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Communion with God

Of Communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
Each Person Distinctly, in Love, Grace, and Consolation;

or

The Saints' Fellowship
with the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost Unfolded.

350TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

John Owen

Christian Focus Publications

‘God is love’ (1 John 4: 8).

‘Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest’ (S. of S. 1: 7).

‘Make haste, my beloved’ (S. of S. 8: 14).

‘Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption’ (Eph. 4: 20).

‘Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God’ (1 Cor. 12: 4–6).

Contents

350TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION 15

INTRODUCTION BY SINCLAIR B. FERGUSON 17

PREFACE 23

PART I

COMMUNION WITH GOD THE FATHER

1 THE SAINTS HAVE COMMUNION WITH GOD 27

Once Alienated from the Life of God 28

Brought Near by Christ 28

What Is Communion? 29

2 COMMUNION WITH THE
THREE PERSONS OF THE GODHEAD 33

As Distinct Individuals 33

How the Saints Commune with God 35

The Father 36

The Son 38

The Holy Spirit 40

Jointly yet Distinctly 41

Each Communicates the Same Grace Individually 41

What Distinguishes Their Communication of Grace? 43

3 COMMUNION WITH GOD THE FATHER 45

- Preliminary Observations 45
- Communion in the Father's Love 47
 - He is Love 47
 - Love—Assigned to the Father 48
 - No Need to Ask for His Love 48
 - Commended to Us 49
 - The Father's Prerogative 50
 - All Hinges upon His Love 50
- How to Commune with the Father 51
 - Receive His Love 51
 - Return His Love 53
 - Both Marked by Rest and Satisfaction 54
 - All Through Christ 57
 - Bounty v. Duty 58
 - Antecedent v. Consequent 59
 - Constant v. Waning 60

4 HOW TO COMMUNE WITH THE FATHER IN LOVE 63

- Preoccupy Yourself with Everlasting Love 64
 - Whose Love Is This? 64
 - What Kind of Love Is This? 65
- Believe That the Father Loves You 66
- Return Love for Love 67
- Do not Think Hard Thoughts of God 67
- Taste and See that God Is Good 68
- No Excuses 69
 - 'Does He Love Me?' 69
 - 'Why Should He Love Me?' 70
 - 'Do I Love Him?' 70
- Run to the Father for Comfort 71
- Be Holy as He Is Holy 73

PART 2

COMMUNION WITH THE SON JESUS CHRIST

I THE SAINTS HAVE
FELLOWSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST 77

- Mutually Satisfying 77

- Two Lilies; Like Beauty 79
- All-Sufficient Jesus 81
- In Christ's Banqueting Hall 82
 - Sweetness 82
 - Delight 83
 - Safety 84
 - Support and Consolation 84
 - The Church—His Banqueting Hall 85

2 THE SAINTS HAVE
COMMUNION WITH CHRIST IN GRACE 87

- His Personal Graces as Mediator 89
 - Fairest Lord Jesus 90
 - Beautiful Saviour 93
- For What Do You Labour? 95
 - Christ Is Knocking 96
 - Is He Your All? 97

3 HOW THE SAINTS COMMUNE WITH CHRIST 99

- In a Marital Relationship 99
 - The Church—Christ's Joy and Crown 100
- Mutual Commitment 102
 - He Gives Himself to Us 102
 - We Freely Embrace Him 104

DIGRESSIONS

I THE EXCELLENCIES OF CHRIST 107

- Desirable in His Deity and Glory 107
 - Inexhaustible Grace 109
- Desirable in His Humanity 113
 - Free from Sin 113
- Full of Grace 116
- God and Man—One Person Forever 117
 - Able to Bear Our Due 118
 - Endless Fountain of Grace 119
 - Perfect Mediator 120
 - All Authority Is His 121
- 'This Is My Beloved' 123
 - His Kingdom is Glorious and Enduring 124

Manifold Wisdom	125
As the Eyes of Doves	126
Comely & Courageous	128
Tender Craftsman	131
Faithful & Steadfast	132
Altogether Lovely	132
2.1 TRUE WISDOM: KNOWING GOD	135
How God Reveals Himself	137
Some Attributes Glimpsed Only in Christ	138
Some Attributes Supremely Revealed in Christ	141
God Reveals Himself in Christ for Our Good	151
Christ Exercises God's Attributes for Our Good	153
They Are Able to Fulfill the Covenant	153
2.2 TRUE WISDOM: KNOWING OURSELVES	155
Understanding Our Sin	155
What We Deserve	157
Our Powerlessness	159
Sin Dying in Us Now	162
How Sin Brings Infinite Glory to God	163
Our Need of Righteousness	164
Unattainable by the Law	165
Unattainable by Restitution	167
Only in Christ	168
The Certainty of Judgment	170
Confirmed in His Death and Resurrection	171
Christ Will Be the Judge	171
2.3 TRUE WISDOM: WALKING WITH GOD	173
In Agreement	173
Having Acquaintance With Him	175
In the Glorious Way of Holiness	176
In His Strength	177
Boldly	178
With the Same End in Mind	179
2.4 TRUE WISDOM: ONLY IN JESUS	181
Not in Academic Learning	182
Men Cannot See in the Dark	184

No Cure for the Curse	185
Not in Good Civil Government	186
The Greatest Rulers Fail	186
Policymakers Tend to Self-destruction	187
Few Great Men Are Wise	188
Learning and Legislature Unite in Failure	188

PART 2 CONTINUED

4 THE LOVE BETWEEN	
CHRIST AND HIS SAINTS (PART I)	191
Christ Delights in His Saints	192
He Reveals His Secrets to Them	193
He Enables Them to Communicate with Him	195
What Difference Does the Spirit Make?	197
The Saints Delight in Christ	200
We Want to Be in His Company	202
We Cannot Bear His Absence	203
We Long for His Return	205
5 THE LOVE BETWEEN	
CHRIST AND HIS SAINTS (PART II)	213
Christ Values His Saints	213
As Mediator for Their Sakes	213
Above All Others	217
Believers Value Jesus	218
Above All	218
Above Their Own Lives	219
Above Religion and Piety	220
Christ Has Compassion on His Saints	223
In Our Temptations	224
In Our Affliction	229
The Saints Are Faithful to Jesus	231
In Our Affections	231
We Labour to Not Grieve His Spirit	233
We Worship As He Commands	236
Christ Provides for His Saints	239
The Saints Are Dutiful and Fruitful	240
Living in Obedience to Christ	240
Striving to be Holy	241

6	THE SOURCE OF PURCHASED GRACE	243
	The Obedience of Christ's Life	244
	Universal Conformity to the Whole Will of God	245
	Necessary to Our Acceptance with God	248
	Summary	253
	Are We as Righteous as Christ?	257
	The Suffering of Christ's Death	258
	A Price	258
	A Sacrifice	260
	A Punishment	260
	Christ's Continued Intercession	261
	A Reminder to God	262
	Procures the Holy Spirit for Us	262
7	THE NATURE OF PURCHASED GRACE	263
	Acceptance with God	263
	Sin Removed	264
	Righteousness Bestowed	265
	Sanctification from God	265
	Defilement Removed	266
	Purity Bestowed	268
	Privileges Before God	269
8	COMMUNION WITH CHRIST	
	IN ACCEPTANCE WITH GOD	271
	What Is Required on Christ's Part	271
	What he Did and Suffered Was for Us	272
	The Gospel Must Be Offered to Us	273
	The Spirit Must Quicken Us	274
	What Is Required on Our Part	274
	Why is Conversion Delayed?	276
	Jesus Is Our Federal Head	276
	Why Obey if Christ Does it for Us?	282
	The End of Obedience—Ours and Imputed	282
	God Requires Our Obedience	284
	Holiness is a Goal of Our Salvation	284
	Obedience is Necessary	286
	The Saints Approve of Christ's Righteousness	291
	We Need it to Appear Before God	291
	Our Righteousness Is Lacking	292
	We Find Rest in Christ's Righteousness	293

	His Righteousness Brings Us to the Haven	296
	We Rejoice to See the Lord Jesus Exalted	297
	We Rejoice to See God Glorified	300
	With Broken Hearts	301
	Self-Examination	301
	They Come to Jesus	302
	Does Jesus Want Our Filth?	303
	Why Bother with Repentance?	305
9	COMMUNION WITH CHRIST	
	IN SANCTIFICATION AND PURIFICATION	309
	What Does Jesus Do?	309
	He Intercedes with the Father	310
	He Sends His Spirit into Our Hearts	311
	He Puts a New Spirit Within Us	312
	How We Should View This Grace	314
	Bought by Christ	314
	Given to Us by Christ	315
	What Should We Do?	317
	Look to Jesus	317
10	THE PRIVILEGE OF SONSHIP	323
	We Belonged to Satan's Family	325
	No Inborn Rights to the Family of God	325
	Empowered to Become Sons of God	326
	By Divine Proclamation and Declaration	326
	By Ingrafting into God's Family	328
	Past Obligations and New Privileges	329
	Liberty	329
	Title and Privileges	335
	Boldness	343
	Affliction	344
PART 3		
COMMUNION WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT		
1	THE FOUNDATION OF	
	OUR COMMUNION WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT	347
	Jesus' Parting Promise	347
	I Tell You the Truth	349

- It Is Good for You That I Go Away 350
- I Will Send Him 350
- The Spirit of Consolation 352
 - The Source 353
 - How He Is Given 355
 - How We Receive the Spirit 359
 - How He Dwells with Us 361
- 2 THE HOLY SPIRIT'S WORK IN US 365
 - He Works Effectually 365
 - He Distributes as He Wills 366
 - A Gift 366
- 3 THE EFFECTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN US 369
 - He Reminds Us of Everything Jesus Said 369
 - He Caused The Apostles to Remember 370
 - He Comforts Us with Christ's Promises 370
 - He Glorifies Christ 374
 - He Persuades Us That God Loves Us 375
 - He Assures Us That We Are God's Children 376
 - He Seals Us 378
 - Stamps Us with the Image of God 378
 - The Purpose of Sealing 378
 - He Is an Earnest to Us 380
 - The Spirit Himself 380
 - A Deposit 381
 - He Anoints Believers 384
 - To Teach Us 385
 - He Adopts Us 387
 - He Gives Us the Spirit of Prayer 388
- 4 THE RESULT IN OUR HEARTS 389
 - Comfort and Consolation 389
 - Abiding 391
 - Strong 391
 - Precious 391
 - Peace 392
 - Joy 393
 - Springing from His Immediate Presence 393

- Springing from His Works in Us 394
- Hope 395
- 5 EXTREMES AND DELUSIONS
 - CONCERNING THE HOLY SPIRIT 397
 - How to Exclude the Spirit from Worship 398
 - Impose a Form of Service to Be Read by the Minister 398
 - Hold Spirit-filled Prayer in Reproach 399
 - Test the Spirits 400
 - What Does Satan Produce? 401
- 6 OUR COMFORTER 405
 - What He Comforts Us Against 405
 - Our Afflictions 406
 - Sin 408
 - All the Concerns of This Life 408
 - What He Comforts Us With 409
 - The Love of the Father 410
 - The Grace of Christ 411
 - The Source of This Comfort 411
- 7 HOW TO TREAT THE COMFORTER 413
 - Do Not Grieve Him 414
 - He Has Deep Affection for Us 415
 - Pursue Holiness on Account of His Love 415
 - Do Not Quench Him 416
 - Do Not Resist Him 418
- 8 HOW TO COMMUNE WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT 421
 - Worship Him As God in Trinity 421
 - Have Faith in the Holy Spirit 424
 - Take Notice of His Kindness 424
 - Praise and Thank Him 425
 - Pray to Him for Consolation 426
 - Ask for Him 427
 - Be Humble Before Him 427
 - When Men Are not Interested in the Spirit 428
 - They Have no True Comfort 428
 - They Have no Peace 430
 - Their Joy and Hope is Perishing 430

THIS 350TH
ANNIVERSARY EDITION

Communion with God was first published in 1657. Three hundred and fifty years later, many readers struggle with some of the language in the original edition. Owen uses certain words now so rare that they are not listed in the largest single-volume dictionaries. His most likely intended meanings for some of those words are therefore displayed near their first occurrence. In addition, words such as ‘unto’ become ‘to’ and ‘doth consist’ becomes ‘consists’.

Beyond this, the text is unchanged except where the following features, designed to make the book more user-friendly, required minor changes:

1. Subheadings, sometimes extending to four levels and largely based on the original numeric structure, have been inserted. The contents pages include primary and secondary subheadings to aid navigation.
2. Sentences enumerating more than five or six items, lists of more than one sentence, selected notes, and some ‘short digressions’ are broken off from the main text and displayed.
3. The style and placement of biblical references have been made consistent with modern practice and Roman numerals have been changed to Arabic.

INTRODUCTION

The collected works of the great Puritan theologian John Owen expand into twenty-four volumes comprising some seven million words. It is hard to conceive the amount of labour involved in such a mammoth undertaking, not least given the writing instruments available in the seventeenth century. While the book you now hold in your hand comprises less than two per cent of this library of Christian instruction, *Communion with God* is certainly one of the most important things Owen ever penned.

By any standard, Owen was a remarkable man who combined great intellectual genius with extraordinary self-discipline. But more than that, he could touch both the heights of Christian theology and the depths of the human heart. To an almost unparalleled degree (Augustine and a handful of others are in the same league) he married a profound understanding of the gospel to a penetrating grasp of the needs, sins, and deceitfulness of the human heart—including the Christian heart.

Underlying all of Owen's work, whether as a minister, an academic, an administrator (he was Vice-Chancellor—essentially President or Principal—of the University of Oxford), or as a political adviser (he was at one time a confidant of Oliver

Cromwell), was a concern to promote genuine, consistent, God-honouring, Christian living.

Nowhere is this more evident than in this book, *Communion with God*. As Daniel Burgess (who wrote the original publisher's 'blurb') noted, this is 'angel's food'. Indeed, Owen himself seemed to recognize that it was a work that could help Christians enormously. In a rare comment on his own work, he wrote nearly twenty years after the publication of *Communion With God* of the help he had learned his book had been to many Christians:

Of what use and advantage it hath been to any, as to their furtherance in the design aimed at therein, is left unto them to judge by whom it hath been perused with any candid diligence; and I do know that multitudes of persons fearing God, and desiring to walk before him in sincerity, are ready, if occasion require, to give testimony unto the benefit which they have received thereby;—as I can also at any time produce the testimonies of as learned and holy persons, it may be, as any I know living, both in England and out of it, who, owning the truth contained in it, have highly avowed its usefulness, and are ready yet so to do.¹

Perhaps the somewhat roundabout way in which Owen expressed himself was an indication not only of his disposition to write English as though it were Latin (which he wrote with perfect fluency), but also his self-consciousness in drawing attention to the value of his own work in the face of criticism.

It is a great privilege to commend this book as someone included among those 'multitudes of persons' who could 'give testimony unto the benefit which they have received.' I owe an incalculable debt to these pages. I look back now with deep gratitude for its republication in 1966 when, as a late-teenaged university student, I was on the hunt for books that would help me grow as a Christian. I bought a 'damaged' copy of

¹ John Owen, 'A Vindication of Some Passages in a Discourse Concerning Communion with God', in *The Works of John Owen*, 1850-53, ed. William H. Goold, vol. 2, 277.

the second volume of Owen's *Works* for what was then fifteen shillings in 'old' money (seventy-five pence, or one dollar fifty cents!). For forty years now it has been a favourite volume to which I continue to return for more 'angel food'.

How could a treatise published so long ago possibly make such an impact? After all, it was written by an academic employing a vocabulary that requires the occasional sidebar explanation in this contemporary edition! Perhaps a few paragraphs of personal testimony may be the best way to introduce the contents of this remarkable volume and to encourage you to read on...and on...and on.

In these pages Owen helped me to understand that the 'doctrine' of the Trinity is not what it is often thought to be—academic, obscure, impractical and, of all doctrines, the most speculative. In fact the truth is virtually the reverse, for the doctrine of the Trinity is really an exposition of the identity, personal existence, and glorious character of our God. It is the most practical as well as the most fundamental of doctrines, and it constitutes a pathway to knowing, trusting, loving, worshipping, and serving him. As I read *Communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost* I began to feel that I was coming home spiritually.

The point Owen made—once seen—is so simple, and yet endlessly profound. God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three Persons in one God. Since each person in the Trinity has participated in a unique way in accomplishing my salvation and blessing, my knowledge of and relationship with each Person will take on the 'flavour' of who that Person is and what he has done for me. So the fellowship we enjoy with the first Person is fellowship with the Father, and so on. More than that, while each Person of the Trinity is always involved in everything God does, there is a sense in which each also plays a special and unique part. The Father alone sends the Son; the Son alone dies on the cross and is raised again; the Spirit alone indwells us and applies Christ's work within our lives; the Father adopts me into his family; the Son is praised for

bearing the wrath of God; the Spirit is thanked for producing his fruit in me.

Of course there is much more to be said—and Owen says it! But even this volume helps to explain why—for a young Christian—knowing God became a much bigger, grander, richer, far more glorious reality than I had imagined. Now the exclamation of the apostle John was one I found (and find!) myself often echoing: ‘our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ’—and this, of course, was through the ongoing ministry of the Holy Spirit. No wonder John said that he was ‘writing these things so that our joy may be complete’ (1 John 1: 3–4).

What I did not realize as a youngster was that Owen was essentially picking up and elaborating on the themes with which earlier theologians had wrestled (we think of them collectively now as the Church Fathers). Indeed a by-product for me of reading Owen was that, almost by accident, he brought me to appreciate and love those early Christians who had worked so hard to find ways of expressing biblical truth, and who had been prepared to suffer hardship and loss, and even exile, for the doctrine of the Trinity.

The Church Fathers had long ago taught what it means to have fellowship with God, and had developed their own terminology and maxims to help us understand and enjoy the Trinity. They had written that whatever God does outside of himself he does in such a way that all three Persons are involved (*opera trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt*, the external works of the Trinity are indivisible, was their fine Latin phrase). They also taught what came to be known as the doctrine of *perichoresis* or *circuminsessio/circumincessio*—how the Father, Son, and Spirit engage with and dwell in one another in an eternal fellowship of mutual affection and holy devotion, fully, personally and satisfyingly exercising all of the divine attributes. And they understood what came to be known as the doctrine of appropriations—that each Person of the Trinity has his own special, personal role in creation, providence, redemption, and consummation.

What Owen does so marvellously in these pages is to take

these doctrines and show how what was the lifeblood of earlier Christians can have a powerful transforming effect on Christians today.

Much more might be said by way of introduction to this great book. Suffice it simply to add that while the exact origin of *Communion with God* is not completely clear its roots lie in a series of addresses Owen gave around the years 1650 or 1651. His hearers had, understandably, been deeply impressed, and urged him to put his thoughts into print.

Several years on—July 10 1657 to be precise—having given the theme further consideration in the interim, and having developed it in various ways, Owen committed these pages to the press.

Now, three hundred and fifty years later (almost to the day), *Communion with God* reappears in this new format as a treasure for twenty-first century Christians. For some it will be a challenging read; for many there will be things here that are new and striking—whether that be Owen’s extended digression on the Song of Songs, or his exposition of the various graces of Christ in which we have fellowship. Whatever is of particular help to each reader, all readers will feel a debt to Philip Ross for his skill in helping to make yet another volume of Owen a little more accessible for today.

As Owen sent his book to the printer, he added one final word of assurance:

Know only, that the whole of it hath been recommended to the grace of God in many supplications, for its usefulness unto them that are interested in the good things mentioned therein.

If these prayers are answered for you, as I feel they have been answered for me, you will be richly rewarded for your reading!

Sinclair B. Ferguson
First Presbyterian Church
Columbia, SC. USA

ANSWER. There are few truths of Christ which, from some or other, have not received like entertainment with this. Terms and appellations are at the will of every imposer; things are not at all varied by them. The love of God in itself is the eternal purpose and act of his will. This is no more changeable than God himself: if it were, no flesh could be saved; but it changes not, and we are not consumed. What then? Loves he his people in their sinning? Yes; his people—not their sinning. Alters he not his love towards them? Not the purpose of his will, but the dispensations of his grace. He rebukes them, he chastens them, he hides his face from them, he smites them, he fills them with a sense of [his] indignation; but woe, woe would it be to us, should he change in his love, or take away his kindness from us! Those very things which seem to be demonstrations of the change of his affections towards his, do as clearly proceed from love as those which seem to be the most genuine issues thereof. ‘But will not this encourage to sin?’ He never tasted of the love of God that can seriously make this objection. The doctrine of grace may be turned into wantonness; the principle cannot. I shall not wrong the saints by giving another answer to this objection: detestation of sin in any way well consist with the acceptance of their persons, and their designation to life eternal.

But now our love to God is ebbing and flowing, waning and increasing. We lose our first love, and we grow again in love; scarce a day at a stand. What poor creatures are we! How unlike the Lord and his love! ‘Unstable as water, we cannot excel.’ Now it is, ‘Though all men forsake you, I will not;’ anon, ‘I know not the man.’ One day, ‘I shall never be moved, my hill is so strong;’ the next, ‘All men are liars, I shall perish.’ When ever was the time, where ever was the place, that our love was one day equal towards God?

And thus, these agreements and discrepancies do farther describe that mutual love of the Father and the saints, in which they hold communion. Other instances as to the person of the Father I shall not give, but endeavour to make some improvement of this in the next chapter.

4

HOW TO COMMUNE
WITH THE FATHER IN LOVE

Having thus discovered the nature of that distinct communion which we have with the Father, it remains that we give some exhortations to it, directions in it, and take some observations from it.

This is a duty in which it is most evident that Christians are but little exercised—namely, in holding immediate communion with the Father in love. Unacquaintedness with our mercies, our privileges, is our sin as well as our trouble. We hearken not to the voice of the Spirit which is given to us, ‘that we may know the things that are freely bestowed on us of God.’ This makes us go heavily, when we might rejoice; and to be weak, where we might be strong in the Lord. How few of the saints are experimentally acquainted with this privilege of holding immediate communion with the Father in love! With what anxious, doubtful thoughts do they look upon him! What fears, what questionings are there, of his goodwill

Unacquaintedness with our mercies, our privileges, is our sin as well as our trouble.

and kindness! At the best, many think there is no sweetness at all in him towards us, but what is purchased at the high price of the blood of Jesus. It is true, that alone is the way of communication; but the free fountain and spring of all is in the bosom of the Father. ‘Eternal life was with the Father, and is manifested to us.’

PREOCCUPY YOURSELF WITH EVERLASTING LOVE

Eye the Father as love; look not on him as an always lowering father, but as one most kind and tender. Let us look on him by faith, as one that has had thoughts of kindness towards us from everlasting. It is misapprehension of God that makes any run from him, who have the least breathing wrought in them after him. ‘Those that know you will put their trust in you.’ Men cannot abide with God in spiritual meditations. He loses souls’ company by their want of this insight into his love. They fix their thoughts only on his terrible majesty, severity, and greatness; and so their spirits are not endeared. Would a soul continually eye his everlasting tenderness and compassion, his thoughts of kindness that have been from of old, his present gracious acceptance, it could not bear an hour’s absence from him; whereas now, perhaps, it cannot watch with him one hour. Let, then, this be the saints’ first notion of the Father—as one full of eternal, free love towards them: let their hearts and thoughts be filled with breaking through all discouragements that lie in the way.

WHOSE LOVE IS THIS?

It is the love of him who is in himself all sufficient, infinitely satiated with himself and his own glorious excellencies and perfections; who has no need to go forth with his love to others, nor to seek an object of it without himself. There might he rest with delight and complacency to eternity. He is sufficient to his own love. He had his Son, also, his eternal Wisdom, to rejoice and delight himself in from all eternity (Prov. 8: 30). This might take up and satiate the whole delight of the Father;

but he will love his saints also. And it is such a love, as wherein he seeks not his own satisfaction only, but our good therein also; the love of a God, the love of a Father, whose proper outgoings are kindness and bounty.

WHAT KIND OF LOVE IS THIS?

Eternal

It was fixed on us before the foundation of the world. Before we were, or had done the least good, then were his thoughts upon us—then was his delight in us; then did the Son rejoice in the thoughts of fulfilling his Father’s delight in him (Prov. 8: 30). Yea, the delight of the Father in the Son, there mentioned, is not so much his absolute delight in him as the express image of his person and the brightness of his glory, in which he might behold all his own excellencies and perfections; as with respect to his love and his delight in the sons of men. So the order of the words require us to understand it: ‘I was daily his delight,’ and, ‘My delights were with the sons of men’—that is, in the thoughts of kindness and redemption for them: and in that respect, also, was he his Father’s delight. It was from eternity that he laid in his own bosom a design for our happiness. The very thought of this is enough to make all that is within us, like the babe in the womb of Elisabeth, to leap for joy. A sense of it cannot but prostrate our souls to the lowest abasement of a humble, holy reverence, and make us rejoice before him with trembling.

Free

He loves us because he will; there was, there is, nothing in us for which we should be beloved. Did we deserve his love, it must go less in its valuation. Things of due debt are seldom the matter of thankfulness; but that which is eternally antecedent to our being, must needs be absolutely free in its respects to our well-being. This gives it life and being, is the reason of it, and sets a price upon it (Rom. 9: 11; Eph. 1: 3–4; Titus 3: 5; Jas. 1: 18).

Unchangeable

Though we change every day, yet his love changes not. Could any kind of provocation turn it away, it had long since ceased. Its unchangeableness is that which carries out the Father to that infiniteness of patience and forbearance (without which we die, we perish) (2 Pet. 3: 9), which he exercises towards us.

Distinguishing

He has not thus loved all the world: 'Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.' Why should he fix his love on us, and pass by millions from whom we differ not by nature—that he should make us sharers in that, and all the fruits of it, which most of the great and wise men of the world are excluded from? I name but the heads of things. Let them enlarge whose hearts are touched.

Let, I say, the soul frequently eye the love of the Father, and that under these considerations—they are all soul-conquering and endearing.

BELIEVE THAT THE FATHER LOVES YOU

So eye it as to receive it. Unless this be added, all is in vain as to any communion with God. We do not hold communion with him in anything, until it be received by faith. This, then, is that which I would provoke the saints of God to, even to believe this love of God for themselves and their own part—believe that such is the heart of the Father towards them—accept of his witness in this. His love is not ours in the sweetness of it until it be so received. Continually, then, act thoughts of faith on God, as love to you—as embracing you with the eternal free love before described. When the Lord is, by his word, presented as such to you, let your mind know it, and assent that it is so; and your will embrace it, in its being so; and all your affections be filled with it. Set your whole heart to it; let it be bound with the cords of this love. If the King be bound

in the galleries with your love, should you not be bound in heaven with his?

RETURN LOVE FOR LOVE

Let it have its proper fruit and efficacy upon your heart, in return of love to him again. So shall we walk in the light of God's countenance, and hold holy communion with our Father all the day long. Let us not deal unkindly with him, and return him slighting for his goodwill. Let there not be such a heart in us as to deal so unthankfully with our God.

DO NOT THINK HARD THOUGHTS OF GOD

Now, to further us in this duty, and the daily constant practice of it, I shall add one or two considerations that may be of importance. It is exceeding acceptable to God, even our Father, that we should thus hold communion with him in his love—that he may be received into our souls as one full of love, tenderness, and kindness, towards us. Flesh and blood is apt to have very hard thoughts of him—to think he is always angry, yea, implacable; that it is not for poor creatures to draw near to him; that nothing in the world is more desirable than never to come into his presence, or, as they say, where he has anything to do. 'Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?' say the sinners in Zion. And, 'I knew you were an austere man,' says the evil servant in the gospels. Now, there is not anything more grievous to the Lord, nor more subservient to the design of Satan upon the soul, than such thoughts as these. Satan claps his hands (if I may so say) when he can take up the soul with such thoughts of God: he has enough—all that he does desire. This has been his design and way from the beginning. The first blood that murderer shed was by this means. He leads our first parents into hard thoughts of God: 'Has God said so? Has he threatened you with death? He knows well enough it will be better with you'—with this

engine did he batter and overthrow all mankind in one; and being mindful of his ancient conquest, he readily uses the same weapons with which then he so successfully contended. Now, it is exceeding grievous to the Spirit of God to be so slandered in the hearts of those whom he dearly loves. How does he expostulate this with Zion! 'What iniquity have you seen in me?' Says he, 'Have I been a wilderness to you, or a land of darkness?' 'Zion said, The Lord has forsaken me, and my Lord has forgotten me. Can a woman...?' (Isa. 49:14-15). The Lord takes nothing worse at the hands of his, than such hard thoughts of him, knowing full well what fruit this bitter root is like to bear—what alienations of heart—what drawings tergiversation: back—what unbelief and tergiversations apostasy; equivocation. in our walking with him. How unwilling is a child to come into the presence of an angry father! Consider, then, this in the first place—receiving of the Father as he holds out love to the soul, gives him the honour he aims at, and is exceeding acceptable to him. He often sets it out in an eminent manner, that it may be so received: 'He commends his love toward us' (Rom. 5: 8). 'Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us!' (1 John 3: 1). Whence, then, is this folly? Men are afraid to have good thoughts of God. They think it a boldness to eye God as good, gracious, tender, kind, loving; I speak of saints; but for the other side, they can judge him hard, austere, severe, almost implacable, and fierce (the very worst affections of the very worst of men, and most hated of him (Rom. 1: 31; 2 Tim. 3: 3)), and think in this they do well. Is not this soul-deceit from Satan? Was it not his design from the beginning to inject such thoughts of God? Assure yourself, then, there is nothing more acceptable to the Father, than for us to keep up our hearts to him as the eternal fountain of all that rich grace which flows out to sinners in the blood of Jesus.

TASTE AND SEE THAT GOD IS GOOD

This will be exceeding effectual to endear your soul to God, to cause you to delight in him, and to make your abode with

him. Many saints have no greater burden in their lives, than that their hearts do not come clearly and fully up, constantly to delight and rejoice in God—that there is still an indisposedness of spirit to close walking with him. What is at the bottom of this distemper? Is it not their unskilfulness in or neglect of this duty, even of holding communion with the Father in love? So much as we see of the love of God, so much shall we delight in him, and no more. Every other discovery of God, without this, will but make the soul fly from him; but if the heart be once much taken up with this the eminency of the Father's love, it cannot choose but be overpowered, conquered, and endeared to him. This, if anything, will work upon us to make our abode with him. If the love of a father will not make a child delight in him, what will? Put, then, this to the venture: exercise your thoughts upon this very thing, the eternal, free, and fruitful love of the Father, and see if your hearts be not wrought upon to delight in him. I dare boldly say, believers will find it as thriving a course as ever they pitched on in their lives. Sit down a little at the fountain, and you will quickly have a farther discovery of the sweetness of the streams. You who have run from him, will not be able, after a while, to keep at a distance for a moment.

So much as we see of the love of God, so much shall we delight in him, and no more.

NO EXCUSES

'DOES HE LOVE ME?'

But some may say, 'Alas! how shall I hold communion with the Father in love? I know not at all whether he loves me or no; and shall I venture to cast myself upon it? How if I should not be accepted? Should I not rather perish for my presumption, than find sweetness in his bosom? God seems to me only as a consuming fire and everlasting burnings; so that I dread to look up to him.'

I know not what may be understood by knowing of the love of God; though it be carried on by spiritual sense and

experience, yet it is received purely by believing. Our knowing of it, is our believing of it as revealed. 'We have known and believed the love that God has to us. God is love' (1 John 4: 16). This is the assurance which, at the very entrance of walking with God, you may have of this love. He who is truth has said it; and whatever your heart says, or Satan says, unless you will take it up on this account, you do your endeavour to make him a liar who has spoken it (1 John 5: 10).

'WHY SHOULD HE LOVE ME?'

'I can believe that God is love to others, for he has said he is love; but that he will be so to me, I see no ground of persuasion; there is no cause, no reason in the world, why he should turn one thought of love or kindness towards me: and therefore I dare not cast myself upon it, to hold communion with him in his special love.'

He has spoken it as particularly to you as to any one in the world. And for cause of love, he has as much to fix it on you as on any of the children of men; that is, none at all without himself. So that I shall make speedy work with this objection. Never any one from the foundation of the world, who believed such love in the Father, and made returns of love to him again, was deceived; neither shall ever any to the world's end be so, in so doing. You are, then, in this, upon a most sure bottom. If you believe and receive the Father as love, he will infallibly be so to you, though others may fall under his severity.

'DO I LOVE HIM?'

'I cannot find my heart making returns of love to God. Could I find my soul set upon him, I could then believe his soul delighted in me.'

This is the most preposterous course that possibly your thoughts can pitch upon, a most ready way to rob God of his glory. 'In this is love,' says the Holy Ghost, 'not that we loved God, but that he loved us' first (1 John 4: 10–11). Now, you would invert this order, and say, 'In this is love, not that God

loved me, but that I love him first.' This is to take the glory of God from him: that, whereas he loves us without a cause that is in ourselves, and we have all cause in the world to love him, you would have the contrary, namely, that something should be in you for which God should love you, even your love to him; and that you should love God, before you know anything lovely in him—namely, whether he love you or no. This is a course of flesh's finding out, that will never bring glory to God, nor peace to your own soul. Lay down, then, your reasonings; take up the love of the Father upon a pure act of believing, and that will open your soul to let it out to the Lord in the communion of love.

RUN TO THE FATHER FOR COMFORT

To make yet some farther improvement of this truth so opened and exhorted to as before; it will discover to us the eminency and privilege of the saints of God. What low thoughts soever the sons of men may have of them, it will appear that they have meat to eat that the world knows not of. They have close communion and fellowship with the Father. They deal with him in the interchange of love. Men are generally esteemed according to the company they keep. It is an honour to stand in the presence of princes, though but as servants. What honour, then, have all the saints, to stand with boldness in the presence of the Father, and there to enjoy his bosom love! What a blessing did the queen of Sheba pronounce on the servants of Solomon, who stood before him, and heard his wisdom! How much more blessed, then, are they who stand continually before the God of Solomon, hearing his wisdom, enjoying his love! Whilst others have their fellowship with Satan and their own lusts, making provision for them, and receiving perishing refreshments from them ('whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things,') they have this sweet communion with the Father.

Moreover, what a safe and sweet retreat is here for the saints, in all the scorns, reproaches, scandals, misrepresentations,

which they undergo in the world. When a child is abused abroad in the streets by strangers, he runs with speed to the bosom of his father; there he makes his complaint, and is comforted. In all the hard censures and tongue-persecutions which the saints meet with in the streets of the world, they may run with their moanings to their Father, and be comforted. 'As one whom his mother comforts, so will I comfort you,' says the Lord (Isa. 66: 13). So that the soul may say, 'If I have hatred in the world, I will go where I am sure of love. Though all others are hard to me, yet my Father is tender and full of compassion: I will go to him, and satisfy myself in him. Here I am accounted vile, frowned on, and rejected; but I have honour and love with him, whose kindness is better than life itself. There I shall have all things in the fountain, which others have but in the drops. There is in my Father's love every thing desirable: there is the sweetness of all mercies in the abstract itself, and that fully and durably.'

Evidently, then, the saints are the most mistaken men in the world. If they say, 'Come and have fellowship with us', are not men ready to say, 'Why, what are you? A sorry company of seditious, factious persons. Be it known to you, that we despise your fellowship. When we intend to leave fellowship with all honest men, and men of worth, then will we come to you.' But—alas!—how are men mistaken! Truly their fellowship is with the Father: let men think of it as they please, they have close, spiritual, heavenly refreshing, in the mutual communication of love with the Father himself. How they are generally misconceived, the apostle declares, 'As deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things' (2 Cor. 6: 8–10). And as it is thus in general, so in no one thing more than this, that they are looked on as poor, low, despicable persons, when indeed they are the only great and noble personages in the world. Consider the company they keep: it is with the Father; who so glorious? The merchandise they trade in, it is love;

what so precious? Doubtless they are the excellent on the earth (Ps. 16: 3).

Farther; this will discover a main difference between the saints and empty professors: as to the performance of duties, and so the enjoyment of outward privileges, fruitless professors often walk hand in hand with them; but now come to their secret retirements, and what a difference is there! There the saints hold communion with God: hypocrites, for the most part, with the world and their own lusts; with them they converse and communicate; they hearken what they will say to them, and make provision for them, when the saints are sweetly wrapped up in the bosom of their Father's love. It is oftentimes even almost impossible that believers should, in outward appearance, go beyond them who have very rotten hearts: but this meat they have, which others know not of; this refreshment in the banqueting house, wherein others have no share; in the multitude of their thoughts, the comforts of God their Father refresh their souls.

BE HOLY AS HE IS HOLY

Now, then (to draw towards a close of this discourse), if these things be so, 'what manner of men ought we to be, in all manner of holy conversation?' Even 'our God is a consuming fire.' What communion is there between light and darkness? Shall sin and lust dwell in those thoughts which receive in and carry out love from and to the Father? Holiness becomes his presence for ever. An unclean spirit cannot draw near to him; an unholy heart can make no abode with him. A lewd person will not desire to hold fellowship with a sober man; and will a man of vain and foolish imaginations hold communion and dwell with the most holy God? There is not any consideration of this love but is a powerful motive to holiness, and leads to that. Ephraim says, 'What have I to do any more with idols?' when in God he finds salvation. Communion with the Father is wholly inconsistent with loose walking. 'If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do

not the truth' (1 John 1: 6). 'He that says, I know him' (I have communion with him), 'and keeps not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him' (2: 4). The most specious and glorious pretence made to an acquaintance with the Father, without holiness and obedience to his commandments, serves only to prove the pretenders to be liars. The love of the world and of the Father dwell not together.

And if this be so (to shut up all), how many that go under the name of Christians, come short of the truth of it! How unacquainted are the generality of professors with the mystery of this communion, and the fruits of it! Do not many very evidently hold communion with their lusts and with the world, and yet would be thought to have a portion and inheritance among them that are sanctified? They have neither new name nor white stone, and yet would be called the people of the Most High. May it not be said of many of them, rather, that God is not in all their thoughts, than that they have communion with him? The Lord open the eyes of men, that they may see and know that walking with God is a matter not of form, but power! And so far of peculiar communion with the Father, in the instance of love which we have insisted on. 'He is also faithful who has called us to the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord'—of which in the next place.

PART 2

COMMUNION WITH THE SON JESUS CHRIST
