

**COMMUNION WITH CHRIST,**

**BY THE**

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## COMMUNION WITH CHRIST.

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COMMUNION with Christ is frequent in the lips of many men, but a hidden mystery to the souls of most men. This atheistical age scoffs at, and ridicules it as enthusiasm and fanaticism; but the saints find that reality and incomparable sweetness in it, that they would not part with it for ten thousand worlds. When the Roman soldiers entered the temple at Jerusalem, and found no image there, as they used to have in their own idolatrous temples; they gave out in a jeer, that the Jews worshipped the clouds. Thus profane atheists scoff at the most solemn, awful, and sweetest part of internal religion as a mere fancy; but the thing is real, sure, and sensible: if there be truth in anything in the world, there is truth in this, that there are real intercourses between the visible and invisible world; between Christ and the souls of believers, which we here call communion: "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Christ Jesus." It is really and truly so, we impose not upon the world, we tell you no more than we have felt. The life of Enoch is

called "his walking with God." O sweet and pleasant walk! all pleasures, all joys are in that walk with God. "Blessed are the people that hear the joyful sound; they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance." The joyful sound there spoken of was the sound of the trumpet, which called the people to the solemn assemblies, where they walked in the light of God's countenance, the sweet manifestations of his favour; and because the world is so apt to suspect the reality and certainty of this doctrine, the Apostle again asserts it, "Truly our conversation is in heaven." We breathe below, but we live above; we walk on earth, but our conversation is in heaven. To open this point, three things must come under consideration.

I. What communion with Christ is.

II. That there is such a communion between him and believers.

III. The excellency of this communion.

*First*, What communion with Christ is, in the general nature of it. To open this it must be considered that there is a twofold communion.

1. A state of communion.

2. Actual communion.

The first is fundamental to the second; we can have no actual communion with the Father, Son, or Spirit, till we be first brought into a state of communion. This state of communion is in scripture called *κοινωνια*, our fellowship or partnership with Christ: such a fellowship as merchants have in one

and the same ship and cargo ; where one hath more and another less, but, however, a joint, though unequal interest ; one lives in one kingdom, another in another kingdom, but they are jointly interested in the same goods. This comparison must not be stretched beyond its intention, which is to show nothing but this, that Christ and believers are co-partners, or co-heirs in the same inheritance : hence they are called, his fellows ; “ God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.” And again, “ If children, then heirs ; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.” Christ states his people, gives them a right and title not only to himself, but to those good things purchased by him, yea, and the very glory he now enjoys in heaven—“ The glory which thou gavest me, I have given them.”

It is true, there are some things in Christ which are peculiar to himself, and incommunicable to any creature, as his eternity, consubstantiality with his Father, &c. neither have we fellowship in his mediatorial works ; we have the fruits and benefits of them, but no partnership with him in the glory and honour of them ; that is peculiarly his own : and though it be said in the scriptures, that believers “ are righteous as he is righteous,” yet the meaning is not that they can justify others as Christ doth ; no, they are justified by him, but cannot communicate righteousness to others as Christ doth to them. But there are other things wherein there is a partner-

ship between Christ and his people; among others, they partake with him in the spirit of sanctification on earth, and glory in heaven: the same spirit of holiness which dwells in Christ without measure, is communicated by him to the saints in measure: "He hath given us of his Spirit." And as Christ communicates his Spirit to the saints, so he communicates the glory of heaven to them; not that they shall be as glorious in heaven as Christ is: no, he will be known among the saints in glory, as the sun is known from the lesser stars. Thus briefly of the state of communion, which is called in scripture "our being made nigh," and indeed we must be made nigh before we can actually draw nigh. We must be put into a state of fellowship before ever we can have actual communion with God.

2. Beside this state of communion, there is also an actual communion which the saints have in this world with the Father and the Son in the duties of religion. This is what I am here engaged to open: this is our supping with Christ, and his with us: and, for clearness' sake, I shall open it,

First, Negatively, what it is not.

Secondly, Positively, what it is.

First, Negatively, what it is not; for I find persons are hugely apt to mistake in this matter, taking that for communion with God which is not so: and here let it be noted,

(1.) That communion with God doth not consist in the bare performance of religious duties. I do

not say that men may have communion with God in this world without duties, it is a delusion of Satan to think so; but this is what I say, that communion with God consisteth not in the mere performance of duties. Communion and duties of religion are two things, separable one from the other. Men may multiply duties, and yet be strangers to communion with God in them; even humiliation and fasting days may be kept by souls that are estranged from communion with the Lord—"Speak unto all the people of the land, and unto the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even these seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even unto me,?" as if he should say, Had your souls pure intentions and respects in those duties to my glory? Had you special communion with me, or I with you in those duties? Did you ever feel your souls in these days wounded for sin? Or did you not fast out of custom, and mourn for company? God may be near in men's mouths, and at the same time far from their reins. Religious words may flow out of men's lips when not one drop of religion touches their reins and hearts; that is, the secret, inward powers of their souls: you cannot therefore safely depend upon this, Christ rejects this plea. Get a better evidence of communion with God than this, or you will certainly come short of your expectation. "I know you not," saith Christ; there was never any spiri-

tual acquaintance between your souls and me; I know you not in a way of approbation.

(2.) Neither do all stirrings and workings of the affections in duties infallibly evidence and prove communion between Christ and that soul; for it is possible, yea, common, to have the affections raised in a natural way, and by external motives in the duties of religion; this you see in that example, “And lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not.” The sweet modulation of the prophet’s voice was like the skilful touch of a rare musical instrument, which in a natural way, moved and excited their affections. Thus John’s hearers rejoiced in his ministry for a season. I confess this is very apt to cast souls into a mistake of their condition. They distinguish not between the influences that come upon their affections from without, from extrinsic things, and those that are purely inward, divine, and spiritual. But then,

Secondly, To show you positively what communion with God is. Here we must consider two things,

1. What things it presupposes in us.
2. Wherein the nature of it consists.

1. There are divers things preredquired and presupposed unto all actual communion with God in duties; and where these things are wanting, men have no communion with God. You may have communion with his people, and communion with

his ordinances, but not communion with God and Christ in them. And these prerequisites are three:

(1.) Union with Christ is fundamentally necessary to all communion with him. All communion is founded in union; and where there is no union, there can be no communion. ‘You know,’ saith an excellent person,\* ‘the member receives nothing from the head unless it be united to it; nor the branch from the root.’ “All is yours, and ye are Christ’s;” ‘here is a vast possession, but all founded upon union: as all communion is founded upon union, so all union terminates in communion: and the closer the union the fuller is the communion.’

Before our union with Christ we are strangers unto God—“We live without God in the world;” it is in Christ that we are made nigh; it is in the beloved we are made accepted. Whilst we are in the state of alienation from Christ, we have no more to do with the communications of joy and peace, with the seals and earnest of the Spirit, than a native Indian hath with the privileges of London. “If any man open to me, (saith Christ) I will come in to him and sup with him, and he with me.”

(2.) Communion with God presupposes the habits of grace implanted in the soul by sanctification; a sound and sincere change of heart. No sanctification, no communion; “If we say we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.” The Apostle gives the lie

\* Dr. Jacomb on Rom. viii. page 69.



to such bold pretenders. "The Lord is nigh to all that call upon him, unto all that call upon him in truth;" the latter clause restrains all spiritual communion unto upright souls. "For an hypocrite shall not come before him."

(3.) Communion with God doth not only suppose grace implanted, but also implanted grace excited, grace in act; for a man may have the habits of faith, love, and delight in him, and yet be without actual communion with God; for by this grace is awakened and put into act. A believer when he is asleep, and acts no grace, is in a state of communion with God; but if he will have actual communion, his faith, love, and delight must be awakened; they must not lie asleep in the habit. "Thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek." It was in order to actual communion with Christ that the church so earnestly begs fresh influences of the Spirit to excite her graces into act—"Awake, O north wind, and come thou south, blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits." And though believers are not so to wait for the influences of the Spirit, as in the mean time to neglect all proper outward means of exciting their own graces, engaging their hearts to approach unto God; yet certainly it is the work of God's Spirit, and without him we can do nothing to any purpose. The seamen may trim the sails, weigh the anchor, put all into a sailing posture;

but till a gale come from heaven there is little or no motion. The same Spirit that plants the habits, is he also that excites the acts of grace. These three things therefore are prerequisites unto all communion with God

2. Next let us consider wherein this heavenly privilege of communion with God doth consist; and more generally it will be found to lie in a spiritual correspondence between Christ and the soul. God lets forth influences upon our souls, and we, by the assistance of his Spirit, make returns again unto God. Communion is a mutual action; so in the text, "I will sup with him, and he with me." We cry to God, and God answers that cry by the incomes of spiritual grace upon the soul: "In the day that I cried, thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul." More particularly, there are many ways and methods wherein men have this spiritual correspondence or communion with God, namely:—

First, In the contemplation of his attributes.

Secondly, In the exercises of our graces in religious duties.

Thirdly, In his various providences. In all these the saints have communion with him.

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

(1.) Sometimes the Lord discovers and manifests to the souls of his people his *immense greatness*; the manifestation of which attribute makes an awful, humbling impression upon the soul, makes them seem as nothing to themselves. Thus when Abraham, that great believer, considered the greatness of that God with whom he had to do; that sight of God seems to reduce him to his first principles, to crumble him, as it were, into dust and ashes again—“I that am but dust and ashes have taken upon me to speak unto God.” He now looks upon himself as a heap of vileness and unworthiness; so David, “When I consider the heavens, the work of thy hands, the moon and the stars which thou hast made,” (from hence he inferred the greatness of the Creator,) “Lord, what is man that thou art mindful of him?” as if he should say: When I consider what a great God the Creator of the world is, I am justly astonished that ever he should set his heart upon so vile a thing as man. When men compare themselves among themselves, and measure themselves by themselves, their spirits are apt to swell with pride; but would they look up to God, as these holy men did, they would admire his condescension. And this is communion with God in the meditation of his immense greatness.

(2.) The representations and meditations of the *purity and holiness of God*, working shame and deep abasement in the soul, for the pollutions and sinful filthiness that are in it. This is communion with

God, and an excellent way of fellowship with him. Thus, when a representation of God, in his holiness, was made unto the prophet, there were the seraphims, covering their faces with their wings, and crying one to another, saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." The effect this produced, or the return made by the prophet to this manifestation of God in his holiness, was deep abasement of the soul for his unsuitableness to so holy a God; "Then said I, woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips," &c. And this is real communion with God in his holiness. Thus Job who had stiffly defended his own integrity against men, yet when God enters the lists with him, and he saw what a great and holy God he had to do with, cried out, "Behold, I am vile, what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken, but I will not answer; yea, twice, but I will proceed no further:" as if he should say, I have done, Lord, I have done; I could answer men, but I cannot answer thee: thou art holy, but I am vile.

(3.) There are sometimes representations of the *goodness and mercy of God*, made unto the souls of his people; when these produce an ingenuous thaw and melting of the heart, into an humble, thankful admiration of it, and an answerable care of pleasing him in the ways of obedience, then have men communion with God in his goodness. The goodness of God runs down to men in a double chan-

nel: his goodness to their bodies in external providences; his goodness to their souls in spiritual mercies. When the goodness of God, either way, draws forth the love and gratitude of the soul to the God of our mercies, then have we real communion with him! Thus Jacob, "And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac; which saidst unto me, return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee. I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth which thou hast showed unto thy servant: for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands." Ah, Lord, I see a multitude of mercies round about me, and the least of them is greater than I. So David, "And David the king came and sat before the Lord, and said, Who am I, O Lord God, and what is mine house, that thou hast brought me hither? And yet this was a small thing in thine eyes, O God, &c. what can David speak more to thee?" You see in these instances, what effects the goodness of God, even in inferior, outward mercies useth to produce in sanctified hearts. But then, if you come to spiritual mercies, and ponder the goodness of God to your souls, in pardoning, accepting, and saving such vile, sinful creatures as you have been; this much more affects the heart, and overwhelms it with holy astonishment; as you see in Paul: "The grace of our Lord was abundant: I was a persecutor, a blasphemer, yet I obtained mercy." So Mary, that

notorious sinner, when pardoning grace appeared to her, into what a flood of tears, into what transports of love did the sight of mercy cast her soul! She wept, and washed her Saviour's feet with tears of joy and thankfulness. No terrors of the law, no frights of hell, thaw the heart like the apprehensions of pardoning mercy.

(4.) Sometimes there are special representations of the *veracity and faithfulness of God*, made unto his people, begetting trust and holy confidence in their souls; and when they do so, then have men communion with God in his faithfulness. Thus—“I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” There is a discovery of the faithfulness of God, and what follows upon this? “So that we may boldly say, the Lord is our God; we will not fear what man can do unto us.” Here is faithfulness in God, producing trust and confidence in the believer; this is that reciprocation, that sweet fellowship and communion between God and a believer, with respect to his fidelity. “Behold, God is my salvation: I will trust, and not be afraid.” And truly, friend, this is what the Lord justly expects from thee, even thy trust and confidence in him, thy steady dependence on him, in return for all the discoveries of his faithfulness to thee both in his word and providences.

(5.) There are manifestations of the *anger, and displeasure of God*, by the hiding of his face from them, and the frowns of his providence: when these produce repentance, and deep humiliation for sin,

an inquietness, a restlessness of spirit, till he restore his favour, and manifest his reconciliation to the soul; even here also, is a real communion between God and the soul: "Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled." Nor will a gracious soul rest there, but will take pains to sue out a fresh pardon—"Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice; restore unto me the joys of thy salvation."

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

Lastly, There are representations and special contemplations of the *omniscience of God*, producing sincerity, comfort in appeals, and recourse to it in doubts of our own uprightness: And this also is a choice and excellent method of communion with God. (1.) When the omniscience of God strongly obliges the soul to sincerity and uprightness, as it did David, Psal. cxxxix. 11, 12, compared with Psal. xviii. 23, “I was also upright before him.” The consideration that he was always before the eye of God was his preservative from iniquity, yea, from his own iniquity. (2.) When it produceth comforts in appeals to it, as it did Hezekiah—“Remember now, O Lord, that I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart.” So Job also appeals to this attribute—“Thou knowest that I am not wicked.” So did Jeremiah—“But thou, O Lord, knowest me, thou hast seen me, and tried my heart towards thee.” (3.) When we have recourse to it under doubts and fears of our own uprightness. Thus did David—“Search me, O God, and try my heart; prove me, and see my reins: see if there be any way of wickedness in me.” In all these attributes of God, Christians have real and sweet communion with him. Which was the first thing to be opened, to wit, communion with God in the meditation of his attributes.

2. The next method of communion with God is *in the exercises of our graces in the various duties of religion*; in prayer, hearing, sacraments, &c. in all



which the Spirit of the Lord influences the graces of his people, and they return the fruits thereof in some measure to him. As God hath planted various graces in regenerate souls, so he hath appointed various duties to exercise and draw forth those graces; and when they do so, then have his people sweet actual communion with him. And,

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

(2.) As there are seasons in duty wherein the saints exercise their repentance, and the Lord returns peace; so likewise the Lord helps them in their duties to act their *faith*, in return whereunto, they find from the Lord inward support, rest, and refreshment. "I had fainted unless I had believed." And oftentimes an assurance of the mercies they have acted their faith about.

(3.) The Lord many times draws forth eminent degrees of our *love* to him, in the course of our du-

ties; the heart is filled with love to Christ. The strength of the soul is drawn forth to Christ in love, and this the Lord repays in kind, love for love—“He that loveth me, my Father will love him; and we will come and make our abode with him.” Here is sweet communion with God in the exercise of love. O what a rich trade do Christians drive this way in their duties and exercises of graces?

(4.) To mention no more in the duties of *passive obedience*, Christians are enabled to exercise their patience, meekness, and long-suffering for Christ, in return for which, the Lord gives them the singular consolations of his Spirit, double returns of joy. “The Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon them.” The Lord strengthens them with passive fortitude, with all might in the inner man, unto all long-suffering; but the reward of that long-suffering is joyfulness. This is the trade they carry on with heaven.

3. Beside communion with God in the contemplation of his attributes, and graces exercised in the course of duties, there is another method of communion with God in the way of his *providences*, for therein also his people walk with him. To give a taste of this, let us consider providence in a four-fold aspect upon the people of God:—

(1.) There are *afflictive providences*, rods and rebukes wherewith the Lord chastens his children, this is the discipline of his house; in answer whereunto gracious souls return meek and child-like submission, a fruit of the spirit of adoption; they are

brought to accept the punishment of their iniquities. And herein lies communion with God under the rod; this return to the rod may not be presently made, for there is much stubbornness unmortified in the best hearts; but this is the fruit it shall yield; and when it doth, there is a real communion with God and the afflicted soul. Let not Christians mistake themselves, if when God is smiting, they are humbled, searching their hearts, and blessing God for the discoveries of sin made by their afflictions; admiring his wisdom in timing, moderating, and choosing the rod; kissing it with a child-like submission, and saying, it is good for me that I have been afflicted: that soul hath real communion with God, though it may be for a time without joy.

(2.) There are times when *providence straitens* the people of God; when the waters of comfort ebb and run very low, wants pinch; if then the soul returns filial dependence upon fatherly care, saying with David, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want;" it belongs to him to provide, and to me to depend: I will trust my father's care and love. Here now is sweet communion with God under pinching wants. The wants of the body enrich the soul, outward straitenings are the occasions of inward enlargements. O see from hence how good it is to have an interest in God as a Father whatever changes of providence may come upon you.

(3.) There are seasons wherein the Lord exposes his people to imminent and visible dangers, when

to the eye of sense there is no way of escape. Now when this produces trust in God, and resignation to the pleasure of his will, here is communion with God in times of distress and difficulty. Thus David, "At what time I am afraid I will trust in thee;" as if he should say, Father, I see a storm rising, thy poor child comes under his Father's roof for shelter; for whither should a distressed child go but to his Father? And then, as to the issues and events of doubtful providences, when the soul resigns and leaves itself to the wise disposal of the will of God, as David—"Here am I, let him do with me as seemeth good in his sight." This is real and sweet communion with God in his providences. And so much for the nature of communion with God.

*Secondly*, In the next place I shall evidence the reality of communion with God, and prove it to be no fancy. I confess it grieves me to be put upon the proof of this, but the atheism and profaneness of the age we live in seems to make it necessary; for many men will allow nothing for certain but what falls under the cognizance of sense. And O that they had their spiritual senses exercised! then they would sensibly discern the reality of these things. But to put the matter out of question, I shall evidence the truth and reality of the saints' communion with God divers ways.

*Evidence 1.* From the saints' union with Christ. If there be a *union* between Christ and believers,

then of necessity there must be a *communion* between them also. Now the whole word of God which you profess to be the rule of your faith, plainly asserts this union between Christ and believers; a union like that between the branches and the root, or that between the head and the members. Now if Christ be to believers as the root to the branches, and as the head to the members; then of necessity there must be a communion between them: for if there were not a communion, there could be no communications; and if no communications, no life. For it is by the communication of vital sap and spirits, from the root and from the head, that the branches and members subsist and live.

*Evid. 2.* There is a *cohabitation* of Christ with believers; he dwells with them, yea, he dwells in them—"I will dwell in them, and walk in them." The soul of a believer is the temple of Christ: yea, his living temple. And if Christ dwell with them; yea, if he dwell in them and walk in them, then certainly there must be communion between him and them; if they live together they must converse together. A man indeed may dwell in his house, and yet cannot be said to have communion with it; but the saints are a living house, they are the living temples of Christ; and he cannot dwell in such temples, capable of communion with him, and yet have no communion with them.

*Evid. 3.* The reality of communion between God

and the saints is undeniably evinced from all the spiritual relations into which God hath taken them. Every believer is the child of God and the spouse of Christ. God is the believer's Father, and the church is the Lamb's wife. Christ calls the believer not only his servant, but friend; henceforth I call you not servants, but friends, &c. Now, if God be the believer's Father, and the believer be God's own child, certainly there must be communion between them. If Christ be the believer's husband, and the believer be Christ's spouse, there must be communion between him and them. What, no communion between the Father and his children, the husband and the wife? We must either renounce and deny all such relations to him, and therein renounce our Bibles; or else yield the conclusion, that there is a real communion between Christ and believers.

*Evid. 4.* The reality of communion with God evidently appears from the institution and appointment of so many ordinances and duties of religion, on purpose to maintain daily communion between Christ and his people. As instance but in that one institution of *prayer*, a duty appointed on purpose for the soul's meeting with God, and communion with him: "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you." Now, to what purpose can it be conceived such an ordinance is appointed for the soul's drawing nigh to God, and God to it; if there be no such thing as communion to be enjoyed with

him? If communion with God were a mere phantom, as the carnal world thinks it to be, what encouragement have the saints to bow their knees to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? But surely there is an access to God in prayer—"In whom we have boldness, and access with confidence." Access to what? If God be not there, and that there can be no communion with him, what means that access? "I will meet with you, saith the Lord, and I will commune with you in every place where I record my name." Certainly duties had never been appointed, but for the sake of God's communing with us, and we with him.

*Evid. 5.* This is yet further evidenced from the mutual desires both of Christ and his people to be in sweet and intimate communion one with the other. The scripture speaks much of the saints' vehement desires of communion with Christ, and of Christ's desires after communion with the saints, and of both jointly. The saints' desires after communion with him are frequent in all the scriptures, see Psal. lxiii. 1—3; xlii. 1; cxix. 20; and the like throughout the New Testament. And Christ is no less desirous, yea, he is much more desirous of communion with us than we are with him. Consider that expression of his to the spouse—"O thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice: cause me to hear it." As if he should say, O my people, you frequently converse one with another, you talk daily together; why shall not you

and I converse one with another: you speak often to men, O that you would speak more frequently to me! “Let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for thy voice is sweet, and thy countenance is comely.” And then these desires are mutually expressed one to another—“Surely” (saith Christ) “I come quickly, amen: even so come, Lord Jesus,” saith the church. Now if there be such vehement mutual desires after communion between Christ and his people in this world; then certainly there is such a thing as real communion between them, or else both must live a very restless and dissatisfied life.

*Evid. 6.* The mutual complaints that are found on both sides of the interruption of communion, plainly prove there is such a thing. If God complain of his people for their estrangements from him, and the saints complain to God about his silence to them, and the hidings of his face from them; surely then there must be a communion between them, or else there could be no ground of complaint for the interruptions of it. But it is manifest God doth complain of his people for their estrangements from him—“Thus saith the Lord, I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, and the love of thy espousals. What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me?” as if he should say, You and I have been better acquainted in days past; what cause have I given for your estrangements from me? And thus Christ in like manner complains



of the church of Ephesus ; after he had commended many things in her, yet one thing grieves and troubles him—"Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." And then on the other side, when the Lord hides his face, and seems to estrange himself from his people ; what sad lamentations and moans do they make about it, as an affliction they know not how to bear ? Thus Heman, "Lord, why castest thou off my soul ? Why hidest thou thy face from me ?" So David, "Hide not thy face from me : put not thy servant away in anger." This is what they cannot bear.

*Evid. 7.* The reality of communion with God is made visible to others, in the sensible effects of it upon the saints that enjoy it. There are visible signs and tokens of it appearing to the conviction of others. Thus that marvellous change that appeared upon the very countenance of Hannah, after she had poured out her heart in prayer, and the Lord had answered her ; it is noted, "She went away, and her countenance was no more sad." You might have read in her face that God had spoken peace and satisfaction to her heart. Thus, when the disciples had been with Christ, the mark of communion with him was visible to others—"Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, they marvelled, and took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus." It is sweet, Christian, when the heavenly cheerfulness, and spirituality of thy

conversations with men, shall convince others that thou hast been with Jesus.

*Evid. 8.* We may prove the reality of communion with God, from the impossibility of sustaining those troubles the saints do without it. If prayers did not go up, and answers come down, there were no living for a Christian in this world. Prayer is the out-let of the saints' sorrows, and the in-let of their supports and comforts. Say not, other men have their troubles as well as the saints, and yet they make a shift to bear them without the help of communion with God. It is true, carnal men have their troubles, and those troubles are often too heavy for them. "The sorrows of the world work death;" but carnal men have no such troubles as the saints have, for they have their inward, spiritual troubles, as well their outward troubles. And inward troubles are the sinking troubles; but this way the strength of God comes in to succour them: and except they had a God to go to, and fetch comfort from, they could never bear them: "I had fainted unless I had believed." Paul had sunk under the buffetings of Satan, unless he had gone once and again to his God, and received this answer, "My grace is sufficient for thee."

*Evid. 9.* We conclude the reality of communion with God, from the end of the saint's *vocation*. We read frequently in scripture of effectual calling; now what is that to which God calls his people, out of the state of nature, but unto fellowship and com-

munion with Jesus Christ? “God is faithful, by whom ye are called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.” They are called, you see, into a life of communion with Christ; therefore certainly there is such a communion, else the saints are called to the enjoyment of a fancy, instead of a privilege, which is the greatest reproach that can be cast upon the faithful God that called them.

*Evid. 10.* Lastly, In a word, the characters and descriptions given to the saints in scripture, evidently prove their life of communion with God. The men of this world are manifestly distinguished from the people of God in scripture; they are called, “The children of this world;” the saints, “The children of light.” They are said to be “after the flesh,” saints to be “after the Spirit.” They “mind earthly things,” but the saint’s “conversation is in heaven.” By all which it undeniably appears that there is a reality in the doctrine of communion between Christ and his people. We are not imposed upon, it is no cunningly devised fable; but a thing whose foundation is as sure as its nature is sweet.

*Thirdly,* In the last place, I shall show you the transcendent excellency of this life of communion with God: it is the life of our life, the joy of our hearts; a heaven upon earth, as will appear by these twenty excellencies thereof following:—

1 *Excellency.* It is the *assimilating* instrument whereby the soul is moulded and fashioned after the image of God. This is the excellency of commu-

nion with God, to make the soul like him. There is a twofold assimilation, or conformity of the soul to God, the one perfect and complete, the other inchoate and in part. Perfect assimilation is the privilege of the perfect state, resulting from the immediate vision and perfect communion the soul hath with God in glory—"When he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." Perfect vision produceth perfect assimilation; but the soul's assimilation or imperfect conformity to God in this world, is wrought and gradually carried on, by daily communion with him. And as our communion with God here, grows up more and more into spirituality and power, so in an answerable degree doth our conformity to him advance: "But we all, with open face, beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord." All sorts of communion among men have an assimilating efficacy; he that walks in vain company is made vainer than he was before; and he that walks in spiritual, heavenly company, will be ordinarily more serious than he was before. But nothing so transforms the spirit of a man as communion with God doth. Those are most like unto God that converse most frequently with him. The beauty of the Lord is upon those souls; it forms the spirit of a man after the divine pattern. That is the first excellency of communion with God, it assimilates them to God.

2 *Excellency.* It is the *beauty* of the soul, in the eyes of God and all good men ; it makes the face to shine. No outward splendor attracts like this ; it makes a man the most desirable companion in the whole world : “ These things have I written unto you, that you might have fellowship with us : and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.” This was the great and only inducement the Apostle makes use of to draw the world into fellowship with the saints, that their fellowship is with God. And if there were ten thousand other inducements, yet none like this. You read of a blessed time, Zech. viii. when the earth shall be full of holiness ; when the Jews, that are now as a lost generation to the eye of sense, shall be called, and an eminent degree of sanctification shall be visible in them ; and then see the effect of this, ver. 23, “ In those days, ten men shall take hold, out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirts of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.” This is the powerful attractive, “ the Lord is with you ;” it is the effect of communion with God, which makes the righteous more excellent than his neighbour. What a vast and visible difference doth this make between one man and another ! How heavenly, sweet, and desirable are the conversations and company of some men ! How frothy, burdensome, and unprofitable is the company of others ! and what makes the difference but

only this, the one walks in communion with God, the other is alienated from the life of God.

3 *Excellency.* It is the *centre* which rests the motions of a weary soul: it is the rest and refreshment of a man's spirits—"Return unto thy rest, O my soul." When we attain perfect communion with God in heaven, we attain to perfect rest, and and all the rest the spirit of man finds on earth, is found in communion with God. Take a sanctified person, who hath intermitted for some time his communion with the Lord, and ask him, Is your soul at rest and ease? He will tell you, no! The motions of his soul are like those of a member out of joint, neither comely nor easy. Let that man recover his spiritual frame again, and, with it, he recovers his rest and comfort. Christians, you meet with variety of troubles in this world; many a sweet comfort is cut off, many a hopeful project dashed by the hand of providence; and what think you is the meaning of those blasting, disappointing providences? Surely this is their design and errand, to disturb your false rest in the bosom of the creature; to pluck away those pillows you were laying your heads upon, that thereby you might be reduced unto God, and recover your lost communion with him; and say, with David, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul." Sometimes we are settling ourselves to rest in an estate, in a child, or the like; at this time it is usual with God to say, go, losses, smite and blast such a man's estate; go, death, and take away the desire of his

eyes with a stroke, that my child may find rest no where but in me. God is the ark; the soul, like the dove Noah sent forth, let it fly where it will, it shall find no rest till it come back to God.

4 *Excellency.* It is the *desire* of all gracious souls throughout the world. Wherever there is a gracious soul, the desires of that soul are working after communion with God. As Christ was called, “The desire of all nations,” so communion with him is “the desire of all saints;” and this speaks the excellency of it—“One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I might dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to see the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple;” that is, to enjoy communion with him in the public duties of his worship. “One thing have I desired,” that is, one thing above all other things; such a one, as, (if God shall give me,) I can comfortably bear the want of all other things. Let him deny me what he will, if so be he will not deny me this one thing; this one thing shall richly recompense the want of all other things. Hence the desires of the saints are so intense and fervent after this one thing, in such expressions as the following—“My soul panteth after thee, O God;” and “My soul fainteth for thy salvation.” No duties can satisfy without it, the soul cannot bear the delays, much less the denials of it. They reckon their lives worth nothing without it. Ministers may come, ordinances and sabbaths may come; but there is no satisfaction

to the desires of a gracious heart, till God comes too ; “ O when wilt thou come unto me ? ”

*5 Excellency.* As it is the desire, so it is the *delight* of all the children of God, both in heaven and earth. As communion with the saints is the delight of Christ—“ Let me hear thy voice : ” and again—“ The companions hearken to thy voice ; cause me to hear it : ” so communion with Christ is the delight of his people. “ I sat under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet unto my taste. ” It is the pleasure of Christ to see the yearning countenances, the blushing cheeks, the dropping eyes of his people upon their knees ; and it is the delight of the saints to see a smile upon his face, to hear a voice of pardon and peace from his lips. I must tell you, Christians, you must look for no such delights as these, in any earthly enjoyment, none better than these, till you come home to glory ; communion with God then appears most excellent, in as much as it is found to be the desire and delight of all gracious souls.

*6 Excellency.* It is the *envy of Satan*, that which cuts and grates that wicked spirit. O how it grates, and galls that proud and envious spirit, to see men and women enjoying the felicity and pleasure of that communion with God, from which he himself is fallen and cut off for ever ! to see the saints imbosomed in delightful communion with Christ, whilst himself feels the pangs of horror, and despair ! this is what he cannot endure to behold. And



therefore you should find in your experience, that times of communion with God are usually busy times of temptation from the devil. “And he showed me Joshua the high-priest standing before the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him.” It is well for thee, Christian, that thou hast an Advocate standing at God’s right hand to resist, and frustrate his attempts upon thee; otherwise Satan would this way destroy your communion with God, and make that which is now your delight, to be your terror. Many ways doth the devil oppose the saint’s communion with God; sometimes he labours to divert them from it: this business shall fall in, or that occasion fall out, on purpose to divert thy soul’s approach to God; but if he cannot prevail there, then he labours to distract your thoughts, and break them into a thousand vanities; or if he succeed not there, then he attacks you in your return from duty, with spiritual pride, security, &c. these fierce oppositions of hell discover the worth, and excellency of communion with God.

7 *Excellency.* It is the *end* of all ordinances, and duties of religion. God hath instituted every ordinance and duty, whether public or private, to beget and maintain communion between himself and our souls. What are ordinances, duties, and graces, but perspective glasses to give us a sight of God, and help us to communion with him? God never intended his ordinances to be our rest, but *mediums*, and instruments of communion with himself, who

is our true rest. When we go into a boat, it is not with an intention to dwell, and rest there, but to ferry us over the water, where our business lies. If a man miss of communion with God in the best ordinances, or duty, it yields him little comfort. He comes back from it, like a man that hath travelled a great many miles to meet a dear friend, upon special and important business; but met with disappointment, and returns sad and dissatisfied. God appoints ordinances to be meeting-places with himself in this world—"Thou shalt put the mercy-seat above upon the ark, and in the ark thou shalt put the testimony that I shall give thee; and there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee, from above the mercy-seat, from between the two cherubims." It was not the sight of the golden cherubims, or of the ark overlaid with pure gold, that could have satisfied Moses, had not the special presence of God been there, and he had had communion with him. "O God, (saith David) my soul thirsteth for thee, that I might see thy beauty, and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary." Magnificent structures, artificial ornaments of the places of worship, are of little account with a gracious soul; it is the presence of God, and communion with him, which is the beauty and glory the saints desire to behold.

8 *Excellency.* It is the *evidence* of our union with Christ and interest in him. All union with Christ must evidence itself by a life of communion

with him, or our pretensions to it are vain and groundless. There be many of you (I wish there were more) enquiring after evidences and signs of your union with Christ; why here is an evidence that can never fail you: do you live in communion with him? May your life be called a walking with God, as Enoch's was? Then you may be sure you have union with him, and this is so sure a sign, as death itself (which uses to discover the vanity of false signs) will never be able to destroy. "Remember now, O Lord, (saith Hezekiah) that I have walked before thee in truth, and in a perfect heart." O professors! it will be a dreadful thing (whatever ungrounded hopes and false comforts you now have) to find them shrinking away from you, as certainly as they will do at death; and all upon this account: I have been a man of knowledge, I have been frequent in the external duties of religion, but my heart was not in them; I had no communion with the Lord in them, and now God is a terror to my soul. I am going to his awful bar, and have not one sound evidence to carry along with me. This is a remarkable place—"If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit;" that is, let us evidence the life of grace in us by exercising that grace in a life of communion with God. When all is said, this is the surest evidence of our union with Christ; and no gifts or performances whatsoever can amount to an evidence of our union with Christ without it.

9 *Excellency*. It is *ease* in all pains, sweet and

sensible ease to a troubled soul. Look, as the bleeding of a vein cools, eases, and refreshes a feverish body; so the opening of the soul by acts of communion with God, gives sensible ease to a burdened soul: griefs are eased by groans heavenward. Many souls are deeply laden with their own fears, cares, and distresses; no refreshment for such a soul, no such *anodyne* in the whole world as communion with God is. How did troubles boil in David's soul? night and day God's hand was heavy on him; his soul, as Elihu speaks, was like bottles full of new wine; he must speak to God that he may be refreshed: and so he did, and was refreshed by it. "I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." It would grieve one to see how many poor distressed souls carry their troubles up and down the world, making their complaints to one another; but no ease. Away to thy God, poor Christian, get thee into thy closet, pour out thy soul before him; and that ease which thou seekest in vain elsewhere, will there be found, or no where.

10 *Excellency*. It is *food* to the soul, and the most delicious, pleasant, proper, and satisfying food that ever it tasted; it is hidden manna. "By these things, O Lord, do men live, and in them is the life of their soul." A regenerate soul cannot live without it; their bodies can live as well without bread or breath as their souls without communion with God: it is more than their necessary food. Here

they find what they truly call marrow and fatness. O the satisfaction and support they draw out of spiritual things by thoughts and meditations upon them!—"To be spiritually minded is life and peace." The delicacies upon princes' tables are husks and chaff to this. Crows and vultures can live upon the carrion of this world, but a renewed soul cannot subsist long without God. Let such a soul be diverted for a time from its usual refreshments this way, and he shall find something within paining him like the sucking and drawing of an empty stomach. It is angel's food, it is that your souls must live upon throughout eternity, and most happily too.

11 *Excellency*. It is the *guard* of the soul against the assaults of temptation. It is like a shield advanced against the fiery darts of that wicked one. Your safety and security lie in drawing nigh to God—"They that are far from thee shall perish: but it is good for me to draw near to God." It is good indeed; not only the good of comfort, but the good of safety is in it—"The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by him." You know the gracious presence of God is your shield and safety; and if you will have the Lord thus present with you in all your fears, straits, and dangers, see that you keep near to him in the duties of communion: "For the Lord is with you whilst you are with him.

12 *Excellency*. It is the *honour* of the soul, and the greatest honour that ever God conferred on any

creature. It is the glory of the holy angels in heaven, to be always beholding the face of God. O that God should admit poor dust and ashes unto such a nearness to himself! to walk with a king, and have frequent converse with him, put a great deal of honour upon a subject; but the saints walk with God; so did Enoch, so do all the saints. "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Christ Jesus." They have liberty and access with confidence; the Lord, as it were, delivers them the golden key of prayers by which they may come into his presence on all occasions with the freedom of children to a father.

13 *Excellency*. It is the *instrument* of mortification, and the most excellent and successful instrument for that purpose in all the world—"This I say then, walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the works of the flesh." Walking in the Spirit is the same thing with walking in communion with God. Now, saith that apostle, if you thus walk in the Spirit, in the actings of faith, love, and obedience, throughout the course of holy duties, the effect of this will be, that ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh. He doth not say, You shall not feel the motions of sin in you, or temptations to sin assaulting you; but he saith, You shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh, sin shall not have dominion over you; this will let out the life-blood of sin. A temptation overcome this way is more effectually subdued than by all the vows, resolutions, and ex-

ternal means in the world: as a candle that is blown out with a puff of breath may be rekindled by another puff, but if it be quenched in water it is not so easily lighted again; so it is here: you never find that power or success in temptations when your hearts are up with God in their exercises of faith and love, as you do when your hearts hang loose from him, and dead towards him. The schoolmen assign this as one reason why the saints in heaven are impeccable, no sin can fasten upon them, because, say they, they there enjoy the beatifical vision of God. This is sure, the more communion any man hath with God on earth, the freer he lives from the power of his corruptions.

14 *Excellency*. It is the *kernel* of all duties and ordinances: words, gestures, &c. are but the integuments, husks, and shells of duties. Communion with God is the sweet kernel, the pleasant and nourishing food which lies within them: you see the fruits of the earth are covered and defended by husks, shells, and such like integuments; within which lie the pleasant kernels and grains, and these are the food. The hypocrite who goes no further than the externals of religion, is therefore said to feed on ashes, to spend his money for that which is not bread, and his labour for that which satisfieth not. He feeds but upon husks, in which there is but little pleasure or nourishment. What a poor house doth a hypocrite keep? Words, gestures, ceremonies of religion, will never fill the soul; but

communion with God is substantial nourishment. "My soul (saith David) shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, whilst I think and meditate on thee." It would grieve one's heart to think what airy things many souls satisfy themselves with; feeding like Ephraim upon the wind, well contented if they can but shuffle over a few heartless, empty duties; whilst the saints, feeding thus upon hidden manna, are feasted, as it were, with angel's food.

15 *Excellency*. It is the *light* of the soul in darkness; and the pleasantest light that ever shone upon the soul of man. There is many a soul which walketh in darkness; some in the darkness of ignorance and unbelief, the most dismal of all darkness, except that in hell. There are others who are children of light in a state of reconciliation, yet walk in the darkness of outward afflictions, and inward desertions and temptations; but as soon as ever the light of God's countenance shines upon the soul in the duties of communion with him, that darkness is dissipated and scattered; it is all light within him and round about him — "They looked unto him and were enlightened;" they looked, there is faith acted in duty; and were enlightened, there is the sweet effect of faith. The horrors and troubles of gracious souls shrink away upon the rising of this cheerful light. As wild beasts come out of their dens in the darkness of the night, and shrink back again into them when the sun ariseth; so do the



fears and inward troubles of the people of God when this light shines upon their souls. Nay more, this is a light which scatters the very darkness of death itself. It was the saying of a worthy divine of Germany upon his death-bed, when his eye-sight was gone, being asked how it was within? "Why," said he, "though all be dark about me," yet, pointing as well as he could to his breast, "*hinc sat lucis*, here is light enough."

16 *Excellency*. It is *liberty* to the straitened soul, and the most comfortable and excellent liberty in the whole world. He only walks at liberty that walks with God—"I will walk at liberty, for I seek thy precepts." Wicked men cry out of bands and cords in religion, they look upon the duties of godliness as the greatest bondage and thralldom in the whole world—"Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us;" as if he should say, away with this strictness and preciseness, it extinguishes the joy and pleasure of our lives; give us our cups instead of Bibles, our profane songs instead of spiritual psalms, our sports and pastimes instead of prayers and sermons. Alas, poor creatures, how do they dance in their shackles and chains! when, in reality, the sweetest liberty is enjoyed in those duties at which they thus snuff. The law of Christ is the law of liberty; the soul of man never enjoys more liberty than when it is bound with the strictest bands of duty to God. Here is liberty from enthralling lusts, and from enslaving fears: "The law of the Spirit of life in

Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.” And here is freedom indeed: “If the Son make you free, then are ye free indeed.” And here is freedom from fears, Luke i. 74, 75. Those that will not endure any restraint from their lusts, will have their freedom to sin; a freedom they shall have, such as it is: “When ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness.” Let none therefore be prejudiced at the ways of duty and strict godliness—“The law of Christ is the perfect law of liberty;” not liberty to sin, but liberty from sin.

17 *Excellency.* It is a *mercy* purchased by the blood of Christ for believers, and one of the principal mercies settled upon them by the new covenant-grant. A peculiar mercy, which none but the redeemed of the Lord partake of; a mercy which cost the blood of Christ to purchase it. I do not deny but there are thousands of other mercies bestowed upon the unregenerate; they have health, wealth, children, honours, pleasures, and all the delights of this life; but for communion with God, and the pleasures that result therefrom, they are incapable of these. No supping with Christ, upon such excellent privileges and mercies as these, till the heart be opened to him by faith; you cannot come nigh to God, until you be first made nigh by reconciliation. What would your lives, Christians, be worth to you, if this mercy were cut off from you? There would be little sweetness or savour in all your outward mercies, were it not for this mercy that sweetens

them all. And there is this difference, among many others, between this mercy and all outward mercies: you may be cut off from the enjoyment of those, you cannot from this; no prison can keep out the Comforter. O bless God for this invaluable mercy.

18 *Excellency*. It is *natural* to the new creature; the inclination and instinct of the new creature leadeth to communion with God. It is as natural to the new creature to desire it, and work after it, as it is to the new-born babe to make to the breast—"As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." There is a law upon the regenerate part, which inwardly and powerfully obliges it to acts of duty, and converse with God in them. Communion with God is a thing that ariseth out of the principles of grace. You know all creatures in this lower world act according to the laws of nature; the sun will rise, and the sea will flow at their appointed times; and the gracious soul will make towards its God in the times and seasons of communion with him. They are not forced on to those duties by the frights of conscience, and the fears of hell, so much as by the natural inclination of the new creature. Two things demonstrate communion with God to be congenial with the regenerate part, called the hidden man of the heart, namely: (1.) The restlessness of a gracious soul without it, Cant. iii. 2. The church, in the first verse, had sought her be-

loved, but found him not. Doth she sit down satisfied in his absence? No; “I will rise now, and go about the city, in the streets, and in the broad ways; I will seek him whom my soul loveth.” (2.) The satisfaction and pleasure, the rest and delight which the soul finds and feels in the enjoyment of communion with God, plainly show it to be agreeable to the new nature—“My soul shall be satisfied when I think on thee.” And when it is thus, then duties become easy and pleasant to the soul: “His commandments are not grievous.” Yea, and such a soul will be constant and assiduous in those duties. That which is natural, is constant as well as pleasant. What is the reason hypocrites throw up the duties of religion in times of difficulty, but because they have not an inward principle agreeable to them? The motives to duty lie without them, not within them.

19 *Excellency*. It is the *occupation* and trade of all sanctified persons, and the richest trade that was ever carried on by men. This way they grow rich in spiritual treasures; the revenues of it are better than silver and gold. There be many of you have traded long for this world, and it comes to little; and had you gained your designs you had gained but trifles. This is the rich and profitable occupation—“Our conversation is in heaven.” Our commerce and trade lies that way, so that word signifies. There be few Christians that have carried on this soul-enriching trade any considerable time, but can

show some spiritual treasures which they have gotten by it—"This I had, because I kept thy precepts." As merchants can show the gold and silver, the lands and houses, the rich goods and furniture, which they have gotten by their successful adventures abroad; and tell their friends, so much I got by such a voyage, and so much by another: so Christians have invaluable treasures, though their humility conceals them, which they have gotten by this heavenly trade of communion with God. Their souls are weak, and by communion with God they have gotten strength: "I cried, and thou strengthenedst me with strength in my soul." They have gotten peace by it, a treasure inestimable: "Great peace have they that love thy law and nothing shall offend them." They have gotten purity by it: "They do no iniquity that walk in thy ways." O what rich returns are here! nay, they get sometimes full assurance by it. The riches of both the Indies will not purchase from a Christian the least of these mercies. These are the rich rewards of our pains in the duties of religion; "In keeping thy commandments there is great reward."

20 *Excellency*. It is *oil* to the wheels of obedience, which makes the soul go on cheerfully in the ways of the Lord—"Then will I run the ways of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart." *Non tardat uncta rota*,—Oiled wheels run nimbly. How prompt and ready for any duty of obedience, is a soul under the influence of commu-

nion with God! Then, as Isaiah, having gotten a sight of God, “Here am I, Lord, send me.” Now the soul can turn its hand to the duties of,

First, Active ; and

Secondly, Passive obedience.

First, Hereby the soul is prepared and fitted for the duties of *active obedience*, to which it applies itself with pleasure and delight—“Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy ;” or, as it is in the Hebrew, “the gladness of my joy.” It goes to prayer as a hungry man to a feast, or as a covetous man to his treasures—“I have rejoiced in the way of thy commandments as much as in all riches.”

Secondly, It prepares the soul for *passive obedience*: makes a man to rejoice in his sufferings. It will make a Christian stand ready to receive any burden or load that God shall lay upon his shoulders, and even be thankful to be so employed—“This joy of the Lord is their strength.” A Christian, under the cheerful influences of near communion with God, can, with more cheerfulness, lay down his neck for Christ, than other men can lay out a shilling for him. In all these twenty particulars, you have an account of the excellency of this privilege ; but O how short an account have I given of it ! What remains, is the application of this point, in a double use :—

I. Of information.

II. Of exhortation.

I. For *information* in the following inferences:—

*Inference 1.* How sure and certain a thing it is, that there is a God, and a state of glory prepared in heaven for sanctified souls.

These things are undeniable. God hath set them before our spiritual eyes and senses: beside the revelation of it in the gospel, which singly makes it infallible; the Lord, for our abundant satisfaction, hath brought these things down to the touch and test of our spiritual senses and experiences. You that have had so many sights of God by faith, so many sweet tastes of heaven in the duties of religion, O what a confirmation and seal have you of the reality of invisible things! You may say of heaven, and the joys above, as the Apostle did of him that purchased it—“That which our eyes have seen, and our ears have heard, and our hands have handled,” &c. For God hath set these things in some degree before your very eyes, and put the first-fruits of them into your own hands. The sweet relish of the joy of the Lord is upon the very palate of your souls. To this spiritual sense of the believing Hebrews, the Apostle appealed, when he said, “Ye took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better, and an enduring substance.” This knowing in ourselves is more certain and sweet than all the traditional reports we can get from the reports of others—“Whom having not seen ye love; whom, though now you see him not, yet believing, ye re-

joy with joy unspeakable, and full of glory." There is more of heaven felt and tasted in this world than men are aware of; it is one thing to hear of such countries as Spain, Italy, Smyrna, by the discourses and reports we heard of them in our childhood, and another thing, to understand those countries by the rich commodities imported from them, in the way of our trade and commerce. O did we but know what other Christians have felt and tasted, we should not have such staggering thoughts about invisible things! but the secret comforts of religion are, and ought to be for the most part inclosed things. Religion lays not all open; the Christian life is a hidden life.

*Infer. 2.* If such a height of communion with God be attainable on earth, then most Christians live below the duties and comforts of Christianity.

Alas, the best of us are but at the foot of this pleasant mount Pisgah. As we are but in the infancy of our graces, so we are but in the infancy of our comforts. What a poor house is kept by many of God's own children; living between hopes and fears, seldom tasting the riches and pleasures, the joys and comforts of assurance! and will you know the reasons of it? There are five things which usually keep them poor and low as to spiritual joys and comforts. (1.) The incumbrances of the world, which divert them from, or distract them in their duties of communion with God, and so keep them low in their spiritual comforts: they



have so much to do on earth, that they have little time for heavenly employments. O what a noise and din do the trifles of this world make in the heads and hearts of many Christians! How dear do we pay for such trifles as these? (2.) A spirit of formality creeping into the duties of religion, impoverishes the vital spirit thereof, like the wanton embraces of the ivy, which binds and starves the tree it clasps about. Religion cannot thrive under formality; and it is difficult to keep out formality in a settled course of duty, and much more when duties are intermitted. (3.) The business of temptations pestering the minds of many Christians, especially such as are of melancholy constitutions. How importunate and restless are these temptations with some Christians? They can make little comfort or advantage out of duty, by reason of them. (4.) Heart-apostacy, inward decays of our first love, is another reason why our duties prosper so little—"Thou hast left thy first love." You were not wont to serve God with such coldness. (5.) In a word, spiritual pride impoverishes our comforts; the joys of the Spirit, like brisk wines, are too strong for our weak heads. For these causes, many Christians are kept low in spiritual comforts.

*Infer.* 3. How sweet and desirable is the society of the saints! it must needs be desirable to walk with them, who walk with God.

No such companions as the saints. What benefit,

or pleasure can we find in converses with sensual worldlings? All we can carry out of such company is guilt or grief. "All my delight (saith David) is in the saints, and in the excellent of the earth, which excel in virtue;" and their society would certainly be much more sweet, and desirable, than it is, did they live more in communion with God than they do. There was a time when the communion of the saints was exceeding lovely: the Lord restore it to its primitive glory and sweetness.

*Infer.* 4. What an unspeakable mercy is conversion, which lets the soul into such a state of spiritual pleasure?

Here is the beginning of your acquaintance with God, the first tale of spiritual pleasures, of which there shall never be an end. All the time men have spent in the world in an unconverted state, hath been a time of estrangement and alienation from God; when the Lord brings a man to Christ, in the way of conversion, he then begins his first acquaintance with God. "Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace, thereby good shall come unto thee." This is your first acquaintance with the Lord, which will be a growing thing; every visit you give him in prayer, increaseth your acquaintance, and begets more intimacy, and humble, holy familiarity between him and you. And, O what a paradise of pleasure doth this let the soul into! the life of religion abounds with pleasures: "All his ways are ways of pleasantness, and his

paths are peace." Now you know where to go, and unload any trouble that presseth your hearts, whatever prejudices and scandals Satan and his instruments, cast upon religion; this I will affirm of it, that that man must necessarily be a stranger to true pleasure, and empty of real comfort, who is a stranger to Christ, and the duties of communion with him. It is true, here is no allowance for sinful pleasures, nor any want of spiritual pleasures. Bless God, therefore, for converting grace, you that have it, and lift up a cry to heaven for it, you that want it.

*Infer.* 5. Lastly, If there be so much delight, and pleasure in our imperfect, and often interrupted communion with God here; O then, what is heaven! what are the immediate visions of his face in the perfect state?

“Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.” You have heard glorious, and ravishing reports in the gospel, of that blessed future state, things which the angels desire to look into. You have felt, and tasted joys unspeakable, and full of glory, in the actings of your faith and love upon Christ; yet all that you have heard, and all that you have felt and tasted in the way to glory, falls so short of the perfection and blessedness of that state, that heaven will, and must be a great surprise to them that have now the greatest acquaintance with it. Though the present comforts of the saints are some-

times as much as they can bear, for they seem to reel and stagger under the weight of them—"Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples, I am sick of love." Yet, I say, these high tides of pleasant joy, are but shallows to the joys of his immediate presence. And as they run not so deep, so they are not constant and continued as they shall be above—"Ever with the Lord." And thus much for information.

II. Use, for *exhortation*.

The last improvement of this point will be by way of exhortation.

First, To believers.

Secondly, To unbelievers.

First, Is this the privileged state, into which all believers are admitted by conversion? Then strive to come up to the highest attainment of communion with God in this world, and be not contented with just so much grace as will secure you from hell; but labour after such a height of grace and communion with God, in the exercise thereof, as may bring you into the suburbs of heaven on earth.

Forget the things that are behind you, as to satisfaction in them, and press toward the mark, for the prize of your high calling. It is greatly to your loss, that you live at such a distance from God, and are so seldom with him; think not the ablest ministers, or choicest books will ever be able to satisfy your doubts and comfort your hearts, whilst you let down your communion with God to so low

a degree. O that you might be persuaded now to hearken obediently to three or four necessary words of counsel.

1 *Counsel.* Make communion with God the very scope and aim of your souls in all your approaches to him in the ordinances and duties of religion. Set it upon the point of your compass, let it be the very thing your souls design; let the desires and hopes of communion with God be the thing that draws you to every sermon and prayer. "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may see the beauty of the Lord, and enquire after him in his temple." That was the mark David aimed at; and men's success in duties is usually according to the spiritual aims and intentions of their hearts in them: both sincerity and comforts lie much in men's ends.

2 *Counsel.* In all your approaches to God, beg and plead hard with him for the manifestations of his love, and further communications of his grace. "Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice; have mercy also upon me, and answer me. When thou saidst, seek ye my face, my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek. Hide not thy face far from me, put not thy servant away in anger." How full and thick of pleas and arguments for communion with God was this prayer of David? Lord, I am come, in obedience to thy command; thou saidst, "Seek ye my face," thou biddest me come to thee, and wilt thou put away thy servant in

anger? Thou hast been my help, I have had sweet experience of thy goodness, thou dost not use to put me off, and turn me away empty.

*3 Counsel.* Desire not comfort for comfort's sake; but comforts and refreshments for service and obedience's sake; that thereby you may be strengthened to go on in the ways of your duty with more cheerfulness—"Then will I run the ways of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart." As if he should say, O Lord, the comforts thou shalt give me, shall be returned again in cheerful services to thee. I desire them as oil to the wheels of obedience, not food for my pride.

*4 Counsel.* As ever you expect to be owners of much comfort in the ways of your communion with God, see that you are strict and circumspect in the course of your conversation. It is the looseness and carelessness of our hearts and lives which impoverishes our spiritual comforts. A little pride, a little carelessness, dashes and frustrates a great deal of comfort, which was very near us, almost in our hands; to allude to that, Hos. vii. 1, "When I would have healed Israel, then the iniquity of Ephraim was discovered." So here, just when the desire of thy heart was come to the door, some sin stept in the way of it. "Your iniquities (saith God) have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you." The Comforter, the Holy Spirit, is sensible and tender; he hath quick resentments of your unkindnesses and offences. As

ever, therefore, you expect comfort from him, beware of him, and grieve him not.

Secondly, In the last place, this point speaks necessary counsel and advice to unbelievers; to all that live estranged from the life of God, and have done so from the womb. To you the voice of the Redeemer sounds a summons once more—“Behold, I stand at the door and knock.” O that at last you might be prevailed on to comply with the merciful terms propounded by him. Will you shut out a Saviour bringing salvation, pardon, and peace with him! Christ is thy rightful owner, and demands possession of thy soul: if thou wilt now hear his voice, thy former refusals shall never be objected. If thou still reject his gracious offers, mercy may never more be tendered to thee; there is a call of Christ which will be the last call, and after that no more. Take heed what you do; if you still demur and delay, your damnation is just, inevitable, and inexcusable. Hear me, therefore, you unregenerated souls, in what rank or condition soever providence hath placed you in this world, whether you be rich or poor, young or old, masters or servants, whether there be any stirrings of conviction in your consciences or not. For however your conditions in this world differ from each other at present, there is one common misery hanging over you all, if you continue in that state of unbelief you are now fixed in.

And 1. Hearken to the voice and call of Christ, you that are exalted by providence above your poorer neighbours; you that have your heads, hands, and hearts full of the world; men of trade and business, I have a few solemn questions to ask you this day.

(1.) You have made many gainful bargains in your time, but what will all profit you if the agreement be not made between Christ and your souls? Christ is a treasure which only can enrich you, Matt. xiii. 44. Thou art a poor and miserable wretch, whatever thou hast gained of this world, if thou hast not gained Christ, thou hast heaped up guilt with thy riches, which will more torment thy conscience hereafter, than thy estate can yield thee comfort here.

(2.) You have made many insurances to secure your floating estates, which you call policies; but what insurance have you made for your souls? Are not they exposed to eternal hazards? O impolitic man! to be so provident to secure trifles, and so negligent in securing the richest treasure.

(3.) You have adjusted many accounts with men, but who shall make up your accounts with God, if you be Christless? "What shall it profit a man to gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" Say not, you have much business under your hands, and cannot allow time; you will have space enough hereafter to reflect upon your folly.

2. You that are poor, and mean in the world, what say you, will you have two hells, one here, and another hereafter? No comfort in this world,



nor hope for the next? Your expectations here laid in the dust, and your hopes for heaven built upon the sand? O if you were once in Christ, how happy were you, though you knew not where to fetch your next bread! "Poor in the world, but rich in faith; and heirs of the kingdom which God hath promised." O blessed state! If you had Christ, you had then a right to all things; you had then a father to take care for you. But to be poor and Christless, no comfort from this world, nor hopes from the next; this is to be truly miserable indeed. Your very straits and wants, should prompt you to the great duty I am now pressing on you; and methinks it should be matter of encouragement that the greatest number of Christ's friends and followers, come out of that rank and order of men to which you belong.

3. You that are seamen, floating so often upon the great deeps, you are reckoned a third sort of persons between the living and the dead; you belong not to the dead, because you breathe, and scarcely to the living, because you are continually so near death. What think you, friends, have you no need of a Saviour? Do you live so secure from the reach and danger of death? Have your lives been so pure, righteous, and innocent, who have been in the midst of temptations in the world abroad? Ponder that scripture, 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10, "Be not deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves

with mankind," &c. ponder it, I say, and think whether you have not as great and pressing a necessity of Jesus Christ, as any poor souls under heaven? You have had many temporal salvations from God, great and eminent deliverances, and will these satisfy you? Is it enough that your bodies are delivered from the danger of the sea, though your souls sink, and perish in the ocean of God's wrath for ever? If you will yet accept Christ upon his terms, all that you have done shall be forgiven. The Lord now calls to you in a still voice; if you hear his voice, well; if not, you may shortly hear his voice in the tempestuous storms without you, and a roaring conscience within you. Poor man, think what an interest in Christ will be worth, wert thou now (as shortly thou mayest be) floating upon a piece of wreck, or shivering upon a cold and desolate rock, crying, Mercy, Lord, mercy! Well, mercy is now offered thee, but in vain wilt thou expect to find it, if thou continue thus to despise and reject it.

4. You that are aged and full of days, hearken to the voice of Christ, God hath called upon you a long time: when you were young you said, it is time enough yet, we will mind these things when we are old, and come nearer to the borders of eternity. Well, now you are old, and just upon the borders of it; will you indeed mind it now? You have left the great concernments of your souls to this time, this short, very short time: and do the

temptations of your youth take hold upon your age? What! delay and put off Christ still as you were wont to do? Poor creatures, you are almost gone out of time, you have but a short time to deliberate; what you do must be done quickly, or it can never be done. Your night is even come upon you when no man can work.

5. You that are young, in the bud or flower of your time, Christ is a suitor for your first love; he desires the kindness of your youth; your spirits are vigorous, your hearts tender, your affections flowing and impressive, you are not yet entered into the incumbrances and distracting cares of the world. Hereafter a crowd and thick succession of earthly employments and engagements will come on; sin will harden you by custom and continuance. Now is your time; you are in the convertible age; few that pass the season of youth (comparatively speaking) are brought over to Christ afterwards. It is a rarity, the wonder of an age, to hear of the conversion of aged sinners. Besides, you are the hopes of the next generation: should you be Christ-neglecting and despising souls; how bad soever the present age is, the next will be worse. Say not we have time enough before us, we will not quench the sprightly vigour of our youth in melancholy thoughts: remember there are skulls of all sizes in Golgotha; graves of all lengths in the church-yard: you may anticipate those that stand nearer the grave than you seem to do. O you cannot be happy too soon.

As young as you are, did you but taste the comforts that be in Christ, nothing would grieve you more than that you knew him no sooner. Behold he standeth at thy door in the morning of thy age, knocking this day for admission into thy heart.

6. You that have had some slight, ineffectual and vanishing convictions upon you formerly; the Lord Jesus once more renews his call: Will you now at last hear his voice? It is an infinite mercy to have a second call. I doubt not but there are many among you, whilst you have sat under the word, have had such thoughts as these in your hearts: Sure my condition is not right, nor safe; there must another manner of work pass upon my soul, or I am lost for ever. External duties of religion I do perform, but I am a stranger to regeneration. Such inward convictions as these were the knocks and calls of Christ, but they passed away and were forgotten. your convictions are dead, and your hearts the more hardened; for it is in putting a soul under conviction as it is in putting iron into the fire, and quenching it again, which hardens it the more. You have been near the kingdom of God, but the more miserable for that, if you be shut out at last. The quickening of your convictions is the right way to the saving of your souls. The Lord make you this day to hear his voice.

7. Such as have come hither upon vain or vile accounts, for mere novelty or worse ends; to catch

advantages, or reproach the truths of God ; scoffing at the most solemn and awful voice of Christ. The word that you have slighted and reproached, the same shall judge you in that great day, except the Lord will give you repentance unto life, and make the heart tremble under it that hath scoffed at it. “ Be not mockers, lest your bands be made strong.”

8. To conclude ; let all whose hearts the Lord hath opened this day, for the enjoyments of the gospel, the blessed instrument of their salvation, bless the Lord that hath made it a key by regeneration to open the door of salvation to your souls. And as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him.

END OF VOL. II.

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