry about that. I do not have to pray that the Father may love you, for this is His special attitude towards you. He Himself loves you. It is true indeed that I will pray the Father to send you the Spirit, the Comforter. But as for that free, eternal love, there is no need for Me to pray for that because above all things the Father loves you. Be fully assured in your hearts that the Father loves you. Have fellowship with the Father in His love. Have no fears or doubts about His love for you. The greatest sorrow and burden you can lay on the Father, the greatest unkindness you can do to Him is not to believe that He loves you."

The Holy Spirit sheds abroad in our hearts the love of God. In Romans 5:5, Paul says, "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." God, Whose love this is, is clearly distinguished from the Holy Spirit Who pours out His love. In Romans 5:8, God is clearly distinguished from the Son, for it is from the love of God that the Son is sent. Therefore, Paul is speaking of the Father. And what is it that Paul especially ascribes to the Father? It is love. Paul declares God's love to us in this wonderful way in order that we may wake up to it and wholeheartedly believe it and receive it. To impress this truth on us, Paul calls the Father "the God of love" (2Co 13:11). John tells us that God is love and that whoever wishes to know God or to dwell in fellowship with God, must dwell in Him as He is love (1Jo 4:8, 16).

In God there are two sorts of love. There is His love of good pleasure and His determination to do good, and also a love of friendship and acceptance.

It was His love of good pleasure and His determination to do good that was the reason why He sent His only begotten Son (Joh 3:16; Rom 9:11-12; Eph 1:4-5; 2Th 2:13-14; 1Jo 4:8-9).

Then, there is His love of friendship and acceptance. "If a man love me," says Christ, "he will keep my words: and my Father will love

him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him” (Joh 14:23). The love of friendship and acceptance is especially ascribed to the Father. Christ says, “We will come,” that is, the Father and the Son, “to such a one and dwell with him,” that is, by the Spirit. Yet in all this, Christ would have us take note that in the matter of love, the Father has a special right or privilege. “My Father will love him.”

This love is especially to be recognized as in God. So, this love of the Father is to be seen as the fountain or source of all other acts of God’s grace to us. Christians are often very worried as to whether God loves them or not. They are fully persuaded of Christ’s love and goodwill to them, but the difficulty they have is whether the Father accepts them and loves them. Philip said, “Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us” (Joh 14:8). Such thoughts ought to be far from us. The Father’s love ought to be looked on as the source from which all other loves flow. Paul said to Titus, “But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared” (Ti 3:4). He is here speaking of the Father’s love, for he goes on to say that that love revealed itself in His mercy in saving us through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, Whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior (vv. 5-6). It is this love of the Father to which Paul points us that brought us into our present state of being saints, for Paul reminds us that “we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another” (v. 3). But what brought the great change in us? It was “the kindness and love of God our Saviour” (v. 4). And how did that kindness and love of God show itself? Why, it showed itself in His merciful salvation and the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, Whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior.

In order to assure us of His love to us, the Father compares Himself to a father, a mother, a shepherd, a hen protecting her chicks, and the like (Psa 103:13; Isa 63:16; Mat 6:6; Isa 66:13; Psa 23:1; Isa 40:11; Mat 23:37). No further proof is needed. So, we can clearly say that there is in the person of the Father a special love to the saints by which He has communion with them.

If we are to have communion with the Father in love, two things are required of us. We must receive the love of the Father, and we must show gratitude and love to the Father.

Believers must receive the love of the Father. Communion or fellowship lies in giving and receiving. Until the love of the Father is received, we have no communion with the Father in love. How then is

this love of the Father to be received in order that we may have fellowship with Him? There is only one way, and that is by faith. To receive the love of the Father is to believe that He does love us. God has so fully, so clearly, revealed His love that it may be received by faith. "Ye believe in God," said Jesus (Joh 14:1). Jesus is here referring to the Father. And what is that which is to be believed in the Father? His love is to be believed, for God is love (1Jo 4:8).

It is true that we do not come directly to the Father by faith. We can only come to Him by the Son. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (Joh 14:6). Christ is the merciful high priest over the house of God, by Whom we have access to the throne of grace. By Christ, we have access and acceptance with the Father. By Christ, we believe in God (1Pe 1:21). Through Christ, then, we have access to the Father; we behold the Father's glory also and enjoy fellowship with the Father in His own special love. All this we receive by faith. As we come to the Father's love through Christ, so the Father's love comes to us through Christ. The light of the sun comes to us by its beams. By its beams, we see the sun; and by its beams, the sun touches us. Jesus Christ is the beam of His Father's love; and through Him, the Father's love reaches down and touches us. By Jesus Christ also, we see and experience and are led up to the Father's love. If we, as believers, would meditate on this truth more and live in the light of it, there would be great spiritual growth in our walk with God.

This growth in our walk with God is what we are to aim at. Many dark and disturbing thoughts arise to hinder our walk with God. Few can rise to the height of the Father's love by faith, so as to rest their souls in His love. They live far below it in the troublesome region of hopes and fears, storms and clouds. Abiding in the Father's love, all is peace and quiet. But how to rise up to the height of the Father's love they do not know. It is God's will that He should always be seen as gentle, kind, tender, loving, and unchangeable. It is His will that we see Him as the Father and the great fountain and reservoir of all grace and love. This is what Christ came to reveal. Christ came to reveal God as a Father (Joh 1:18). It is the name of God as Father that Christ declares to those who are given Him out of the world (Joh 17:6). And this is what Christ leads us to because He is the only way of going to God as a Father (Joh 14:5-6). He leads us to God as love. By this, Christ gives us the rest that He promised us. We believe in God through Christ (1Pe 1:21). Faith seeks out a place for the soul to rest. This rest is presented to the soul by Christ the Mediator. By

Christ the soul has access into the Father's love (Eph 2:18). Believers find that God is love and that He loved them from eternity. Believers learn that it was God's will and purpose to love them from everlasting to everlasting in Christ and that all reason for God to be angry with us and treat us as His enemies has been taken away. The believer, being brought by Christ into the bosom of the Father, rests in the full assurance of God's love and of never being separated from that love. This is the first act of communion that the believer has with the Father.

The response from us that God looks for, in return for His love, is love. God says to us, "My son, give me thine heart" (Pro 23:26). And God commands us to love Him with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind (Luk 10:27). This is the response God wants from us in return for His love to us. When the believer sees God as love, sees Him to be infinitely lovely and loving, and finds rest and peace for his soul in that love, then the believer has communion with the Father in love. This is love, that God loves us first; and then we love Him in response to His love. Love is a feeling or emotion of union and delight and desire to be near to the object loved. So long as the Father is seen as harsh, judging, and condemning, the soul is filled with fear and dread every time it comes to Him. So, in Scripture, we read of sinners fleeing and hiding from Him. But when God, Who is the Father, is seen as a father, filled with love, the soul is filled with love to God in return. This is, in faith, the ground of all acceptable obedience (Deu 5:10; 10:12; 11:1, 13; 13:3; Exo 20:6).

Paul tells us that God in His love chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world in order that we should be holy and without blame before Him (Eph 1:4). It all begins in the love of God and ends in our love to Him. That is what the eternal love of God aims to produce in us.

From *Communion with God*, abridgement R. J. K. Law (Edinburgh; Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 12-18; this book is available in print from www.banneroftruth.org, used by permission.

John Owen (1616-1683): English Congregational pastor, author, and theologian; born in Stadhampton, Oxfordshire, UK.



That the bodies of believers are the temples of the Holy Ghost; that God dwelleth in them by His Spirit; that they have received the Spirit of God; that they are led by the Spirit, walk in the Spirit, and have communion with the Holy Spirit; these truths are either expressed or strongly implied in almost every page of the New Testament.—*John Newton*.

OBTAINING AND MAINTAINING

Matthew Barker (1619-1698)

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another.—1 John 1:7

THE ways of this communion...must be those that God Himself hath appointed, the principals whereof are Jesus Christ Himself and the Holy Spirit.

1. **By Jesus Christ:** Who was figured¹ upon this account by Jacob's ladder that stood between heaven and earth, as the person wherein heaven and earth are united, God and man have communion with each other. [He] was also figured by the temple, whither the people came up to meet and have communion with God and God with them; and particularly by the mercy-seat, where God promised to meet His people and commune with them. Therefore, the apostle addeth here in the text, "Our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1Jo 1:3). For, on our part, all our access to God is by Him. "Through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father" (Eph 2:18). All God's approaches to us are also through Him. All that light, life, and love, which God communicates to His people, are through Him alone. And we have this communion through Christ with God:

First, *by virtue of His incarnation.* He assumed our nature into union and communion with God, and so made way for our persons.

Secondly, *by virtue of His life [that] He lived here in the world.* Considered either in the holy example He hath left us to walk by or the doctrine that He here preached: by both, He did guide and lead men in the right way to fellowship with His Father.

Thirdly, *by virtue of His death and making reconciliation for us by His blood.* For if there had not been a reconciliation and an agreement made between God and us, we could never have had communion with Him. How "can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amo 3:3). This communion with God is some lower entrance into the holiest of all in this world; and this is said to be by the blood of Jesus, as the apostle speaks, "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into

¹ **figured** – typified; represented by a typical or figurative resemblance.

the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water” (Heb 10:19-22).

Fourthly, *by virtue of His resurrection, whereby believers come to be raised up to newness of life* (Rom 6:4). And it is only in this new life that we have all our communion with God; the “old man” in us is not capable of it (Rom 6:6), nor the powers of nature, until they be renewed, raised, and quickened through the power of Christ’s resurrection.

Fifthly, *by virtue also of His ascension into heaven*. From whence descends upon believers a divine influence and power through faith, whereby they are carried up above this world and ascend up to heaven and into communion with God, as the apostle argues, “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God” (Col 3:1).

Sixthly, *by virtue of His intercession*. For this is one great thing that He intercedes for with His Father in heaven that His people might have union and communion with them. [That] appears by what Christ prays for in the behalf of His disciples: “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us’ (Joh 17:21), and so have communion with us.”

So that all these things [that] I have spoken concerning Christ, ye see, tend to this great end:² to bring up the saints of God into this communion with Him.

2. **This communion with God is also *by the Spirit of God***. As the apostle speaks of the communion of the Holy Ghost: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all” (2Co 13:14). The Holy Ghost communicates the grace of Christ and the love of God, so that all our fellowship with the Father and the Son is by the Spirit. Now, the Spirit doth effect this communion with God,

(1) *By sanctifying our hearts and assimilating³ our natures to the nature of God*. For there can be no communion where there is no likeness of nature. “What communion hath light with darkness” (2Co 6:14), or fire with water? There is no similitude⁴ in their natures. As the ele-

² end – goal.

³ assimilating – making or being like.

⁴ similitude – likeness; resemblance.

ments that have symbolic qualities and some likeness in their nature do easily pass one into the other by a natural transmutation,⁵ there must be some suitableness and likeness between God and the soul in this communion with God. Enmity and contrariety,⁶ which are in our natures to Him, must be removed by the sanctifying operation of the Holy Spirit in us.

(2) *By elevating and raising the soul above its natural power and reach.* The apostle distinguished between the soul and spirit in man. The spirit is the superior part of the soul, and it is in the spirit that we have our communion with God, Who “is a Spirit” (Joh 4:24)...So, our union and communion with God is by [our human] spirit, the supreme part of the soul, and [it is] elevated and raised by the Spirit of God above its own natural capacity or power.

These are the principal ways for communion with God. But then, there are subordinate ways, which are the ordinances and institutions of God for that end. For God hath in all ages been training up His people to this: to have communion with Himself. Therefore, He did appoint ordinances for that end under the Law. There were sacrifices, altars, and solemn feasts appointed of God, especially the Sabbath day, and a sanctuary erected, etc. [It was] all for this end, that His people might therein draw nigh to Him and have communion with Him. And so, in the New Testament, God hath His ordinances also appointed for this end, [such] as prayer, hearing the Word, singing of psalms, baptism, and especially the Lord’s Supper, which is therefore called “the communion,” as that ordinance wherein we have a more special communion with Christ and with God in Him.

Question: But what is to be done more particularly on our part to obtain it and maintain it also?

Answer 1: *In general, we are to desire it and pant after it as the most beneficial and necessary thing in the world.* Many have it not because they desire it not. They satisfy themselves in their converse with things below and the communion they have with things sensible and natural. [They] desire not this communion with God.

Answer 2: *You are to make it your scope and end⁷ in all the ordinances you approach to have therein communion with God.* Many come to them out of custom, some out of curiosity, and others in hypocrisy. So, [they] find not that communion with God that [otherwise] they might

⁵ **transmutation** – the change of anything into another substance.

⁶ **enmity and contrariety** – animosity and opposition.

⁷ **scope and end** – aim and goal.

obtain if they did make it their great scope and end. David testifies his great longing that he had after the sanctuary of God, but it was for this end: that there he might meet with God and have communion with Him, as he expreseth in Psalm 27:4: “One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple.” And again: “O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary” (Psa 63:1-2); which is, in effect, that he might there have communion with God. But to speak to this more particularly:

1. **If we would have communion with God, we must keep up the exercise of faith in Christ.** For it is, as I said, by Him that we have all our communion with God. Therefore, Christ had His name *Immanuel* given to Him, which signifies “God with us” (Mat 1:23). Let faith look upon God as in Christ, and so we may behold Him reconciled. We may behold Him coming down to us in our own nature. We may behold Him upon a throne of grace and as entered into a Covenant of Grace, whereby we may with a greater freedom and boldness have access unto Him. [That] is *the active part* of this communion with God. And, through faith in Christ, God also communicates Himself by His Spirit to His people in light, life, and love, which is *the passive part* of this communion. The apostle saith to this purpose, “Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God” (1Jo 4:15). This confession is an act of faith. If it be not only from the mouth, but from the heart, it leadeth the soul into this communion with God. [It is] expressed on our part by our dwelling in God, and on God’s part by His dwelling in us.

2. **Keep up a daily exercise of repentance,** so that no new sin nor the guilt of it in the conscience may hinder and interrupt our communion with God. For “who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?” (Pro 20:9). Therefore, there is need of daily repentance [so] that sin may not interrupt our communion with God. It will do [that], if we abide [without repentance] under it. The apostle speaks in this chapter of fellowship with God and here in the text. Afterwards, [he] adds, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1Jo 1:8), so that this communion with God may consist with the being of sin, but not with impenitence under it. [He] adds, therefore, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins” (1Jo 1:9). We know that confession of

sin is one great part of repentance, and when sin is thus confessed and forgiven, it need not hinder our fellowship with God. The apostle also mentioneth, in my text, fellowship with God and the cleansing us from sin by the blood of Christ. Both these are put together, so that to maintain this fellowship with God, we must be cleansed from sin. [That] is done meritoriously by the blood of Christ, but on our part upon the conditions of faith and repentance.

3. *Keep up a constant course of prayer and praising God.*

(1) *Prayer.* Prayer is a special ordinance for communion with God, and therefore so much commanded in Scripture. “Pray without ceasing,” saith the apostle in one place (1Th 5:17). “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit,” as he speaks in another place (Eph 6:18). For if it be not a prayer “in the Spirit,” accompanied with faith and fervor of soul, we may pray and yet have no communion with God. Prayer is compared to incense, but it doth not ascend to heaven but in the fire of holy affection kindled by the Spirit! And Christ therefore propounded⁸ several parables to put men upon fervency, faith, and perseverance in prayer...If the soul draws nigh to God in any duty, it will be in this. So, God’s drawing nigh to the soul is experienced to be much in this duty of prayer. Christ Himself had His transfiguration from heaven and the glory of God shining forth upon Him while He was praying, as you read (Luk 9:29). And the experience of the saints can much witness to this: what visits of light and love and transfiguring views of heavenly glory they have had in this duty of prayer! And then,

(2) *Keep up a constant course of praising God.* Praise is the great ordinance of heaven for communion with God in a state of perfection. And, as we are able to reach it in our present state, it will raise the soul into communion with God. The soul is in its highest operations when it is praising God! And the higher the acts of the soul are, the nearer it doth approach to Him Who is the most high God.

4. *Keep yourselves pure.* Though, by purity, I mean not an absolute purity, but watchfulness against all sins and temptations—resisting every sin, living in no sin, and a continued endeavor to mortify all sin in ourselves. The purer the soul is, the fitter it is for communion with God. The promise of seeing God is made by our Savior to the pure in heart (Mat 5:8); and with the pure, God will show Himself pure, saith the Psalmist (Psa 18:26). The apostle James, speaking concerning this communion with God, which he expresseth by our drawing nigh to

⁸ **propounded** – put forward for consideration.

God and His drawing nigh to us, adds this exhortation: “Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded” (Jam 4:8). And the apostle Paul speaks to the Corinthians of the same thing; [he] thereupon adviseth them to keep themselves pure: “And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty” (2Co 6:16-18)...

5. *Let God be much in your thoughts and in the view of your mind.* Not only when you approach some solemn ordinance, but in the whole course of your actions—when you go forth and come in, when you lie down and rise up. Let the creatures you converse with, the several dispensations⁹ of divine providence toward you, present God to your thoughts and the view of your minds. For how can men that have seldom any thoughts of God maintain any communion with Him? Our communion with God is not in a sensible way as it is with creatures. But it is by the inward thoughts and exercise of the mind, which therefore we ought to be frequent in.

We should, with David, “set the LORD always before” our face (Psa 16:8) and not [as the wicked], of whom it is said, “God is not in all his thoughts” (Psa 10:4). This is rather to live “without God in the world” (Eph 2:12), than to live in communion with Him. These thoughts of God should not be slight and transient, but fixed and serious, especially at [certain] times, which we should more peculiarly devote to solemn meditation.¹⁰ Meditation brings the object nearer to the soul and the soul nearer to it, though locally distant; unites the soul to it; mixeth itself with it; whereby it doth possess it or is possessed of it.

6. *Practice self-denial.* For he that abideth in himself and liveth in and to himself liveth at a distance from God. God and self are as two opposite terms: we must forsake the one, if we would approach to the other. When man first fell from God, he fell in with himself. [He] must therefore forsake himself, if he would return to God and have communion with Him.

There is a two-fold self-denial: (1) One is *internal*. When we can

⁹ **several dispensations** – various acts of divine ordering and arrangement of events.

¹⁰ See FGB 245, *Meditation*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

deny ourselves in all high thoughts of ourselves, confidence in ourselves, all self-ends,¹¹ self-applause, self-sufficiency...this is highly requisite to our communion with God. Self is that Dagon that must fall before God's ark (1Sa 5:2-4); that idol that must be cast out of the temple of man's soul that God may enter in and dwell there. (2) Then, there is a self-denial that is *external*. God sometimes calls His people to this, in order to communion with Himself, [such] as, to forsake father, mother, house, land, liberty, etc. And all this in order to receive the "hundredfold" in this life, as our Savior hath promised (Mat 19:29), which they shall receive in this communion with God.

7. *Walk in love*. This I add because our apostle doth so much insist upon it in this epistle. Love is an affection requisite to all communion—to communion with saints among themselves and to communion with God. For "God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him" (1Jo 4:16). And this mutual indwelling is the communion [that] I am treating of...[Love] is the band of union, and all communion is founded in union. Therefore, where there is no love, how can there be communion? Where men do not walk in love, how can they walk in communion with God? If Christians walk in strife, envy, debates, emulation,¹² contention, they will hereby be not only hindered in their communion with one another, but with God also.

8. Lastly, *let the people of God walk in fellowship with one another*. Let them be all united to some particular visible church, where they may enjoy all those ordinances of divine worship that God hath instituted for communion with Himself. Beside the church [universal,] whereof Christ is the supreme Head and Pastor, there are particular churches under the presidency and care of particular pastors, to some of which all professed Christians ought to belong in order to their communion with God and one another.

From "The Right Way of Obtaining and Maintaining Communion with God" in James Nichols, *Puritan Sermons*, Vol. 4 (Wheaton, IL: Richard Owen Roberts, Publishers, 1981), 38-56.



That saints on earth have real communion with God and that this communion is the joy of their hearts, the life of their life, and their relief under all pressures and troubles in this life is a truth so firmly sealed upon their hearts by experience, as well as clearly revealed in the Word, that there can remain no doubt about it among those that have any saving acquaintance with the life and power of religion.—*John Flavel*.

¹¹ **self-ends** – selfish goals.

¹² **emulation** – attempting to be equal or to surpass others in qualities or actions; rivalry.

COMMUNION WITH CHRIST

John Owen (1616-1683)

THE fellowship that the saints have with the Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord, is fellowship with Him as Mediator.¹ Into this office of Mediator, Christ submitted Himself for our sakes, being “made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Gal 4:4-5).

Scripture shows that Christians have such fellowship with Jesus Christ (1Co 1:9). This is that fellowship to which all saints are called, and in which, by the faithfulness of God, they shall be kept. We are called by God the Father, Who loves us, to this fellowship with His Son our Lord.

Jesus says, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me” (Rev 3:20). If this is not fellowship, then I do not know what fellowship is. Christ will dine with believers. Christ refreshes Himself with His own graces in His people, by His Spirit that He has given them. The Lord Christ greatly delights in the sweet fruits of the Spirit in His saints.

An example of this is given in the Song of Solomon, where the Shulamite² prays that she may have something to entertain her beloved when he comes to her (Song 4:16). The souls of the saints are the garden of Jesus Christ, the good ground that is blessed by God (Heb 6:7). Christ rejoices in the souls of His saints (Pro 8:31). He rejoices over them (Zep 3:17). The souls of Christ’s people are a garden for fruit, pleasant fruit (Song 4:12-14). Whatever is sweet and delicious, whatever is pleasant and sweet to the smell, whatever is useful and good for medicine, is in this garden. There are all sorts of spiritual things in the souls of the saints for the Lord Jesus. It is for this reason that the Shulamite is so earnest in her prayer that these things may be so increased in her that her beloved may dine with her as he has promised: “O that the yearnings and worship of the Spirit of all grace

¹ **Mediator** – one who intervenes between two hostile parties for the purpose of restoring them to a relationship of unity. See FGB 183, *Christ the Mediator*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

² **the Shulamite** – title for the young woman who is the heroine of Solomon’s Song; Shulamite is the feminine form of Solomon and means “perfect one” or “peace.”

might stir up all His gifts and graces in me, so that the Lord Jesus, the beloved of my soul, may be well entertained and pleased when He comes to have fellowship with me.”

God complains of lack of fruit in His vineyard (Isa 5:2; Hos 10:1). Lack of good food for her beloved’s entertainment is what the Shulammite feared and desired to prevent. A barren heart is not fit to receive Christ. So how can we allow our hearts to be barren and unfit for Him, when we know what unspeakable delight He takes in the fruit of the Spirit? Moreover, as Christ dines with His saints, so He has promised that they shall dine with Him. Christ provides for their entertainment in a most wonderful way (Pro 9:2). Christ calls the good things that He has for them a feast, a wedding, a “feast of fat things” with good wine. The fatted calf is killed for their entertainment. Such is the communion, and such is the mutual entertainment of Christ and His saints in that communion.

The beloved says, “I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys” (Song 2:1). The Lord Christ is compared to all that is most glorious and beautiful in His creation. He is, in the heavens, as glorious as the sun and as the bright morning star. Among the beasts, He is like the lion, the lion of the tribe of Judah. Among the flowers, Christ is as beautiful and as glorious as the rose and the lily. He is like the rose for the sweetness of its perfume and like the lily for its beauty. “Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these” (Luk 12:27). But Christ is more than an ordinary rose. He is the “rose of Sharon.” Sharon was a fruitful plain where the best herds were fed (1Ch 27:29). The plain of Sharon was so beautiful and so fruitful that it is promised to the church that there shall be given to it the glory of Sharon (Isa 35:2). This fruitful plain, no doubt, grew the most precious roses. Christ, in the beauty of His love and in His righteousness is like this excellent rose, drawing the hearts of His saints to Him. As God smelled a soothing aroma from the blood of Christ’s atonement,³ so from the graces with which He is anointed by God for His people, His saints receive a refreshing, lovely scent of a soothing aroma. The scent of a soothing aroma symbolizes all that is acceptable and delightful (Gen 8:21).

Christ is also “the lily of the valleys” (Song 2:1). Of all flowers, this is the most beautiful (Mat 6:29). So, Christ is most desirable for the beauty and perfection of His person. He is incomparably fairer than the children of men. Christ, Who is to His people One Who abun-

³ **atonement** – reconciliation with God by removing or covering the guilt of sin.

dantly satisfies all their spiritual senses, Who is their refreshment, their beauty, their delight, their glory, goes on to tell His people what they are to Him. “As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters” (Song 2:2). Christ and His church are both described by the same object, the lily, showing that their union is by the same indwelling Spirit and that His saints are conformed to His image and likeness, to which they were predestined (Rom 8:29). The church, like a lily, is very beautiful to Christ. The church is like “the lily among thorns” because Christ’s people excel all others. As the lily excels thorns, so in Christ’s eyes, believers in Him excel all unbelievers. The church is like “the lily among thorns” because the church is faithful and keeps her beauty under sore trials. The world is described as being pricking briars and painful thorns to the house of Israel (Eze 28:24). “The best of them is as a brier: the most upright is sharper than a thorn hedge” (Mic 7:4). So, we see what Christ is to His people, and what He is to the church. And now we see what Christ is in the church’s estimation. “As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste” (Song 2:3).

The Shulamite begins to speak her thoughts. She shows her delight in her beloved. So, the church delights in her beloved—Christ. As Christ compares the church to a lily among thorns, so she compares Christ to the apple tree among the trees of the wood because the apple tree has two things other trees do not have. The apple tree has fruit for food and shade for comfort. She eats its fruit and rests in its shade, and she does both with great delight. So, the church feeds on Christ and rests in the shade of His love.

“So is my beloved among the sons.” All other sons, whether angels, the sons of God by creation, or the sons of Abraham, the best of His offspring, or the sons of the old creation, however high they are in the world’s esteem, are to a hungry, weary soul—for only such seek shade and fruit—like the fruitless, leafless trees of the forest that give neither fruit nor shade. “In Christ,” says the church, “there is fruit, sweet-tasting fruit. His flesh is food indeed, and His blood is drink indeed” (*see* Joh 6:55). Moreover, Christ has brought the everlasting righteousness that will abundantly satisfy any hungry soul after that hungry soul has gone to many a barren tree for food and found none. Christ abounds in precious and pleasant graces, which I may take and eat. In fact, He calls me to eat and to go on eating until I am full. These are the fruits that Christ bears. He is the tree that produces everything necessary for life. Christ is the tree of life that has pro-

duced everything that is necessary for eternal life. In Christ is that righteousness for which we hunger. In Christ is that water of life of which whoever drinks shall never thirst again. Oh, how sweet are the fruits of Christ's mediation to the faith of His saints! He that can find no mercy, pardon, grace, acceptance with God, holiness, sanctification, and all other things necessary for salvation is an utter stranger to these things that are prepared for believers only.

Christ also is a shade giving comfort and shelter. He shelters from outward wrath and gives comfort for inner weariness. The first use of the shade is to protect us from the heat of the sun, as did Jonah's gourd (Jon 4:6-10). When the heat of God's wrath is ready to scorch the soul, Christ shades the soul from its heat. Under the shadow of His wings, we sit down quietly, safely, because we put our trust in Him. And all this we do with great delight. Who can describe the joy of a soul safely sheltered from wrath by the covering of the righteousness of the Lord Jesus? There is also comfort in shade from weariness. Christ is "as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land" (Isa 32:2). From the power of corruptions, the trouble of temptations, the distress of persecutions, there is in Christ quiet, rest, and peace (Mat 11:27-28).

Having described each other, and so made it clear that they cannot but be delighted in that fellowship and communion they have with each other, the Shulamite goes on to describe more fully that fellowship, and from her description we can learn the delights of fellowship between Christ and His people. "He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love. Stay me with flagons,⁴ comfort me with apples: for I am sick of love. His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me" (Song 2:4-6).

This fellowship is like a delicious banquet. "He brought me to the banqueting house" or "house of wine." This fellowship is described under images of the greatest sweetness and most delicious refreshment. "He entertains me," says the Shulamite, "as if I was some great person." Great persons, at great entertainments, are brought into the banqueting house, the house of wine and excellent food. These are the provisions of grace and mercy, love and kindness, and everything that is promised in the gospel, preached in the assemblies of the saints, and revealed by the Spirit. This love is "better than wine" (Song 1:2). It is "not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom 14:17). Gospel promises are delicious morsels. Whether these houses symbolize the Scriptures, the

⁴ flagons – raisin cakes.

gospel, the ordinances, or any wonderful revelation of special love, as banqueting is not done every day, nor used in ordinary entertaining, it does not matter. Wine that cheers the heart of man, that makes him forget his misery, that gives him a cheerful appearance, is that which is promised (Pro 31:6-7; Gal 4:9, 12). The grace shown by Christ in His ordinances is refreshing, strengthening, and full of comfort to the souls of the saints. Woe to such souls who loathe these honeycombs! But in this way, Christ makes all His assemblies banqueting houses. There He gives His saints rich entertainment.

This fellowship is delightful. “Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples: for I am sick of love.”⁵ The Shulamite is quite overwhelmed with the richness of the entertainment. So, Christ’s people find love, care, and kindness poured out by Christ in the assemblies of the saints. When the soul discovers the excellency and sweetness of Christ in the banqueting house, it is overcome and cries out to be made partaker of His fullness. The soul is lovesick—overcome with the mighty power of God’s love. Having once tasted the sweetness of Christ in the banqueting house, and not being fully satisfied, makes the heart sick. Therefore, the soul cries out, “Sustain me. I have caught a glimpse of the King in His beauty! I have tasted the fruit of His righteousness. My soul longs for Him. Oh, support and sustain my spirit with His presence in His ordinances, or I shall sink down and faint. Oh, what have you done, blessed Jesus! I have seen you and my soul is overwhelmed with your love. Let me have something from you to support me, or I die.” When a person is fainting, two things are needed to help him. Strength is to be used to stop him falling to the ground, and inward comfort is needed to refresh and revive his fainting spirit. For these two things the soul prays—overcome and fainting with the strength of its own love and raised by a sense of Christ’s love. The fainting soul desires strengthening grace to support it so that it may be able to attend to its duty. The soul also desires the comforts of the Holy Spirit to revive it and to satisfy it until it comes to a full enjoyment of Christ.

From *Communion with God*, abridgement R. J. K. Law (Edinburgh; Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 38-44; this book is available in print from www.banneroftruth.org, used by permission.



Communion is a reciprocal exchange between Christ and a gracious soul.

—Thomas Brooks

⁵ **sick of love** – weak or faint with passion and longing for her lover.

THIRSTING AND LONGING

Thomas Brooks (1608-1680)

MY...advice and counsel is this: In all your closet¹ prayers, thirst and long after communion with God. In all your private retirements, take up in nothing below fellowship with God, in nothing below a sweet and spiritual enjoyment of God (Song 3:1-3; Psa 73:28). “One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple” (Psa 27:4). The temple of the Lord, without communion with the Lord of the temple, will not satisfy David’s soul. “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?” (Psa 42:1-2)

The hart, as Aristotle² and others observe, is of all creatures most hot and dry of itself, but especially when it is chased and hunted; then it is extremely thirsty...By this, David discovers what a vehement and inflamed thirst there was in his soul after communion with God. As nothing could satisfy the hunted hart but the water brooks, so nothing could satisfy his soul but the enjoyments of God. “Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy” (Psa 43:4). The altar of God is here put for the worship of God. Now, it is not barely the worship of God, but communion with God in his worship that was David’s exceeding joy. “O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary” (Psa 63:1-2). David’s soul did not thirst after a crown, a kingdom, or any worldly greatness or glory, but after a choice and sweet enjoyment of God in his wilderness estate... “My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God” (Psa 84:2). I commend that speech of Bernard: ³ “I never come to Thee, but by Thee; I never come from Thee, without Thee.”

¹ **closet** – in this context, closet does not mean a room for storage but a private room, an inner chamber, a place for private study, prayer, and meditation (see Mat 6:6).

² **Aristotle** (384-322 B.C.) – Greek philosopher, pupil of Plato (428/427-348/347 B.C.).

³ **Bernard of Clairvaux** (1090-1153) – French monastic reformer and theologian known for his devotion.

Whenever you go into your closets, press hard after real and sensible communion with God, so that you may come out of your closets with some shine of God upon your spirits, as Moses came down from the mount with his face shining (Exo 34:29-35). Oh, do not take up in your closet prayers, tears, joys, or enlargements; but labor and long to enjoy that inward and close fellowship with God in your closets, as may leave such a choice and sweet savor of God, both upon your hearts and lives, as others may be forced to say, “Surely these have been with Jesus” (Act 4:13). It is sad when Christians return from their closets to their shops, their trades, their families, their commerce, etc., without the least visible rays of divine glory upon them.

O sirs! Closet prayer will be found to be but a dry, sapless, lifeless, heartless, comfortless thing, if you do not enjoy communion with God in it. Communion with God is the very life, soul, and crown of all your closet duties. Therefore, press after it as for life! When you go into your closets, let everything go that may hinder your fruition of Christ, and let everything be embraced that makes way for your enjoyment of Christ. Oh, let closet prayer be a golden bridge, a wherry,⁴ a chariot to convey your souls over to God and to bring you into a more intimate communion with God. Let no closet duty satisfy you or content you, wherein you have not conversed with God as a child converseth with his father or as a wife converseth with her husband or as a friend converseth with his friend, even face to face. Nothing speaks out more unsoundness, falseness, and baseness of heart than this: when men make duty the end⁵ of duty; prayer the end of prayer; than when men can begin a duty, go on in a duty, close up a duty, bless and stroke themselves after a duty, and yet never enjoy the least communion with God in the duty.

Question: But how shall a man know when he hath a real communion with God in a duty or no? This is a very noble and necessary question, and accordingly it calls for a clear and satisfactory answer. And therefore thus:

[1] First, A man may have communion with God in sorrow and tears when he hath not communion with God in joy [and] delight (Psa 51:17). A man may have communion with God in a heart-humbling, a heart-melting, and a heart-abasing way when he hath not communion with God in a heart-reviving, a heart-cheering, and a heart-comforting way. It is a very great mistake among many tender-

⁴ wherry – light rowboat used chiefly to carry passengers.

⁵ end – goal.

spirited Christians to think that they have no communion with God in their closets, except they meet with God embracing and kissing, cheering and comforting up their souls (Song 2:4-6). When they find God raising the springs of joy and comfort in their souls; when they find God speaking peace unto them; when they find the singular sensible presence of God cheering, refreshing, and enlarging of them in their closets—oh, then they are willing to grant that they have had sweet communion with God in their closets. But if God meets with them in their closets and only breaks their hearts for sin and from sin; if He meets with them and only makes His power and His presence manifest in debasing and casting down of their souls upon the sight and sense of their strong corruptions and many imperfections, how unwilling are they to believe that they have had any communion with God!

Well, friends, remember this once for all, viz.,⁶ that a Christian may have as real communion with God in a heart-humbling way as he can have in a heart-comforting way. A Christian may have as choice communion with God when his eyes are full of tears, as he can have when his heart is full of joy (Joh 20:11-19). Sometimes God meets with a poor Christian in his closet and exceedingly breaks him and humbles him; and at other times He meets with the same Christian in his closet and mightily cheers him and comforts him. Sometimes God meets with a poor soul in his closet, and there He sweetly quiets him and stills him; at other times, He meets with the same soul in his closet, and then He greatly revives and quickens him. God doth not always come upon the soul one way; He doth not always come in at one and the same door (Joh 3:8). We sometimes look for a friend to come in at the fore-door,⁷ and then he comes in at the back door; and at other times, when we look for him at the back door, then he comes in at the fore-door! So it is with God's coming into His people's souls. Sometimes they go into their closets and look that God will come in at the fore-door of joy and comfort, and then God comes in at the back door of sorrow and grief. At other times, when they look that God should come in at the back door of humiliation, breaking, and melting their hearts, then God comes in at the fore-door of joy and consolation, cheering, and rejoicing their souls. But,

[2] Secondly, I answer, that all Christians do not enjoy a like communion with God in their closets. Some enjoy much communion with

⁶ viz. – from Latin *videlicet*: that is to say; namely.

⁷ fore-door – front door.

God in their closets, and others enjoy but little communion with God in their closets. Moses had a more clear, glorious, and constant communion with God in his days than any others had in those times wherein he lived (Exo 33:11; Deu 5:4; Num 12:7-8). God spake to none face to face as He did to Moses. And Abraham, in his time, had a more close, friendly, and intimate communion with God than holy Lot or any others had in that day (Gen 18). And though all the disciples, Judas excepted, had sweet communion with Christ in the days of His flesh, yet Peter, James, and John had a more clear, choice, and full communion with Him than the rest had (Mat 17:1-4). Among all the disciples, John had most bosom communion with Christ. He was the greatest favorite in Christ's court: he leaned on Christ's bosom, he could say anything to Christ, he could know anything of Christ, and he could have anything of Christ (Joh 13:23; 20:2; 21:20). Now, that all Christians do not enjoy communion with God alike in their closets, may be thus made evident:

First, all Christians do not prepare alike to enjoy closet-communion with God. Therefore, all Christians do not enjoy communion with God alike in their closets (Ecc 5:1; Psa 10:17). Commonly, he that prepares and fits himself most for closet-communion with God is the man that enjoys most closet-communion with God (2Ch 30:17-20).

Secondly, all Christians do not alike prize communion with God in their closets. Some prize communion with God in their closets before all and above all other things; as that noble marquis said, "Cursed be he that prefers all the world to one hour's communion with God." They look upon it as that pearl of price, for the enjoyment of which they are ready to sell all and part with all. Others prize it at a lower rate and so enjoy less of it than those that set a higher price and value upon it (Job 23:12; Psa 119:127; Mat 13:45-46).

Thirdly, all Christians do not alike press after communion with God in their closets. Some press after communion with God in their closets as a condemned man presses after a pardon, as a close⁸ prisoner presses after enlargement,⁹ or as a poor beggar presses after alms (Psa 73:28; Isa 26:8-9). Now, you know these press on with the greatest earnestness, the greatest fervency, and the greatest importunity¹⁰ imaginable. But others press after communion with God in their closets

⁸ **close** – confined.

⁹ **enlargement** – release from confinement.

¹⁰ **importunity** – persistence.

ets more coldly, more carelessly, more slightly, more lazily...Now, they that press hardest after communion with God in their closets, they are usually blessed with the highest degrees of closet-communion with God.

Fourthly, all Christians don't alike improve¹¹ their communion with God in their closets. Therefore, all Christians don't enjoy communion with God alike in their closets. Some Christians do make a wiser, a humbler, a holier, a more faithful, a more fruitful, and a more constant improvement¹² of their closet-communion with God than others do. Therefore, they are blessed with higher degrees of communion with God than others are. Some Christians do more improve their closet-communion with God against the world, the flesh, and the devil, than others do; and, therefore, no wonder if they do enjoy more communion with God in their closets than others do.

Fifthly, all Christians do not alike need communion with God in their closets. Therefore, all Christians have not a like communion with God in their closets. All Christians have not a like place in the mystical body of Christ (1Co 12:14-15); some rule, and others are ruled. Now, every man stands in more or less need of communion with God, according to the place that he bears in the body of Christ. Again, all Christians have not alike burdens to bear, nor alike difficulties to encounter, nor alike dangers to escape, nor alike temptations to wrestle with, nor alike passions and corruptions to mortify, nor alike mercies and experiences to improve, etc.; therefore, all Christians don't need alike communion with God in their closets. Now, commonly God lets Himself out more or less in ways of communion, according as the various necessities and conditions of His people doth require.

Sixthly and lastly, all Christians do not alike meet with outward interruptions nor inward interruptions. Therefore, all Christians have not alike communion with God in their closets. Some Christians meet with a world of outward and inward interruptions more than others do: some Christians' outward callings, relations, conditions, and stations, etc., do afford more plentiful matter and occasions to interrupt them in their closet-communion with God than other Christians' callings, relations, conditions, and stations do, etc. Besides, Satan is busier with some Christians than he is with other Christians. Corruptions work more strongly and violently in some

¹¹ **improve** – use to one's profit; make effective use of.

¹² **improvement** – profitable use.

Christians than they do in other Christians, etc. And let me add this to all the rest: the very natural tempers of some Christians are more averse¹³ to closet-duties than the natural tempers of other Christians are. Therefore, all Christians have not alike communion with God in their closets; but some have more, and some have less, according as God in His infinite wisdom sees best.

Now, let no Christian say that he hath no communion with God in closet prayer because he hath not such a full, such a choice, such a sweet, such a sensible, and such a constant communion with God in closet prayer, as such and such saints have had or as such and such saints now have. For all saints do not alike enjoy communion with God in their closets: some have more, some have less; some have a higher degree, others a lower; some are rapt¹⁴ up in the third heaven, when others are but rapt up in the clouds...

The lowly Christian is the most amiable and the loveliest Christian. When a man can come out of his closet and cry out with Augustine,¹⁵ “I hate that which I am, and love and desire that which I am not. O wretched man that I am, in whom the cross of Christ hath not yet eaten out the poisonous and the bitter taste of the first tree,” or, as another saith, “Lord, I see, and yet am blind; I will, and yet rebel; I hate, and yet I love; I follow, and yet I fall; I press forward, yet I faint; I wrestle, yet I halt,” then he may be confident that he hath had communion with God in his closet. He that comes off from closet-duties in a self-debasing way, and in laying of himself low at the foot of God, certainly hath had communion with God. But when men come out of their closets with their hearts swelled and lifted up, as the hearts of the Pharisees were, it is evident that they have had no communion with God (Luk 18:11-12). God hath not been near to their souls, who say, “Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou” (Isa 65:5).

From “The Privy Key of Heaven,” in *The Complete Works of Thomas Brooks*, Vol. 2, 262-271, in the public domain.

Thomas Brooks (1608-1680): English Nonconformist Puritan preacher and advocate of Congregationalism; buried in Bunhill Fields, London, UK.



¹³ **averse** – turned away in mind or feeling.

¹⁴ **rapt** – sense of being carried away up into heaven or carried away by great emotion.

¹⁵ **Aurelius Augustine (354-430)** – early church theologian born in Tagaste, North Africa.

COMMUNION WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

John Owen (1616-1683)

THE first thing in which we have communion with the Holy Spirit is His work of bringing to mind the things that Jesus said (Joh 14:26). There are two promises in this verse: (1) There is the promise of the Spirit's teaching...and (2) there is the promise of bringing to remembrance all things that Jesus said

The work of bringing to remembrance things that Jesus said is the first general promise concerning the Spirit's work as Comforter. This promise first concerned the apostles. Christ promised His apostles that the Holy Spirit would bring back to their minds, by a direct work of almighty power, the things that He had said to them, so that by His inspiration they might be enabled to write and preach them for the good and benefit of His church (2Pe 1:21). The apostles had forgotten much of what Christ had said to them or might possibly do so. And what they did remember by their natural ability was not a sufficient foundation for them to write an infallible rule of faith for the church. It would be by this work of the Spirit that they would be enabled to write such an infallible rule of faith.

This promise of bringing to remembrance all the things that Jesus had spoken is also for the comfort of believers. Christ had been speaking to His disciples to comfort them by giving them precious promises of His help and strength in this life. He told them of the love of the Father, of the glory He was providing for them, which was full of unspeakable joy. "But," Christ says, "I know how unable you are to make use of these things for your own comfort. The Spirit, therefore, will bring them back to your minds in their full strength, so that you will find the comfort in them that I intended." And this is one reason why it was necessary for believers that Christ's bodily absence should be more than made up for by the presence of the Spirit. While He was with them, what little effect His promises had on their hearts! But when the Spirit came, how full of joy did He make all things to them. He brings the promises of Christ to our minds and hearts to comfort us, to bring us the joy of them and that far beyond the joy the disciples found in them when Christ spoke to them on earth. The gracious influences of the promises were then restrained so that the dispensation of the Spirit might be seen to be more glorious than that of the giving of the Law.

Christ told the disciples that the effect of the Holy Spirit's work in bringing things to their remembrance would be peace (Joh 14:27). They would be freed from worried, anxious minds and fearful hearts. It is stupid to rely on our natural abilities to remember the promises of Christ. But when the Comforter undertakes the work, then all is well. Our Savior Christ, then, left to His Spirit the powerful effect of His promises that He personally gave His apostles in their great distress. We may therefore see where all the spiritual comfort we have in this world comes from, and so we may have fellowship with the Holy Spirit in this His work...

The life and soul of all our comforts are treasured up in the promises of Christ. They are the breasts from which we suck the milk of godly comfort. Who does not know how powerless these promises are in the bare letter, even though we may meditate long on them, as well as how unexpectedly they burst in on the soul, bringing great comfort and joy? Faith deals especially with the Holy Spirit. Faith considers the promises themselves, looks up to the Spirit and waits for the Spirit to bring life and comfort into them. No sooner does the soul begin to feel the life of a promise warming his heart, freeing him from fear, worries, and troubles, than it may know, and it ought to know, that the Holy Spirit is doing His work. This will add to the believer's joy and lead him into deeper fellowship with the Holy Spirit.

The second general work of the Holy Spirit is to glorify Christ (Joh 16:14)...But how will the Comforter glorify Christ? "He," says Christ, "shall receive of mine." What these things are is told us in the next verse. "All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine" (Joh 16:15). Christ is not speaking of the essence and essential properties of the Father and the Son, but He is speaking of the grace that is brought to us by the Father and the Son. This is what Christ calls "my things" because they are the "things" purchased by His mediation. They are also the "things of the Father" because in His eternal love, He has provided them to be brought to us by the blood of His Son. They are the fruits of His election. "These," said Christ, "the Comforter shall receive. They shall be committed to Him so that He may bring them to you for your good and for your comfort in trouble. So, He shall show, declare and make them known to you." As Comforter, He reveals to the souls of sinners the good things of the Covenant of Grace, which the Father has provided, and the Son has purchased. He shows to us mercy, grace, forgiveness, righteousness, and acceptance with God. It is vital to know that these are the things of Christ that He has procured for us. They are shown

to us for our comfort and establishment. These things the Holy Spirit effectively conveys to the souls of believers and makes them known to them for their own good; that they were originally from the Father, prepared from eternity in His love and good will; that they were purchased for them by Christ and laid up for them in the Covenant of Grace for their use. In this way, Christ is magnified and glorified in their hearts, and they then fully realize what a glorious Savior and Redeemer He is. It is by the work of the Holy Spirit that a believer glorifies and honors Christ for the eternal redemption He has purchased for him. “No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost” (1Co 12:3).

The third general work of the Holy Spirit is to “shed abroad in our hearts” the love of God (Rom 5:5). That it is the love of God to us and not our love to God that is here meant is clear from the context. The love of God is either the love of His purpose to do us good or the love of acceptance and approval by Him. Both these are called the love of God in Scripture. Now, how can these be poured into our hearts? This can be done only by giving us a spiritual understanding of them. God pours the Holy Spirit abundantly on us, and He pours out the love of God into our hearts. That is, the Holy Spirit so persuades us that God loves us that our souls are filled with joy and comfort. This is His work, and He does it effectively. To persuade a poor, sinful soul that God in Jesus Christ loves him, delights in him, is well pleased with him, and only has thoughts of kindness towards him is an inexpressible mercy.

This is the special work of the Holy Spirit; and by this special work, we have communion with the Father in His love, which is poured into our hearts. So not only do we rejoice in and glorify the Holy Spirit Who does this work, but in the Father also, Whose love it is. It is the same in respect of the Son, in taking the things of Christ and showing them to us. What we have of heaven in this world lies in this work of the Holy Spirit.

From *Communion with God*, abridgement R. J. K. Law (Edinburgh; Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 177-182; this book is available in print from www.banneroftruth.org, used by permission.



There is no communion with God without a renewed soul. What communion can there be between a living God and a dead heart? God loathes sin, man loves it.

God loves holiness, man loathes it. How can these contrary affections meet together in an amicable friendship? We must have His life restored to us before we can be instated in communion with Him.

—*Stephen Charnock*

THIS HEAVENLY PRIVILEGE

John Flavel (c. 1630-1691)

LET us consider wherein this heavenly privilege of communion with God doth consist. More generally, it will be found to lie in a spiritual correspondence between Christ and the soul. God lets forth influences upon our souls; and we, by the assistance of His Spirit, make returns again unto God

Communion is a mutual action; so, in the text, “I...will sup with him, and he with me” (Rev 3:20). We cry to God, and God answers that cry by the incomes¹ of spiritual grace upon the soul. “In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul” (Psa 138:3). More particularly, there are many ways and methods wherein men have this spiritual correspondence or communion with God, viz.²: 1. In the contemplation of His attributes; 2. In the exercises of our graces in religious duties; 3. In His various providences. In all these, the saints have communion with Him.

1. There is a sweet and sensible communion between God and His people in the contemplation of the divine attributes and the impressions God makes by them upon our souls, while we meditate on them. As for instance,

(1) *Sometimes the Lord discovers³ and manifests to the souls of His people His immense greatness, the manifestation of which makes an awful,⁴ humbling impression upon the soul, makes them seem as nothing to themselves.* Thus, when Abraham, that great believer, considered the greatness of that God with Whom he had to do; that sight of God seems to reduce him to his first principles, to crumble him, as it were, into dust and ashes again. “I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes” (Gen 18:27). He now looks upon himself as a heap of vileness and unworthiness; so, David [also says]: “When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained” (Psa 8:3). From hence he inferred the greatness of the Creator: “What is man, that thou art mindful of him?” (Psa 8:4); q.d.,⁵ “When I consider what a great God the

¹ incomes – entrance.

² viz. – from Latin *videlicet*: that is to say; namely.

³ discovers – reveals.

⁴ awful – awe-inspiring; providentially reverential.

⁵ q.d. – Latin = *quasi dicat*: as if one should say.

Creator of the world is, I am justly astonished that He should ever set His heart upon so vile a thing as man.” When men compare themselves among themselves, and measure themselves by themselves, their spirits are apt to swell with pride. But [if] they would look up to God, as these holy men did, they would admire His condescension.⁶ And this is communion with God in the meditation of His immense greatness.

(2) *The representation and meditations of the purity and holiness of God, working shame and deep abasement in the soul for the pollutions and sinful filthiness that are in it.* This is communion with God, and an excellent way of fellowship with Him. Thus, when a representation of God in His holiness was made unto the prophet [Isaiah], there were the *seraphims* covering their faces with their wings and crying one to another, saying, “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isa 6:3). The effect this produced, or the return made by the prophet to this manifestation of God in His holiness, was a deep abasement of soul for his unsuitableness to so holy a God. “Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips” (v. 5). And this is real communion with God in His holiness. Thus Job, who had stiffly defended his own integrity against men, yet when God entered the lists⁷ with him and he saw what a great and holy God he had to do with, cried out, “Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further” (Job 40:4-5); q.d., “I have done, Lord, I have done; I could answer men, but I cannot answer Thee. Thou art holy, but I am vile.”

(3) *There are sometimes representations of the goodness and mercy of God made unto the souls of His people.* When these produce an ingenuous⁸ thaw and melting of the heart into a humble, thankful admiration of it and an answerable care of pleasing Him in the ways of obedience, then have men communion with God in His goodness. The goodness of God runs down to men in a double channel: His goodness to their bodies in external providences; His goodness to their souls in spiritual mercies. When the goodness of God, either way, draws forth the love and gratitude of the soul to the God of our mercies, then have we real communion with Him! Thus Jacob: “And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac...which saidst unto

⁶ **condescension** – coming down or stooping to people or things unworthy.

⁷ **entered the lists** – figure of speech for two knights on horseback, engaging each other with lances; in other words, God and Job were engaging in battle.

⁸ **ingenuous** – honest and direct.

me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee: I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands” (Gen 32:9-10). Ah, Lord, I see a multitude of mercies round about me, and the least of them is greater than I. So David: “And David the king came and sat before the LORD, and said, Who am I, O LORD God, and what is mine house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? And yet this was a small thing in thine eyes, O God...what can David speak more to thee?” (1Ch 17:16-18). You see in these instances what effects the goodness of God, even in inferior, outward mercies useth⁹ to produce in sanctified hearts. But then, if you come to spiritual mercies and ponder the goodness of God to your souls—in pardoning, accepting, and saving such vile, sinful creatures as you have been—this much more affects the heart and overwhelms it with holy astonishment, as you see in Paul: “The grace of our Lord was...abundant...[I] was...a blasphemer, and a persecutor...but I obtained mercy” (1Ti 1:13-14). So, when pardoning grace appeared to Mary, that notorious sinner, the sight of mercy cast her soul into a flood of tears, into transports of love! She wept and washed her Savior’s feet with tears of joy and thankfulness (Luk 7:44). No terrors of the Law, no frights of hell, thaw the heart like the apprehensions of pardoning mercy.

(4) *Sometimes there are special representations of the veracity and faithfulness of God made unto His people.* [They beget] trust and holy confidence in their souls; and when they do so, then men have communion with God in His faithfulness. Thus, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb 13:5). There is a discovery of the faithfulness of God, and what follows upon this? See verse 6: “So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.” Here is faithfulness in God, producing truth and confidence in the believer; this is that reciprocation, that sweet fellowship and communion between God and a believer with respect to His fidelity. “Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid” (Isa 12:2). And truly, friend, this is what the Lord justly expects from thee, even thy truth and confidence in Him, thy steady dependence on Him, in return to all the discoveries of His faithfulness to thee both in His Word and providences.

(5) *There are manifestations of the anger and displeasure of God by the hiding of His face from them and the frowns of His providence.* When

⁹ useth – tends.

these produce repentance and deep humiliation for sin, an unquietness, a restlessness of spirit until He restore His favor and manifest His reconciliation to the soul—even here is a real communion between God and the soul. “Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled” (Psa 30:7). Nor will a gracious soul rest there but will take pains to sue out a fresh pardon. “Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice...Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation” (Psa 51:8, 12).

I cannot here omit to detect a great mistake even amongst God’s own people: many of them understand not what communion there should be with God under the manifestations of His displeasure for sin. They know the affectionate meltings of their souls into love, praise, etc., to be communion with God, but that in the shame, grief, and sorrow produced in them by the manifestations of God’s displeasure—I say that they understand not that even in these things there may be communion with God. But let me tell thee, that even such things as these are the choice fruits of the spirit of adoption, and that in them thy soul hath as real and beneficial communion with God as in the greatest transports of spiritual joy and comfort. Oh, it is a blessed frame to be before the Lord, as Ezra was, after conviction of thy looseness, carelessness, and spiritual defilements, the consequents of those sins, saying with him, “O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee” (Ezr 9:6). Shame and blushing are as excellent signs of communion with God as the sweetest smiles.

Lastly, there are representations and special contemplations of the *omniscience of God*, producing sincerity, comfort in appeals, and recourse to it in doubts of our own uprightness. And this also is a choice and excellent method of communion with God. (1) When the omniscience of God strongly obliges the soul to sincerity and uprightness, as it did David (Psa 139:11-12). “I was also upright before him” (Psa 18:23). The consideration that he was always before the eye of God was his preservative from iniquity, yea, from his own iniquity. (2) When it produceth comforts in appeals to it, as it did Hezekiah. “Remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart” (2Ki 20:3). So Job also appeals to this attribute: “Thou knowest that I am not wicked” (Job 10:7). So did Jeremiah: “But thou, O LORD, knowest me: thou hast seen me, and tried mine heart toward thee” (Jer 12:3). (2) When we have recourse to it under doubts and fears of our own uprightness. Thus did David, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me” (Psa 139:23-24). In all these attrib-

utes of God, Christians have real and sweet communion with Him, which was the first thing to be opened, to wit,¹⁰ communion with God in the meditation of His attributes.

2. The next method of communion with God is *in the exercises of our graces in the various duties of religion*: in prayer, hearing, ordinances, etc., in all which the Spirit of the Lord influences the graces of His people, and they return the fruits thereof in some measure to Him. As God hath planted various graces in regenerate souls, so He hath appointed various duties to exercise and draw forth those graces; and when they do so, then have His people sweet, actual communion with Him. And,

(1) To begin with, the first grace that shows itself in the soul of a Christian: to wit, repentance and sorrow for sin. In the exercise of this grace of repentance, the soul pours out itself before the Lord with much bitterness and brokenness of heart, casts forth its sorrows, which sorrows are as so much seed sown; and, in return thereto, the Lord usually sends an answer of peace. “I said, I will confess my transgressions...and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin” (Psa 32:5). Here is a voice of sorrow sent up and a voice of peace coming down, which is real communion between God and man in the exercise of repentance.

(2) As there are seasons in duty wherein the saints exercise their repentance, and the Lord returns peace, so likewise the Lord helps them in their duties to act their *faith*, in return whereunto, they find from the Lord inward support, rest, and refreshment. “I had fainted unless I had believed” (Psa 27:13). And oft-times [they find] an assurance of the mercies they have acted their faith about (1Jo 5:14).

(3) The Lord many times draws forth eminent degrees of our *love* to Him in the course of our duties; the heart is filled with love to Christ. The strength of the soul is drawn forth to Christ in love, and this the Lord repays in kind, love for love. “He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father...and we will come...and make our abode with him” (Joh 14:21, 23). Here is sweet communion with God in the exercise of love. Oh, what a rich trade do Christians drive¹¹ this way in their duties and exercises of graces?

(4) To mention no more in the duties of *passive obedience*, Christians are enabled to exercise their patience, meekness, and long-suffering for Christ, in return to which the Lord gives them the sin-

¹⁰ **to wit** – namely; that is to say.

¹¹ **drive** – carry on.

gular consolations¹² of His Spirit: double returns of joy. “The spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you” (1Pe 4:14). The Lord strengthens them with passive fortitude, with all might in the inner man, unto all longsuffering; but the reward of that longsuffering is joyfulness (Col 1:11). This is the trade they drive with heaven.

3. Beside communion with God in the contemplation of His attributes, and graces exercised in the course of duties, there is another method of communion with God in the way of His *providences*, for therein also His people walk with Him. To give a taste of this, let us consider providence in a [threefold] aspect upon the people of God.

(1) There are *afflictive providences*, rods and rebukes wherewith the Lord chastens His children; this is the discipline of His house, in answer whereunto gracious souls return meek and childlike submission—a fruit of the Spirit of adoption.¹³ They are brought to accept the punishment of their iniquities. And herein lies communion with God under the rod. This return to the rod may not be presently made, for there is much stubbornness unmortified in the best hearts, but this is the fruit it shall yield; and when it doth, there is real communion between God and the afflicted soul (Heb 12:5-11). Let not Christians mistake themselves: if, when God is smiting, they are humbled, searching their hearts, and blessing God for the discoveries of sin made by their afflictions, admiring His wisdom in timing, moderating and choosing the rod, kissing it with childlike submission, and saying, “It is good for me that I have been afflicted,” that soul hath real communion with God, though it may be for a time without joy.

(2) There are times when *providence straitens*¹⁴ the people of God. When the waters of comfort ebb and run very low, wants pinch.¹⁵ [But] if then the soul returns filial dependence upon fatherly care,¹⁶ saying with David, “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want” (Psa 23:1); [then] it belongs to Him to provide and to me to depend: I will trust my Father’s care and love. Here now is sweet communion with God under pinching wants.¹⁷ The wants of the body enrich the soul; outward straitenings are the occasions of inward enlargements.¹⁸ Oh, see

¹² **singular consolations** – unique comforts or encouragements.

¹³ **adoption** – Adoption is an act of God’s free grace whereby we are received into the number and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God. (See *Spurgeon’s Catechism*, Q. 33 and FGB 246, *Adoption*, both available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.)

¹⁴ **straitens** – distresses; perplexes; presses.

¹⁵ **wants pinch** – lack of necessities cause distress.

¹⁶ **filial...fatherly care** – as a child depending on his father’s care.

¹⁷ **pinching wants** – physical or mental distress because of needs.

¹⁸ **outward...enlargements** – difficulties are opportunities for inner spiritual growth.

from hence how good it is to have an interest in God as a Father, whatever changes of providence may come upon you.

(3) There are seasons wherein the Lord exposes His people to imminent and visible dangers, when to the eye of sense there is no way of escape. Now when this produces trust in God, and resignation to the pleasure of His will, here is communion with God in times of distress and difficulty. Thus, David [said,] “What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee” (Psa 56:3), q.d., “Father, I see a storm rising. Thy poor child comes under his Father’s roof for shelter, for where should a distressed child go but to his Father?” And then, as to the issues and events¹⁹ of doubtful providences, when the soul resigns and leaves itself to the wise disposal of the will of God. As David [said], “Here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him” (2Sa 15:26). This is real and sweet communion with God in His providences.

From “England’s Duty, under the Present Gospel-Liberty,” in
The Works of John Flavel, Vol. 4, in the public domain.

John Flavel (c. 1630-1691): English Presbyterian minister; born in Bromagrove, Worcester, UK.



High communion with Christ will yield you two heavens: a heaven upon earth and a heaven after death.—*Thomas Brooks*

Communion with God is the top of the saints’ experience in this life. It is the height of experimental religion and powerful godliness. This, of all the enjoyments of God’s people on earth, is the nearest to the heavenly bliss; and could entire perfection and endless duration be added to it, it would be that.—*John Gill*

The end, my brethren, of all duties—mark what I say—the end of grace itself is the knowledge of God and communion with Him. Therefore you hear, and therefore you pray. If you rest in the duties without communion with God and the knowledge of Him, your soul will be found empty and will sit down in sorrow at the last.—*Thomas Goodwin*

To be sound on the whole doctrine of justification by faith only—the great watchword of the Protestant Reformation—is not enough. That can be held as an intellectual opinion; and if people merely hold on to a number of orthodox opinions, they are not, I repeat, in the truly Christian position. The essence of the Christian position and of the Christian life is that we should be able to say, “Truly my fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.”—*D. M. Lloyd-Jones*

The more a man’s union and communion with God is evidenced, the more will the soul be filled with that joy that is unspeakable and full of glory and with that comfort and peace that passes understanding.

—*Thomas Brooks*

¹⁹ **events** – consequences; results.

DEFENSE AGAINST SATAN'S SNARES

Thomas Brooks (1608-1680)

IF you would not be taken with any of Satan's snares and devices, then *keep up your communion with God*. Your strength to stand and withstand Satan's fiery darts is from your communion with God. A soul high in communion with God may be tempted but will not easily be conquered. Such a soul will fight it out to the death.

Communion with God furnisheth the soul with the greatest and the choicest arguments to withstand Satan's temptations. Communion is the result of union. Communion is a reciprocal exchange between Christ and a gracious soul. Communion is Jacob's ladder, where you have Christ sweetly coming down into the soul, and the soul, by divine influences, sweetly ascending up to Christ. Communion with Christ is very inflaming, raising and strengthening. While Samson kept up his communion with God, no enemy could stand before him, but he goes on conquering and to conquer; but when he was fallen in his communion with God, he quickly falls before the plots of his enemies. It will be so with your souls. So long as your communion with God is kept up, you will be too hard for "spiritual wickedness in high places"; but if you fall from your communion with God, you will fall, as others, before the face of every temptation. So long as David kept up his communion with God, he stands and triumphs over all his enemies; but when he was fallen in his communion with God, then he falls before the enemies that were in his own bosom and flies before those that pursued after his life. It will be so with your souls, if you do not keep up your communion with God. Job keeps up his communion with God and conquers Satan upon the dunghill; Adam loses his communion with God and is conquered by Satan in paradise. Communion with God is a shield upon land, as well as an anchor at sea; it is a sword to defend you, as well as a staff to support you; therefore, keep up your communion.

From *The Complete Works of Thomas Brooks*, ed. Alexander Balloch Grosart, Vol. 4 (Edinburgh; London; Dublin: James Nichol; James Nisbet and Co.; G. Herbert, 1867), 54-55; in the public domain.



One hour's communion with God in one's closet is to be preferred before the greatest and best company in the world.—*Thomas Brooks*