

CALLED UNTO DIVINE FELLOWSHIP

Preached at Providence Chapel, Oakham, Lord's Day
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"God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord." 1 Cor.1:9

Everything in this world is changing and changeable. We ourselves are perpetually fluctuating and wavering. The things of time and sense are as fluctuating and wavering as we. Our friends are fluctuating and wavering too. All things are in a continual state of transition and change. Seeing, then, that all earthly things are passing away, and the things of time and sense vanishing like a cloud of the night, the Scripture leads us to rest upon something that is immutable and unchangeable, a foundation to stand upon which shall not waver and fluctuate with earthly, perishing things. For instance, Jesus Christ is held forth as "the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever" (Heb.13:8), and therefore a foundation on which to stand for eternity. Again, we read that "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (Jas.1:17). In these passages the unchangeableness and immutability of God are held forth as a foundation for our wavering, halting feet to stand upon.

In the same way the text holds forth the faithfulness and unchangeableness of Jehovah. "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord." The faithfulness of God to his Word and to his work is here pointed out as a foundation on which to rest. Now, unless a man rest upon this, he is continually wavering. Until he is brought to anchor in immutability, he is perpetually

tossed up and down with every wind and wave of doctrine; but when he is brought to rest on things which cannot change, then he has an anchor to his soul "both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil" (Heb.6:19).

There are two things worthy of notice in the text:

I. One is *the declaration of God's faithfulness*: "God is faithful;" and, II. *What God does in order to manifest his faithfulness*: "By whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord." In considering these words I shall, with God's blessing, change their order, and look first at what is contained in the words, "By whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord." And then, secondly, at God's faithfulness and unchangeability as made manifest in this special calling.

I. All God's purposes run underground until they are manifested and brought forth; for his way is in the sea, and his path in the great waters, and his footsteps are not known (Psa.77:19). "It is the glory of God," we read, "to conceal a thing " (Prov.25:2). Thus God has hidden his own eternal counsels in his own bosom, and they are only brought forth in time in such a way and such a season as he has appointed. We have a wonderful instance of this in the crucifixion of the Lord of life and glory. It was the eternal purpose of the Three-One Jehovah that the Son of God should die, and by dying offer up a ransom price to save the elect from the ruins of the fall. This lay hid in the bosom of God. When the Lord Jesus came into the world, he came for that special purpose; but it was hidden from the eyes of man, hidden from the eyes of his disciples, and hidden from the eyes of the Jews. Now, so it is with respect to the work of grace upon the soul. What is God's purpose in beginning and

carrying on a work of grace in the soul? It is set forth in the text, "By whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord." That is the object; that is the purpose of the work of grace upon the soul, to call God's people unto a fellowship with the Son of God; to bring them into living union and communion with the Lord of life and glory. Now this work must go on; for "God is faithful." It must go on until it result in the accomplishment of what God has purposed.

Let me explain myself a little more fully. Say (for example), you are a vessel of mercy, that God has chosen you in Christ from before the foundation of the world, and has loved you with an everlasting love in the Person of his dear Son. Jesus came and laid down his life for you. He died on the cross that you might live for ever. He bore your sins in his own body on the tree. He reconciled you to God, and cast all your transgressions into the depths of the sea. Now, the object in calling you by his grace, is to bring you into the fellowship of his dear Son.

But when a work of grace is first begun upon the heart, the subject of it is not aware what God's purposes are. The Lord does not reveal them; nay, rather, he hides them from his eyes. His purpose is to bring the soul into the personal knowledge, spiritual enjoyment of, and divine communion with his own dear Son. But where does he find us? He finds us in what I sometimes call a *sensual* communion; that is, a fellowship with sensible objects. The fellowship and communion that we are to enjoy, if called by grace, is a spiritual communion with invisible, insensible objects. But the Lord finds us in a state of nature, having communion with sensible objects, buried in a sensual, as distinct from a spiritual communion. We are imbued with a spirit of the world, the things of time and sense are our element, the

world is our home, and we are so swallowed up in it that we have no other object, delight, or purpose. This I call a sensual communion; that is, there is a fellowship, an intimacy, and intercourse in our carnal mind with sin, the world, and all that is evil. But this intimacy and intercourse must be broken up, that spiritual communion with the Lord of life and glory may be set up in its place. Our communion with the world, with everything short of Christ, is all to be broken in pieces, that we may be led up into union and communion with Jesus. For instance, we have in our carnal state communion with sin, we have an intimacy with it, it is our bosom companion. It is like the lamb in the parable of Nathan; it lies in our bosom, drinks of our cup, and is to us as a daughter. We fondle it as a parent does a child, we cleave to it in love. Thus there is a sensual intercourse with sin and all its baseness and filth. This, then, is to be broken.

But what is to break it? The entrance of God's holy commandment so as to manifest his purity, and holiness, and righteous anger against sin; and this breaks to pieces that sensual communion which we have with iniquity. This is the first thing God uses, his holy commandment, his pure precept, the spirituality of his law opened up in the soul. Sin is then discovered to be sin, its evil nature is then manifested, the wrath of God is revealed against it, and the wages of sin, which is eternal death, are brought to light. The soul is thus cut off and cut away from sin by the sharp entrance of that sword which the apostle speaks of, "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword" (Heb.4:12). The sharp Word of God entering into the conscience cuts asunder the former communion betwixt the soul and sin.

But there is also communion *with the world*. We love the world by nature, our heart is in it, our affections are

altogether worldly, all that our natural heart delights in is sublunary, earthly. This sensual communion, then, with the world must be broken to pieces; we must be divorced from it in order that we may have communion with holy and heavenly things. When God makes himself known as a consuming fire, and the breadth and spirituality of the precepts are opened up, the world is seen as the apostle saw it, lying in wickedness, or in the wicked one (1 John 5:19), and all but God's people are beheld as walking in the broad road that leads to eternal perdition. We thus become separated from it, and our feet are turned out of the broad into the narrow way. The Holy Spirit sets the face towards the heavenly Jerusalem; and thus our communion with the world is broken to pieces.

But there is also communion *with our own righteousness*. There is a delighting in what we think we have done or can do for the Lord. Our freewill, our natural strength, our creature piety, our fleshly religion, cleave closely to us; we have a sensual union with them all. Now this likewise must be broken to pieces, or else we cannot have communion with the Lord of life and glory. And this too begins to be destroyed by the entrance of the precept of God's Word, by the spirituality of God's law; our own righteousness is made known to us as filthy rags, and we abhor and loathe ourselves in dust and ashes as the vilest of the vile. And so also there is a sensual communion with deceit, hypocrisy, and delusion; for the heart is "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer.17:9), and out of this wicked heart there springs a wicked intimacy with all manner of lies, hypocrisy, deceit, and delusion. By nature we drink down lies like water, our hypocritical heart wallows in hypocrisy as the swine on a hot summer's day wallows in the mud; to deceive ourselves and others is the very element of our deceitful heart. This intercourse, then, with lies, hypocrisy, and

delusion, must all be cut asunder by the entrance of the light of God's Word into the soul.

When a pure and holy God shines forth into the conscience, our hypocrisy, lies, and delusion are made manifest, and our intercourse with them begins to be dissolved. If you read Isaiah 28, you will see how the Lord speaks there of breaking up this sensual communion: "Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves: Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste. Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place" (verses 15-17). This covenant with death and agreement with hell is a communion and intercourse with death and hell; and this is broken up by the hail sweeping away the refuges of lies, and the waters overflowing the hiding-place.

Only, therefore, as this covenant with death and agreement with hell, that is, this sensual communion, is broken to pieces, can there be spiritual communion with the Lord of life and glory. Now, in this God's people are distinguished from all others on the face of the earth, in that they are seeking communion with the Son of God, fellowship with Jesus in the knowledge and enjoyment of him in their hearts. This distinguishes a work of grace upon the heart from all fleshly counterfeits.

Now as the Lord breaks up this sensual communion, he goes on to fulfil his own eternal purpose; which is, to bring a soul

into communion with his dear Son. Observe the words of the text, "By whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ." It is God therefore who calls his people unto "the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ." Now he has lodged in his dear Son everything needful for our wants. "For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell" (Col.1:19). And again we read, "And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace" (John 1:16). We read also, "In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col.2:9). The Lord of life and glory is the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of his Person. All that God is shines forth in the face of Jesus Christ. In bringing, therefore, his people into fellowship with his dear Son, he brings them into fellowship with the Three-One God. God out of Christ is a consuming fire. None can see him and live. God is invisible. He is said to "dwell in thick darkness" (1 Kings 8:12), and also "in the light which no man can approach unto" (1 Tim.6:16). But if we have not fellowship with God we shall one day be of all men most miserable. And the way to have fellowship with God is to have fellowship with his Son; for he is the Mediator. He stands betwixt God and us; through him we have access to God, by him we are reconciled to God, and thus by him we have fellowship and communion with a Three-One Jehovah. Oh, what a mercy it is to have a Mediator to cover with blood and righteousness the guilty head of a fallen child of Adam! Not to have to deal immediately with God as a consuming fire, whose infinite holiness and eternal justice must consume us; but that there is a Mediator, one who has taken the flesh and blood of the children into union with his glorious Person, a Daysman through whom we may have access to God, one who has said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me" (John 14:6). The grand object of divine teaching in the soul is to bring us to Jesus. What says the Lord himself? "It is written in the prophets, And they

shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me" (John 6:45). That is the effect of divine teaching, a coming unto Jesus. As the text says, "By whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son."

Now, every obstacle that interferes with or prevents this fellowship, God will remove. That is the reason why we have so many trials, so many sharp thorns, so many bitter afflictions, such painful exercises, such distressing temptations. They are to encourage communion with Jesus by removing out of the way all that is in opposition to it. For instance, there is the world; when this creeps in, it shuts out fellowship with the Lord Jesus. It has therefore to be removed; and is done by means of painful trials. Again, there is carnality, lightness, frivolity, worldly-mindedness; to all of which we are sadly prone. Now when these evils get possession of us, they shut out communion with Jesus. Therefore we need scourging with sharp thorns and briers, as the men of Succoth were torn by the thorns and briers of the wilderness (Judges 8:7,16), that this carnality and lightness may be torn away out of the heart. So afflictions in body, in providence, in the family, temptations from Satan, the burden of an evil heart of unbelief, the corruption that we are more or less plagued with, all these things are made profitable, in order to bring us into fellowship with God's dear Son by emptying us of self. God's dear Son is only suitable for sinners; all that he is and has is for such; all his glorious fulness, all his precious attributes, all his dying love, all the riches of his atoning blood, the beauty and glory of his justifying righteousness, all are for sinners, for feeling, sensible, sin-plagued, Satan-harassed sinners. As, then, we sink into felt sinnership, it leads us up into communion with Jesus. Pride, worldly-mindedness, covetousness, self-righteousness, self-esteem, self-exaltation, carnality, and

lightness, all unfit a man for communion with Christ. Jesus is a brokenhearted Lord, the Spirit of God was given him without measure, his heart is full of tenderness, sympathy, and compassion, he is a holy Jesus; therefore there can be no communion on his part with sin. For "what concord hath Christ with Belial?" (2 Cor.6:15). What intercourse can there be, then, on the part of Christ with sin which he hates, with the world that crucified him, with Satan his implacable enemy, with that evil heart in man that is utterly opposed to his holy and pure nature? In order, therefore, to bring us into fellowship with Jesus, we need trials, exercises, afflictions, and temptations, to remove out of the way those things that hinder communion, and to bring us down to lie as low as possible in our own eyes. This fits us for Jesus. But it may be asked, "When are we fit for Jesus?" When we are all nakedness, all rags, all misery, all guilt, and all helplessness, and sink down at his feet unworthy of a single smile from his face, then we are fit for him. We are unfit for him when we are proud and covetous, when we have no sorrows, nor burdens, nor griefs, nor troubles, when sin does not lie on the conscience, when we can be cheerful and happy with the things of time and sense. All these things set us at a distance from Christ. But sorrows, griefs, burdens, exercises, doubts, cares, perplexities, and distresses, these are helps that God uses to bring us to Jesus. One is the ebbing wave that takes us away from the rock, and the other is the flowing wave that drives us on to it. One is the adverse wind that blows against the ship when she is making for the harbour, the other is the prosperous gale that urges her forward into the haven. So that the things that seem against us are really for us; and the things that seem for us are really against us.

But what is communion and "fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord?" It is a sweet and blessed intimacy betwixt

Jesus and the soul. How is this produced? It is produced by the Spirit through the Word; not by the Spirit without the Word, but by the Spirit of God making use of the Word as the living instrument to raise up faith in the soul, whereby through the Word are communicated power, unction, and sweetness to the conscience. If ever you have felt anything like fellowship, communion with God's dear Son, it has been in this way: the Spirit of God worked through the Scriptures upon your heart, secretly applying to your soul some precious truth concerning Jesus, giving you faith to receive it in simplicity and love, and then drawing your heart upward through the Word into the presence of him who sits and reigns behind the veil. This is communion with God's dear Son, what the Scripture calls the "communion of the Holy Ghost" (2 Cor.13:14); because the Holy Ghost alone can lead us up into this fellowship. Now this is what God calls his people to, this is what God makes all his people intensely long for.

The Lord's people are all dissatisfied with everything short of communion with God's dear Son. Give them the doctrines of truth without the Spirit's sealing these truths upon their hearts, they bring no sweet communion. They cannot, therefore, rest upon them. Give them their own righteousness, it produces no communion with the Lord. Let them have the world, it does not lead their soul into communion with him. Give them sin, it draws them away from the Lord. Let them fall into darkness, and be beset with fears, doubts, perplexities, and temptations, these bring them no communion with the Lord. What they want, then, is that Jesus would sweetly whisper into their souls: Thou art mine; fear not, I have redeemed thee. "Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me" (Isa.49:16). Thus to have our souls raised up into the very bosom of the Lord, so as to clasp him

and embrace him in the arms of affection and love, as a lover breathes his love-tale into the ears of his beloved one, that we may be able to say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee" (Psa.73:25), this alone satisfies a living soul. Now when a soul has enjoyed a measure of this, then it has enjoyed what God has called it to, the "fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord." This is the life of religion.

But if we have fellowship with the Son, it will bring into our hearts every fruit and grace of the Spirit. Jesus has left us an example that we should walk in his steps, and the Scripture sets forth his holy love, his humility of spirit, his meekness, his gentleness, his separation from the world, the image of God shining forth in him. Now when God calls us into the fellowship of his dear Son, it is that we may walk in his steps, it is that the image and likeness of Jesus may be impressed upon our souls. It is that we may be conformed to the image of the Firstborn, and that the mind and likeness of the blessed Lord may be stamped upon our hearts, lips, and lives. If we are not called to this, we are called to nothing.

II. But the text adds, and it is a great mercy that it is added, "God is faithful." For consider how many things there are to interrupt this fellowship. What an evil nature you carry in your bosom, which is averse to communion with this blessed Lord! How many enemies surround your soul! What an adversary you have by night and by day to grapple with! But "God is faithful." Do you see the connection? As though the Holy Spirit implied this: God has called you unto the fellowship of his Son. That is his object; and he is faithful. His purposes are immutable. He hath purposed, and shall he not accomplish his purpose? He is faithful, and has determined you shall enjoy that fellowship unto which he hath called you. Now this, by setting forth God's eternal will and pleasure,

shows that in us there is everything against that fellowship, and that God's faithfulness alone overcomes that evil tendency, perfects and completes his purposes. For instance, our carnal mind is altogether opposed to communion with the Son of God. What is the scriptural description of it? It is summed up in one expression: "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be " (Rom.8:7). If that be the case, can there be any fellowship or communion in our carnal mind with God? If it is enmity against him? If it is not subject to the law of God? If it is opposed to all his will, and Word, and ways? Can there be any union between our carnal mind and God's dear Son? Impossible! Now just in proportion as our natural mind works, will there be a turning away from communion with Jesus, a plunging into communion with the world and the world's sins, a cleaving to the things of time and sense, as riches, honour, pride, and worldly pleasures. Our carnal mind understands all these things; it is the very breath that it draws into its lungs, the very element in which it swims. Its whole being is intense, implacable enmity to God and his dear Son, and therefore can never be reconciled to him. But God is a pure and holy God, and must ever regard sin with the utmost hatred and abhorrence. Do we not feel it? What is the greatest grief and burden to a living soul? Is it not the workings of his natural mind? Does not this wicked mind continually stir up unbelief, infidelity, rebellion, and fretfulness? Does it not drag him into the world? Does it not draw him away from the Lord? Does it not fill him with everything base, earthly, sensual, and devilish? But "God is faithful." And he will not suffer the carnal mind to overcome a believer. God, being faithful, has called his people unto the fellowship of his dear Son: he therefore communicates power to the soul whereby this carnal mind is overcome. There are times and seasons when it is blessedly overcome. When sharp exercises and troubles work with power in the mind for

a time, the Lord at such seasons communicates a sweet spirit of faith. And where this spirit of faith is, it goes up after the living Lord. And thus "God is faithful," who will not suffer the carnal mind to prevail altogether, but gives his blessed Spirit to draw the heart up to him.

Then there is the world, and the world is opposed to communion with God's dear Son. It calls it rank enthusiasm, a bitter spirit; it is horrible in the eyes of the profane world. What! To have communion with Jesus; there is nothing that they scorn more, nothing from which the world more revolts. And the world in our hearts is just as bad. The news and gossip, politics, the chit- chat of the day, and the scandal of the town, the carnal mind has plenty of communion with that; it drinks it all down as a thirsty ox drinks down water; but the world outward and the world inward never can have communion with Jesus. He is too holy, too heavenly for the world or for our worldly heart to love. Therefore we need crosses, losses, trials, temptations, and exercises. These embitter the world, they show us the world cannot satisfy us. And then the Lord takes occasion to drop a measure of divine sweetness into the heart, and gives it that solid satisfaction in Jesus which the world can neither give nor take away. Thus "God is faithful."

Then there is temptation. There is constant temptation in a living soul, and these temptations are all against communion. Have you not had all sorts of evil thoughts injected into your mind against Jesus? Nothing too bad to think about him, nothing too base, nothing too horrible. And what was the object of it all but to harass your soul, distract your mind, and destroy communion with the Son of God? And if God were not faithful, these temptations would do it effectually. But "God is faithful." He has not allowed you to be tempted more than you can bear. When enemies come in like a flood,

the Spirit of God holds up the standard against them, and brings that faith into your soul whereby Jesus is looked up to, rested upon, and loved, in spite of all these suggestions against him with which the devil fills your heart. Be not surprised if you find in your heart everything whispered against the Son of God. Satan hates him with mortal enmity, and your mind is enmity against him. It is the lot of God's children thus to be tempted; but "God is faithful." He will not let you be overcome. He will in time subdue and conquer these temptations, and bring your soul into fellowship with his dear Son. Sometimes despair works powerfully, and despondency suggests that you have committed such sins as God cannot forgive; and when you give way to this temptation it hinders communion, it shuts up prayer, stops the reading of the Word, and seals up the spirit of supplication within. Then there are doubts and fears, perplexities, harassings of Satan as to the work of grace upon the heart, whether we have felt right, begun right, and continued right. All these various workings in the mind hinder communion with God's dear Son. But "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son." God's purpose in calling you is not to build up your own righteousness, not to make you think anything of yourself, not to set you to work, nor make you in love with what you think you can do. He has but one purpose in view, and that is, to bring your soul into sweet communion with his dear Son, to stamp his likeness upon you, and to fill your soul with joy and peace in believing, "joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Pet.1:8).

Now, how is this to be attained? Not by looking into our own hearts to find anything good there. But in a spirit of faith, by looking up to Jesus, resting upon his blood and righteousness, and receiving a communication out of his fulness. If you are a poor, needy sinner, if you are a guilty

criminal, a brokenhearted wretch, if you are a vessel of mercy, and God the Spirit has humbled you in your own eyes, you want nothing but these divine blessings to bring your soul into communion with God's dear Son. It is with these he has communion, with those who need him, with those who are troubled, harassed, and plagued without him; and all that you want is God's faithfulness, who will give you your desire in his own time and way. All that you want is for the Lord of life and glory to come into your heart with savour; and when God the Spirit raises up faith in your soul to receive the blessing in love, this lifts you up to the bosom of Christ himself, and fills you with joy and peace in believing; and this is what it is to have fellowship with the Son of God. God has called you for that very purpose. It is his object in calling you next to his own glory, he has no other. He has not shown you your sins to condemn you, and send you to hell; he does not so deal with those he has called. But he makes you feel sin here, that you may not feel it hereafter; he makes you seek for mercy here and cry unto him for pardon, that he may fill your soul out of the fulness of Jesus and give you communion with him here. That is God's eternal purpose. He lets you have a little communion here, to be a foretaste and prelude of eternal communion with him hereafter, "God is faithful." If he has given you any communion here, he will give you eternal communion with his dear Son in realms of endless joy and peace. And for that purpose he takes his people out of the course of this world, that he may give them a measure of communion here, and enlarge their souls with full communion hereafter.