

And if this shall be the doleful language, the direful lamentations, of souls that went Christless out of time into eternity, do ye, while ye are in time, eye eternity in all you do, and get a title to eternal happiness; or else, when ye are in eternity, ye shall remember that in time ye were forewarned; which warning, because ye did not take [it], shall be a vexation to your hearts to all eternity.

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## SERMON XXVII.

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A DISCOURSE OF THE RIGHT WAY OF OBTAINING AND MAINTAINING COMMUNION WITH GOD.

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

THE subject I am to treat upon is *communion 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*: and for that end I have chosen this text. My usual course is to provide matter for a text; but in this lecture I provide a text for the matter I am to treat upon. The subject is high and copious, much spoken of; but, I fear, not so well understood, and less experienced, though the subject mainly relates to Christian experience. Before I come to the subject, I shall speak something of the text upon which it is grounded.

The author of this epistle is St. John, "John the apostle," "John the divine," as he was anciently called; and he writes this epistle, some think, to the believing Jews only; others think, rather to the whole catholic church; and the matter of the epistle is partly to distinguish the true and the false Christian, and for that end lays down many signal characters to distinguish them; and partly to vindicate the doctrine of the gospel concerning Jesus Christ the true Messiah,—his person, his natures, and salvation by him alone,—from the many errors that were crept-in by false teachers and seducers in his time; as Cerinthus, Ebion, &c., as he intimates in 1 John ii. 26: "These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you." He also vindicates the holiness of the Christian profession from the impure practices of the Nicolaitanes and the Gnostics, who began early to abuse the true liberty of the gospel, and to turn the grace of God into wantonness. And, lastly, he doth earnestly press them to the Christian love of one another, because of the persecutions [which] he saw were coming upon the church from the Roman empire, and the divisions that would arise amongst themselves from many false brethren.

And hereupon to strengthen their faith and profession the more, he shows forth the gospel in the beginning of this epistle :—

1. *In the antiquity of it* : “That which was from the beginning,” &c.

2. *In the certainty of it*, as in the third verse : “That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you.”

3. *In the main scope and end of it* : “These things which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life, declare we unto you, that ye may have fellowship with us ;” *with us*, the true apostles of Christ, and not go out from us ; as he complains of some that did in this epistle : “They went out from us, but they were not of us :” (ii. 19 :) and then tells them what their fellowship was : “Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.” So that he proposeth fellowship with God and with Jesus Christ as the great scope and end of the gospel ; and he mentioneth Christ as well as God, because all our fellowship with God is by Jesus Christ. So that the apostle doth invite and persuade the believing Jews to fellowship with himself and other apostles in the doctrine and ordinances of the gospel dispensed by them ; or, more generally, the whole catholic church of God, consisting both of believing Jew and Gentile. But all this was in order to their having “fellowship with God and with his Son Jesus Christ.”

4. He shows *the way how to have this fellowship with God* : Which he setteth down both negatively, and affirmatively.

1. *Negatively*, in the sixth verse : “If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.”

2. *Affirmatively*, in the words of the text : “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another.”

And this the apostle proves by an argument taken from the nature of God in the fifth verse : “God is Light, and in him is no darkness at all ;” and therefore they that would have fellowship with him who is Light, must walk in the Light ; for “what communion hath Light with darkness ?” But by “Light” is not meant any visible, material light, either natural or artificial ; but a Light that is divine, spiritual, and intellectual. For though God expresseth himself to us by things natural, when he is called Light, or Life, &c., yet he is *ens transcendens*, “a transcendent being ;” and it is a true rule, “Nothing can be predicated univocally of God and the creature.” And he doth not say only of God that “he is in the Light,” as verse the seventh ; or that he “dwelleth in the Light,” as the apostle Paul elsewhere expresseth it ; but, “He is Light ;” Light essentially, originally, eternally ; Light itself ; and “in him,” he saith, “there is no darkness at all.” He is a pure, simple, immixed, and perfect light ; as we say of that which is perfect, “It is *plenum sui*,” “full of itself,” without any mixture of the contrary.

QUESTION. “Why is God called ‘Light without darkness?’ And what is this Light ?”

I answer,

1. Wisdom is light, and folly is darkness.
2. Knowledge is light, and ignorance is darkness.
3. Truth is light, and error is darkness.
4. Holiness is light, and sin and wickedness are darkness.

So that when he saith that "God is Light," he means that God is wisdom, without mixture of folly; knowledge, without ignorance or nescience; truth, without any error, or any false conceptions in his eternal mind; and holiness, without the least mixture of sin: so that the way to "have fellowship with God," is to "walk in the light," that is to say, to walk in wisdom, and not as fools; to walk according to knowledge, and not in ignorance; to walk in the truth, and not in error; to walk in the way of holiness, and not of sin and wickedness.

Now light in men is either *natural* or *supernatural*.

1. *Natural*: Which is either "the light of the body," which "is the eye;" (Matt. vi. 22;) or the light of the soul, which is the light of reason and natural conscience: this we are to walk in, according to the utmost sphere and extent thereof.

2. But *supernatural light*: That shines from supernatural revelation in the scriptures; and the enlightening Spirit of God in the souls of men, is the light here meant in the text, and which Christians should walk in.

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," *μετ' ἀλλήλων*, some say, the apostle means the saints to whom he writes: "We and ye shall have fellowship together, we apostles and ye believers." And the Vulgar Latin carries it that way, and renders it *ad invicem*. But we must rather understand that the apostle here speaks of the fellowship that God hath with his people, and they with him. And so Beza understands it: *Mutuum habemus cum eo communionem*.\* An ancient Greek manuscript hath in the text *μετ' αὐτου*, "with him;" that is, "God and we shall have fellowship with one another." And the rather we are to understand it in this sense; for the apostle is not speaking here of the communion which the saints have with one another, but of our communion and fellowship with God, as in the sixth verse, "If we say we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth." And then he 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, and herein shall discourse of these four generals:—

- I. *What this communion with God is.*
- II. *Give some distinctions about it.*
- III. *Show how it is to be attained and maintained.*

\* "He and we hold communion together."—EDIT.

IV. *Deduce some consequences that follow from my whole discourse concerning it ; and then conclude with some practical application.*

## FIRST GENERAL.

I. *What this communion with God is.*—The word in the Greek, *κοινωνία*, is from *κοινός*, which signifies “common ;” and so it imports something that is common and mutual betwixt God and us, as communion among men imports something mutual on each side ; so that 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* : Which consisteth in the divine operations of our souls toward God, when the faculties of the soul are tending toward him, and terminated upon him ; when the mind is exercised in the contemplation of him, the will in choosing and embracing him ; when the affections are fixed upon him, and centre in him ; when by our desires we pursue after him, by our love we cleave to him, and by delight we acquiesce and solace ourselves in him.

2. *Passive on God's part* : And so our communion with God consists in our participation of him, and in his communicating himself to us ; and 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 ; (2 Cor. iv. 6 ; ) and “seeing light in God's light,” by the Psalmist. (Psalm xxxvi. 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. iv. 18.) And by this “life of God” we must understand that which the scripture calls “sanctification ;” 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 ;” and which elsewhere is called “a partaking of the Divine Nature,” (2 Peter i. 4,) and “a renewing [of] man into the image of God.” (Col. iii. 10.)

(3.) *In love.* God communicates his love also in the sense and taste of it to the soul, which the apostle calls, “the shedding abroad the love of God in the heart.” (Rom. v. 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 ; and under this is comprehended all that peace, joy, and consolation that springs out of this to the soul, and arising from the communication of the sense of his love to us. The apostle James expresseth this communion with God in both the parts of it, when he saith, “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.” (James iv. 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." (John xiv. 23.) He expresseth *the active part* of communion with God by "our 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." (1 John iv. 16.) 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;" 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 this communion with God—we must think soberly of it. 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; for 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; 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.

But this communion is a sacred and mutual intercourse that is between God and his people, whereby they go forth and act in the divine exercise of their faculties toward him, and he comes forth in the communication of himself in light, life, and love to them.

#### SECOND GENERAL.

II. I next proceed to speak of *some distinctions about communion with God.*

1. Communion with God may be considered either with respect to this world, or the world to come; the one is imperfect, the other is perfect; one is mediate, the other immediate; the one is inconstant and often interrupted, the other is constant, fixed, and uniform, without any interruption for ever.

2. This communion with God hath higher and lower degrees both in the nether and upper world; both among the saints here below, and the saints and angels above. As there are orders of angels in heaven, and some nearer to the throne of God than others, and receive higher communications of God to them, so it is with the saints made perfect in that heavenly state.

3. This communion with God is either internal, or external; by *internal* I mean that sacred intercourse between God and the soul which is managed only in the inward man; and by *external* I mean this communion with God managed in some external ordinance of his worship in the communion of saints.

## THIRD GENERAL.

III. I next proceed to *show how this communion with God is attained, and then maintained.*

I answer in general, It is attained only in that way which God himself hath appointed thereunto.

The Heathen did aim at having fellowship with their gods; and therefore they built them temples to dwell in, erected oracles for them to speak to them by, and they built altars to sacrifice to them, and appointed priests to be their mediators, or *leitourgoi philias*, “ministers of friendship” between them and their gods. They used several charms to bring their gods to them, and keep them with them. They made use of various modes and rites of worship, which they thought best pleased their gods, and whereby they might invite their favour to them, and presence with them. Yea, they worshipped several creatures, though not as gods, but yet that, in worshipping them, they might have some communion with those gods that they thought did preside over those creatures [which] they worshipped, as Vulcan over the fire, Neptune over the sea, Ceres over the fruits of the earth, &c. But, notwithstanding these vain apprehensions of the Heathen by such means to have fellowship with their gods, yet the apostle says, “They sacrificed to devils, and not to God,” and had “fellowship with devils.” “I would not,” saith he, “that ye should have fellowship with devils.” (1 Cor. x. 20.)

But the ways of this communion, as I said, must be those which God himself hath appointed; the principal whereof are Jesus Christ himself, and the Holy Spirit.

1. *By Jesus Christ.*—Who was figured upon this account by *Jacob's ladder* that stood betwixt heaven and earth, as the person wherein heaven and earth are united, God and man have communion with each other. Who 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; and therefore the apostle addeth here in the text: “Our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ:” 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. ii. 18.)

All God's approaches to us are also through him. All that light, life, and love, which God communicates to his people, is 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 [which] he lived here in the world.*—Considered either in the holy example [that] he hath left us to walk by, or the doctrine that he here preached: by both which 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?" (Amos iii. 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 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. x. 19—22.)

Fourthly. *By virtue of his resurrection, whereby believers come to be raised up to newness of life.* (Rom. vi. 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, nor the powers of nature, till 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. iii. 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; as 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," (John xvii. 21.) and so have communion with us.

So that all these things [which] I have spoken concerning Christ, ye see, tend to this great end,—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." (2 Cor. xiii. 14.) The grace of Christ and the love of God are communicated by the Holy Ghost: 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 assimilating 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," or fire with water? Because there is no similitude in their natures. As the elements that have symbolical qualities, and some likeness in their nature, do easily pass one into the other by a natural transmutation; in this communion with God, there must be some suitableness and likeness between God and the soul; and that enmity and contrariety which is 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 distinguisheth 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.” As the union and communion between the soul and the body in nature is by the superior and most refined part of the body, which are the vital, natural, and animal spirits; so our union and communion with God is by the spirit, the supreme part of the soul, and that 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; and therefore he did appoint ordinances for that end under the law. There were sacrifices, and altars, and solemn feasts appointed of God, especially the sabbath-day; and a sanctuary erected, &c., and 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; 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 I. *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; and desire not this communion with God.

ANSWER II. *You are to make it your scope and end in all the ordinances you approach to, to have therein communion with God.*—Many come to them out of custom, some out of curiosity, and others in hypocrisy; and so find not that communion with God which else they might 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 he might there meet with God, and have communion with him; as he expresseth it in Psalm xxvii. 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 inquire in his temple.” And again: “O God, 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, as I have seen thee in thy sanctuary;” (Psalm lxiii. 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." 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: which 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 this communion in *the passive part* of it. The apostle saith to this purpose: "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God." (1 John iv. 15.) This confession is an act of faith; and if it be not only from the mouth, but from the heart, it leadeth the soul into this communion with God; 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.*—That so no new sin, nor the guilt of it in the conscience, may hinder and interrupt our communion with God. For "who can say, My heart is clean, I am pure from sin?" (Prov. xx. 9:) and therefore there is need of daily repentance, that sin may not interrupt our communion with God; which it will do, if we abide impenitently under it. The apostle speaks in this chapter of fellowship with God, and here in the text; and afterwards adds: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." (Verse 8.) So that this communion with God may consist with the being of sin, but not with impenitence under it; and therefore [he] adds: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins;" (verse 9;) and 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; which 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. (1 Thess. v. 17.) "Pray always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit," as he speaks in another place. (Eph. vi. 18.) For if it be not "a prayer in the Spirit," accompanied with faith and fervour 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 propounded several parables to put men upon fervency, faith, and perseverance in prayer; which are so well known that I need not mention them. If the soul draws nigh to God in any duty, it will be in this; and 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, Luke ix. 29. And the experience of the saints can much witness to this:—what visits of light and love they have had, and transfiguring views of heavenly glory, in this duty of prayer. And then,

(2.) *Keep up a constant course of praising God.*—Praise,—it 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 endeavour 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, by our Saviour, made to the pure in heart; (Matt. v. 8;) and “with the pure, God will show himself pure,” saith the Psalmist. (Psalm xviii. 26.) And the apostle James, speaking concerning this communion with God, which he expresseth by “our drawing nigh to God, and his drawing nigh to us,” adds this exhortation: “Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double-minded.” (James iv. 8.) And the apostle Paul speaks to the Corinthians of the same thing; and 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.” (2 Cor. vi. 16—18.) Under the law God appointed porters to keep their watch at the doors of the temple, that nothing might enter-in to defile that temple, which was his dwelling-place. The soul is to be God's temple for him to dwell in, and therefore we should watch against whatsoever may enter-in to defile our souls; whereby we may be fitter dwellings for him, and for communion with him. And the priests under the law were commanded to purify themselves, before they drew nigh to God in his temple. Yea, and the people also, before they came to the passover, and those solemn feasts wherein they did draw nigh to God,—they were to purify and cleanse themselves. And the very Heathen, before they entered their solemn sacrifices, would have their crier to proclaim to the people, *Ἁγία τοῖς ἁγίοις*: “Holy things are for holy persons.” And they would write this inscription over the doors of their temple: *Nemo immundus huc ingreditor*: “Let no unclean person enter in here.” And all their lustrations and washings [which] they used to

the living, and their purging fires which they dreamed of for souls after death, (and which are still kept up in the holy water and purgatory of the Romish church,) do confirm the truth of this notion, as that which is ingrafted in the minds of all men,—that purity is required as necessary in all our approaches to God, and communion with him.

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 ye lie down, and rise up. Let the creatures you converse with, the several dispensations 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 as it is with creatures, in a sensible way; 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; (Psalm xvi. 8;) and not as he that he speaks of, of whom it is said, “God is not in all his thoughts.” (Psalm x. 4.) This is rather to live “without God in the world,” than to live in communion with him. And these thoughts of God should not be slight and transient, but fixed and serious; especially at some times, which we should more peculiarly devote to solemn meditation. 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. *Practise 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; and therefore must 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 deny ourselves in all high thoughts of ourselves, confidence in ourselves, all self-ends, self-applause, self-sufficiency, and do even annihilate ourselves: this is highly requisite to our communion with God. Self is that Dagon that must fall before God’s ark; 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*: Which God sometimes calls his people to, in order to communion with himself; as, to forsake father, mother, house, land, liberty, &c.; and all this in order to the receiving the “hundred-fold” in this life, as our Saviour hath promised; (Matt. xix. 29;) which they shall receive in this communion with God. An eminent instance of this we have in Galeacius Caracciolus, who left his country, kindred, estate, honour, that he possessed at home, to enjoy communion with God in the purer ordinances of the Reformed church at Geneva; and, being tempted by gold and silver to return, answered: “His money perish with him that thinks all the gold and

silver in the world worth one day's communion with Jesus Christ!" He found all that he had left an hundred-fold in this communion [which] he had with God and Jesus Christ.

6. *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." (1 John iv. 16.) And this mutual indwelling is the communion [which] I am treating of.

The philosopher saith of love, "It doth transfer *amantem in amatum*;"\* it carries the soul from home to live and dwell in the person or thing beloved. It is *vinculum unionis*, "the band of union;" and all communion is founded in union. And therefore where there is no love, how can there be communion? and where men do not walk in love, how can they walk in communion with God? If Christians walk in strife, envy, debates, emulation, contention, they will hereby be not only hindered in their communion with one another, but with God also.

7. And, 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 which God hath instituted for communion with himself. Beside the catholic church, 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.

But upon this third general I shall speak somewhat further in the application.

#### FOURTH GENERAL.

IV. I shall now come to the fourth and last general I proposed to speak to, and that is *the consequences or consecretaries that arise from this whole discourse.*

#### CONSECTARIES.

CONSECTARY I. It follows hence that communion with God is a *very comprehensive duty.*—It comprehends much in it. It consists not in one single grace, of one single act of the soul, or one single duty of religion; but it comprehends the exercise of many graces, reacheth to manifold duties of religion, and consisteth of manifold acts and operations of the soul.

CONSECT. II. It is also a *constant duty.*—Which we are to maintain in a constant course, and not only now and then at some solemn times, or at some solemn ordinance: not as if we ought to do nothing else but worship God, which is the communion reserved for heaven; but it is to be our daily practice, and to set some time apart for it every day, and, as much as we can, to carry this communion

\* "It transfers, or carries forward, him who loves toward him who is beloved."—  
ENIT.

with God through the several affairs, conditions, and actions of our life.

“ Acquaint now thyself with God, and be at peace,” said Eliphaz to Job (xxii. 21). The Hebrew is, “ Accustom thyself with God ;” which importeth some frequent course of approaching to God, and converse with him. And when it is said of Noah and Enoch, that they “ walked with God,” it implies a constant course of religion, and communion with God. And when the apostle saith, “ Our conversation is in heaven,” (Phil. iii. 20,) it implies more than the performance now and then of some religious worship, but some constant converse with God and the things of heaven, as citizens of the same civil body or society have among themselves in their civil commerce and conversation with one another; as the Greek word *ωολιτευμα*, there used, doth import.

CONSECT III. *No creatures are capable of communion with God, but angels and men.*—The beasts were not made for it, nor are capable of it, not being rational and intelligent beings. This communion with God requires the exercise of reason and understanding, and that in the highest improvements of them. If we consider it either in the active or passive part of it, the beasts are not capable of it. Though God hath communicated something of himself to all his creatures, and, as the poet expresseth it, *Jovis omnia plena*, “ All things are full of God,” and his infinite being is in all finite beings; yet no creatures have communion with him, but angels and men. Other creatures have a natural instinct or sagacity to preserve and propagate their respective natures or beings, but have no sense of their Creator, no impression of a Deity upon their nature, no rational faculties whereby they might be capable of communion with God.

The angels have communion with God in heaven: they “ always do behold the face” of God, as our Saviour speaks; (Matt. xviii. 10;) so the spirits of just men departed are with Christ, and in nearer communion with God than when they dwelt in their tabernacles of flesh. And the saints upon earth also are not without it, though in a lower degree; whereby the church militant hath communion with the church triumphant in this communion that both have with God; (Heb. xii. 22—24;) which shows the excellency of rational creatures above all others, that they alone are capable of this high employment and privilege.

CONSECT. IV. *The supreme felicity of angels and men lies in communion with God.*—As they alone are capable of it, so their felicity consisteth in it. God hath provided a good suitable to the natures of all his creatures; in the enjoying of which is their chief happiness. But the happiness of rational and intelligent creatures lies in himself; and therefore, in their first creation, they were made happy in their communion with him.

And herein consisteth the chief misery of fallen angels and fallen man,—that they both fell from their communion with God. The angels so fell as never to be restored to it again; and man so fell also as not to be able of himself to return to it. But God hath provided

a way for man, by Christ, to be brought back again to him ; which if he neglects or refuseth, he will then be cast into the same hopeless condition with the devil and his angels.

CONSECT. v. *The highest improvement of the faculties of the soul is, to employ them in communion with God.*—They are then in their highest operation upon the highest object. Though they are employed about things of this lower world, and ought so to be in their proper bounds ; yet these are not their highest operations which they are capable of. As the highest use that could be made of beasts under the law, was to make them sacrifices to God ; and when the Israelites brought gold, silver, purple, scarlet, and precious stones for the use and service of the sanctuary, they devoted them to the highest service they were capable of ; so when the faculties of the soul are made a sanctuary to God, and employed in communion with him, they receive their highest improvement.

CONSECT. vi. Lastly : *Communion with God is the life of religion.*—It is but a dead thing without it. All religion hath respect to a Deity, either to confer honour upon it, or to have communion with it ; especially the true religion. Without the former, it finds no acceptance with God ; without the latter, it is unprofitable to ourselves, yea, we may grow worse under all our profession. What the body is without the soul, and what the matter without the form, that is religion, where men find no influence from heaven upon their hearts, and have no communion with God.

I next proceed to

#### THE APPLICATION.

USE I. *Take notice, with a holy admiration, of the condescending goodness of God, to admit any of the sons of men into fellowship with himself.*—That there should be fellowship where there is such infinite inequality, such infinite distance ; yea, with such as had provoked him, and disobliged him, by their wilful departure from him.

To assume our nature into union and communion with God was great condescent ; and so it is to receive any of our persons. “ Will God indeed dwell on earth ? ” said Solomon, when he had built God a house for him to dwell in amongst his people. (1 Kings viii. 27.) For God to approach in ways of such kindness to men, as to communicate himself to them, as I said before, and to admit men to make such near approaches to himself,—both these manifest his great goodness.

USE II. *Take notice wherein Christianity excels philosophy, properly so called.*—The one directs us the way to communion with God, which the other cannot do. Philosophy speaks nothing of the “ Mediator, the man Christ Jesus,” by whom alone we can draw nigh to God. Philosophy improves the principles of mere nature, but cannot confer a new nature ; doth not infuse such principles as the gospel doth, to lead men into communion with God. Philosophy, whether natural or moral, hath an excellency in it, in its proper sphere ; but yet falls far short of Christianity, the principles of the gospel, and the mysteries

of faith, wherein men are led to the true knowledge of God, and fellowship with him.

USE III. *This may be matter of lamentation, in this profane and apostate age, that there is so little of this communion with God to be found among men.*—Some understand not what it is; some desire it not, nor seek after it; some have lost what once they had; and some deride and scoff at it as a foolish fancy, a dream, a delusion of some fanatic people.

Though some may pretend to it that have it not, yet God forbid we should deny it. The apostle in the text asserteth it, and the experience of real Christians in all ages bears witness to it. And if it be not a fancy, but a real thing, I am sure it is the most solemn and important thing in the whole world.

QUESTION. "But why are there so few that attain it?"

ANSWER 1. Some are under "an evil heart of unbelief," whereby "they depart from the living God." (Heb. iii. 12.) And what stands opposite to *communion with him* more than *departing from him*?

2. Others walk in hypocrisy, and have only external communion with the church, and ordinances of it; but, for want of true grace and sincerity in their hearts, have no real communion with God.

3. Others walk in pride; and "God resisteth the proud," "knoweth him afar off;" (James iv. 6; Psalm cxxxviii. 6;) and all communion with God is intercepted hereby.

4. Others are in such "friendship with the world," which, as the apostle saith, is "enmity against God;" (James iv. 4;) and where there is enmity, there can be no communion.

5. Others are under the disturbance of headstrong passions; and communion with God requires a quiet, serene, and sedate frame of spirit.

6. Others concern themselves only about disputes and controversies in religion; and mind not that wherein the life and power of it consisteth, which is communion with God.

7. Others satisfy themselves with notions and speculations, with fine language, strains of rhetoric, well-compiled forms of devotion; and look no farther.

8. Others give way to wandering thoughts, and serve God with a distracted mind, whereby their hearts are carried from God, even while they are serving of him.

9. Others make religion mere matter of discourse, please themselves to talk of it; and that is all.

10. And, lastly: others are fallen into downright atheism, question God's very being, and indeed are of no religion at all; and can have no communion with the Deity, which they doubt of or deny.

Now is not this to be lamented, for men to have no communion with that God who gave them their being, that God in whose favour is their life, that God in whom is treasured up the true felicity of man? God is a fountain of living water, a spring of endless pleasure, an ocean of all perfection and holiness: but what is this to him that hath no

communion with him, and hath not a drop of all this falling upon himself.

But, instead of this communion with God, have not these men "fellowship with unrighteousness," and "with the unfruitful works of darkness," (which the apostle forbids, Eph. v. 11,) fellowship with the adulterer or adulteress in uncleanness, with the swearer in profane oaths, with the unjust in unrighteousness, with the deceiver in his frauds, the liar in false-speaking, the drunkard in riotous and intemperate drinking, which men call "good fellowship?" &c. And I could wish that the fellowship that men call "clubbing" at taverns and coffee-houses at unseasonable hours, whereby the duties of their families are neglected, were forborne at this day. Certainly, a more circumspect walking is required of us, especially such as pretend to religion, in a day wherein God is visiting the nation, and rebuking his own people for their iniquities.

And many, instead of fellowship with God, have fellowship with the devil. I mean not so much witches, sorcerers, or such as confederate expressly with him; but such as do his lusts, and carry on his work in the world. What is the devil's great work? Is it not to propagate wickedness, to persecute the church, to obstruct the gospel, to foment divisions, to corrupt the truth with error, and to sow tares among the wheat? And how many are there that have fellowship with the devil in such works as those! But they little think of the fellowship *they* are in danger to have with him in his torments, *who* at present have this fellowship with him in these works of wickedness.

USE IV. I shall next proceed to *exhort men to seek after this communion with God.*

1. And I shall first speak to *such as are mere strangers to it*; have lived many years in the world, and in a land where the gospel hath been long preached, and yet know nothing of it.

(1.) Let me persuade them that there is really such a thing; and that all that is spoken of it is not mere canting and vain pretence.

(2.) Let me persuade them seriously to seek it; and to make it the great work of their lives, and their great scope and end in all religion, to attain unto it.

(3.) As the gospel invites sinners to Christ, so let them make haste to him, that in him they may have their peace made with God, and receive that grace whereby they may be capable of communion with him.

(4.) Let them no longer walk in darkness. For "if we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth," as the apostle speaks in this chapter. (Verse 6.) And here remember what I spake in the opening of the text: "Wisdom is light, and folly is darkness; knowledge is light, and ignorance is darkness; truth is light, and error is darkness; holiness is light, and sin and wickedness are darkness."

Let men then, First, walk wisely, and not as fools. Wisdom lies in choosing to a man's self a good end, and in fitting means suitable

to that end : let men do this. Wisdom lies in preferring things according to their true worth and value : let men do so. Wisdom lies in embracing of seasons, and redeeming of time : let men practise this. Wisdom lies in looking to things in their end and issue, and not only how they appear at the present : let men do this also.

And, Secondly, I said, "Knowledge is light, ignorance is darkness." Would you then have communion with God? You must not abide in ignorance ; but read the scriptures, inquire into the mysteries of the gospel, and know the way of coming to God, and communion with him by Christ Jesus, and to an everlasting communion with him in heaven.

And, Thirdly, "Truth is light, and error is darkness." Take heed therefore of false doctrines, espically such as may tend to the obstructing this communion with God. Take heed of Socinian doctrines, in denying Christ's satisfaction, the Trinity, and the Godhead of Christ, &c. Take heed of Popish doctrines, which tell you of other merits beside the merits of Christ, other satisfaction, other mediation, and other headship of the church beside Jesus Christ, &c. Take heed of the leaven of Quakerism, which sets up the light of nature for Christ, and casts off the use of those ordinances which Christ hath appointed for our communion with God. Take heed of the old Pelagian doctrines, that set up the power of nature, and are since revived under other names, to the denial or neglect of that help of the Spirit which is necessary to our communion with God.

And, Lastly, I said, "Holiness is light, and sin and wickedness are darkness." He therefore that would have communion with God must break off from his sin, betake himself to a course of godliness, and holy walking with God. In the apostle's time rose up a sect of carnal professors, who would talk high of fellowship with God, and yet walk after the flesh, and indulge their lusts : whom he is thought especially to refer to in this chapter, that they, thus walking in darkness, cannot have fellowship with that God who is Light.

2. The next branch of the exhortation I direct to *such as are in the practice and experience of this communion with God.*

First. *Maintain it in what constancy you can.*—The fewer interruptions are admitted therein, so much the better. Take heed of violent passions, take heed of distracting cares, take heed of diversions from duties and ordinances [which] you ought to attend unto. Take heed of the snares of bad company, of the influence of bad examples, of the carnal counsels of your own heart, of any compliances against your consciences, of any doubts and disputes in your mind about the fundamental principles of all religion, especially that Christian religion that you make profession of. And watch over the levity and instability of your own minds, which of itself alone may hinder our constancy in this duty. Yea, and the very lawful affairs of our calling, especially if much encumbered, may interrupt us herein.

Secondly. *Advance it to a higher degree.*—That your communion with God may grow up into a greater intimacy ; such as the church, the spouse of Christ, is represented to have in the book of Canticles.

He that can attain it, let him attain it. In Jacob's ladder, which stood betwixt heaven and earth, there were many rounds. In a high mountain there are several degrees of ascent. At Mount Sinai, the people stood at the bottom; some of the priests, and the seventy elders of Israel, went up a little way; but Moses was at the top. Let us ascend this Mount as high as we can; only know, it is not Mount Sinai, but Mount Sion, we must ascend, to have communion with God. And be not discouraged if you meet with some difficulties in your ascent, through the natural bent of your hearts toward things below. The sweetness and advantage [which] you will reap herein, will abundantly recompense all the labour and endeavours after it.

And may not some eminent degree of communion with God be expected of such as do not only live in the times of the New Testament, but have had a long standing in the church of God? that your growth herein may in some measure be proportioned to your time and advantages for it? And that which should quicken you the more, is the present complexion of the times both at home and abroad. We know not what days are coming. "Men's hearts are failing them for fear" of what evils "are coming upon the earth;" as our Saviour foretold. (Matt. xxiv. 29; Luke xxi. 26.) Now, nothing will so fortify the soul against an evil day and an hour of temptation, as this communion with God. This will sweeten a prison, sweeten poverty, sweeten banishment, sweeten the very sorrows of death. This sweetened the martyrs' sufferings of old: that fellowship they had with God in those sufferings, wherein they had fellowship also with Christ in his death.

Now, let these things put you on to this great work; and be not discouraged because of the infinite distance betwixt God and us. He is come down to us in our own nature in Christ, that we may have access to him, and his "terror not make us afraid." (Job xxxiii. 7.) And hear what he speaks himself to our encouragement: "Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." (Isai. lvii. 15.) The most high God thus humbleth himself to men.

**OBJECTION.** "But God is invisible; and how can I have communion with one whom I see not?"

**ANSWER.** It is true, we cannot have a sensible communion with him, as men have with one another; but spirits that are invisible have converse together, as well as sensible creatures. "God is a Spirit;" and the soul of man is a spirit, and so may be capable of communion with that God who is a Spirit. Had not the apostle communion with invisible things, when he said, "We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen?" (2 Cor. iv. 18.) And doth not the apostle Peter say, "Whom having not seen, ye love?" (1 Peter i. 8.) And is not "faith the evidence of things not seen?" (Heb. xi. 1.) And though in himself he is invisible, yet he made himself visible in Christ, "who is the image of the invisible God." (Col. i. 15.)

USE V. Having spoken of this *communion with God*, I shall add one use about *the communion of saints*. We know it is one of the articles of our Creed, and that which the apostle in this chapter exhorts to: "These things write we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us;" (verses 3, 4;) with us as apostles, and with us as believers. So that the fellowship of saints comprehends their fellowship with the Father, and their fellowship with the Son, and their fellowship with the apostles, and from thence fellowship with one another.

All saints and churches that hold fellowship with these three, ought to have fellowship among themselves. To bring-in new doctrines, or new rules of worship, not delivered by the apostles, is to forsake communion with the apostles. The terms of communion laid by the apostles for the churches of Christ, ought to be kept inviolable in all churches to the end of the world, and be the foundation of their communion among themselves. And, for my part, I can hold communion with any church where these are maintained, though there may be some circumstantial differences either in opinion or practice; especially if they are not imposed as necessary. For this hath made such woful divisions in the church,—the making *things unnecessary and doubtful* the necessary terms of church-communion. Was the church of Rome itself the truly ancient, catholic, and apostolic church, as she styles herself, I could have communion with it. They that leave the apostles, shake the foundation of the church's stability, and forsake the centre of its unity. The Lord help us all to understand the way of peace and union, in this miserably-divided age!

USE VI. Lastly. And now, from all that hath been said, *we may take a prospect of heaven*.—Heaven is not a Turkish Paradise: it is communion with God that is the very heaven of heaven; as the loss of it is the very hell of hell! And this makes heaven not desirable to the carnal man, who hath no desire after or delight in communion with God. But it doth commend it the more to the spiritual man, that he shall then enjoy that, in its highest perfection, which he hath been pursuing and had the foretastes of in this world.