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John Gill's

A BODY OF PRACTICAL DIVINITY

Book 1—Chapter 24

OF COMMUNION WITH GOD

Communion with God is the top of the saints experience in this life, it is the height of experimental religion and powerful godliness. This, of all the enjoyments of God's people on earth, is the nearest to the heavenly bliss; and could entire "perfection" and "endless duration" be added to it, it would be that. I shall consider,

1. First, communion with God in general, which appears chiefly in a large communication of grace, and the blessings of it from him conveyed through Christ, and applied by the blessed Spirit; and in a free exercise or grace upon him, under a divine influence: in all which is enjoyed much of the divine presence.

1a. First, communion is founded in union, and arises from it. There is an union between God and his people; for the more open manifestation and evidence of which our Lord prays (John 17:21), "That they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us!" This original union is a federal union between God and them, taking them into a covenant relation to himself; by virtue of which he becomes their God, and they become his people; it is a conjugal union between them, as between husband and wife; "thy Maker is thine Husband" (Isa. 54:5). The evidence of which union is the gift of the Spirit to them in regeneration and conversion; when there appears to be a vital union and a mutual inhabitation of God in them, and of them in God; "hereby we know that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit" (1 John 4:13). The bond of this union is the everlasting love of God to them. As it is the love of one friend to another which knits their souls together; as the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul; and as the saints in a spiritual relation are "knit together in love," and by it; love is the cement which unites them: so it is the love of God in his heart towards his people which attracts them to him, and unites them with him; and which bond is indissoluble; for nothing shall be able to

"separate from the love of God," nor to separate from him, who are interested in his love; and in the manifestation of this love unto them lies much of their sensible communion with God; as an effect and evidence of this his everlasting love to them, he with lovingkindness draws them to himself in the effectual calling, when large displays are made of it to them, and at times they have some plentiful effusions of it; the love of God is shed abroad in their hearts, by the Spirit that is given them, and their hearts are directed into the love of God; insomuch that they are "rooted and grounded" in it, and are persuaded of their interest in it; and comprehend, with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of it; they are made to drink largely of this river of pleasure, the river, the streams whereof make glad the city of God; in the participation of which they have much solace and refreshment, and enjoy much communion with God.

1b. Secondly, the grand blessing of grace flowing from this union, is covenant interest in God; than which there cannot be a greater blessing; "happy is that people whose God is the Lord!" and this covenant interest always continues, it can never be destroyed; "This God is our God for ever and ever!" and this is the foundation blessing, from whence all others take their rise; "he that is our God, is the God of salvation!" of all the blessings of it (Ps. 144:15; 48:14; 68:20), of all the spiritual blessings saints are blessed with in Christ, and of all grace from him, and all the supplies of it; "My God," my covenant God, "shall supply all your need!" (Eph. 1:3; Phil. 4:19). Now in the perception and enjoyment of this grand blessing, covenant interest in God, communion with him greatly lies; God sometimes says to his people, even when they are fearing and doubting, "Be not dismayed, for I am thy God!" and they in the exercise of faith say, as David, "I trusted in thee, O Lord, I said unto thee, Thou art my God!" (Isa. 41:10; Ps. 31:14), they avouch the Lord to be their God, and he avouches them to be his peculiar people; "I will say," says the Lord, "It is my people; and they shall say, The Lord is my God!" (Zech. 13:9), and when this is the case, sensible communion with God must be enjoyed: the Lord is the portion of his people; and when he says to them as he did to Abraham, "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward;" and they in return say, "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul, therefore will I hope in him" (Gen. 15:1; Lam. 3:24), their portion now in the land of the living, and their portion for evermore; under such a discovery, and in such a view of things, there must be communion with God: they have a mutual interest in each other; the Lord's people is his portion, and he himself is the portion of Jacob; and therefore with great propriety may they be said to be "heirs of God;" an amazing phrase! expressive of property, interest, and fellowship. Hence,

1c. Thirdly, there is a mutual intercourse between God and his people; which is variously expressed in scripture.

1c1. By their mutual indwelling in each other, and which follows upon covenant interest, and is an evidence of it; as was the Lord's dwelling among the people of Israel; "I will dwell," says Jehovah, "among the children of Israel, and will be their God," make it manifest to them thereby, as follows, "and they shall know that am

the Lord their God;" hence he ordered a "sanctuary" to be made, that he might "dwell among them;" and in this sanctuary, or tabernacle, an ark was put, and over the ark a mercy seat, and on that the cherubim, between which Jehovah dwelt; and from whence he promised to commune with Moses concerning all things relative to the people of Israel: an emblem this of saints communion with God, through Christ, at the throne of grace (Ex. 29:45,46; 25:8,22). And God not only dwells in particular congregated churches of Christ, who are built up an habitation for God, through the Spirit; such as were the churches at Corinth and at Ephesus (2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:22), but in particular persons, who love Christ, and keep his commandments; of whom he says, "We will come unto him, and make our abode with him!" a phrase expressive of constant and continued communion at least for a while (John 14:23), and on the other hand, such dwell in God, who has been "the dwelling place of his people in all generations," and is "their strong habitation, whereunto they may continually resort" (Ps. 90:1; 71:3), and such dwell in God, who live in the continual exercise of grace upon him; and particularly of the grace of love towards him, and towards his people; "He that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him" (1 John 4:16), this is communion.

1c2. By a mutual walking together; which shows agreement, and is expressive of fellowship; "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). God and his people are agreed; reconciliation to God is made for them by the death of Christ, and reconciliation is made in them by the Spirit of Christ; and both are signified in (Rom. 5:10), and being thus agreed, they walk together; God walked with the children of Israel in a tent and in a tabernacle, which moved from place to place; and he walks in the midst of his golden candlesticks, particular churches, as he has promised; "I will dwell in them, and walk in them;" and so in individual believers (2 Cor. 6:16), and they walk with him; thus "Enoch walked with God;" as did Noah and others (Gen. 5:24; 6:9), as do all believers, they walk by faith on God as their covenant God, and walk humbly before him, and in all his commandments and ordinances blameless; in which they have much communion with him.

1c3. By a mutual converse together; they talk together, God speaks to them, and they speak to him; such familiar fellowship had Abraham with God, about the affair of Sodom; which, when over, it is said, "he left communing with him" (Gen. 18:33), and such had Moses also, with whom God is said to "commune," to talk with him, and to "speak" to him "face to face" (Ex. 25:22; 31:18; 33:9,11), and something similar to this, is the experience of all the saints, when the Lord appears unto them, and talks with them, and tells them that he has loved them with an everlasting love, and has drawn them to himself with the cords of it; when he visits them, and discloses the secrets of his heart unto them (Ps. 25:14), and they talk with him, and speak to him in prayer; they have access to him through Christ, and that with freedom and boldness, through his blood and righteousness, and come up even to his seat, and tell him all their mind, make known their requests unto him, and pour out their souls before him; much of communion with God lies in prayer, private, family, and public.

1c4. By a mutual sitting down and feasting together; the table on which the shewbread, or bread of faces, was set, was typical of the saints communion with God, and the enjoyment of his presence, through the mediation of Christ; so was the meat offering, part of which was burnt for a savour, a memorial of it to the Lord, and the rest was eaten by Aaron and his sons. God has spread a table for his people, and made a feast of fat things for them, on his holy mountain; where they feast with him, and he with them; more particularly in the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, in which much spiritual communion is enjoyed; of which more hereafter.

2. Secondly, who the persons are who have communion with God.

2a. First. not unregenerate men, such who are in a state of nature; for they are in a state of alienation from the life of God; they are at a distance from him, their sins separate between God and them. Adam, in his state of innocence, had nearness to and communion with God; God frequently conversed with him, made known his mind and will to him, and bestowed very special favors upon him; but that whisperer, sin, soon separated chief friends; and man falling into sin, was banished from the divine presence; "So he drove out the man" from the garden of Eden, as an emblem of the estrangement of him and his posterity from God; which is the case of them all.

2b. Secondly, not any who are in the native darkness and blindness of their understandings, and walk therein; which is the condition all men are in by nature; everyone "walks in darkness:" and now "what communion hath light with darkness?" as persons enlightened by the Spirit and grace of God, can have no spiritual communion with such who are altogether in the dark about spiritual things; much less can there be any communion between God, who is light, and such who walk in darkness (1 John 2:11; 1:5,6).

2c. Thirdly, such who are dead in sin, as all men naturally are, can have no communion with God; for as "what agreement hath the temple of God" (the temple of the living God) "with idols?" lifeless creatures: so what agreement can there be between the living God and dead sinners? such must be quite strangers to a life of communion with God; when it is "a time of life," and so of open love, then, and not before, does God spread his skirt over such persons, as a token of their conjugal relation to him, and enters into covenant with them, or manifests to them their covenant interest in him; and so they openly become his, and are admitted to fellowship with him (Ezek. 16:8).

2d. Fourthly, no unholy and unrighteous persons have communion with God; for "what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?" as not righteous men with unrighteous men in a church state; so not a pure, holy, and righteous God, with impure and unsanctified sinners; even with none but such who are created in righteousness and true holiness; who are washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

2e. Fifthly, not any in whom sin is the governing principle; in whom it reigns, and who commit it with as much boldness and impudence as if they had a law for it (Ps. 94:20), but God is of such unspotted purity and holiness, that he cannot take pleasure in sin, neither shall evil men dwell with him, not now nor hereafter; but shall be bid to depart from him as workers of iniquity. But,

2e1. Such only have communion with God, or are admitted to fellowship with him, who are loved and chosen by him; such whom for the great love wherewith he has loved them, he has quickened them by his Spirit and grace, and with lovingkindness has drawn them to himself; those whom he has chosen to be holy, and without blame before him in love, he causes to approach to him now, and gives them nearness to him, and fellowship with him.

2e2. Such who are redeemed and reconciled by Christ, through his sufferings and death; by which he has made satisfaction for sin, and so removed that which lay in the way of a sinner's communion with God: Christ suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, "that he might bring us to God," into a state of open communion with him; and such "who are sometimes afar off," with respect to communion, "are made nigh by the blood of Christ;" by which means obstructions in a way of fellowship are removed, and only such persons are admitted to it.

2e3. Such chosen and redeemed ones, who are regenerated and sanctified by the Spirit of God; for his work is necessary to communion with God; "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord," enjoy him, and have fellowship with him, neither now nor hereafter. The gift of the Spirit, as a Spirit of sanctification, and the operations of his grace on the hearts of men, are the great evidence of union to God, from whence flows communion with him (1 John 3:24; 4:13). I go on to consider,

3. Thirdly, the special fellowship which such persons have with Father, Son, and Spirit, distinctly; the apostle John says, it is "with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3), to which may be added (Phil. 2:1. "If any fellowship of the Spirit:" and also (2 Cor. 13:14). "The communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all." All which put together, show that the saints have a communion with each person in the Godhead.

3a. First, with God the Father, as he is the Father of Christ; who, as such, has blessed them with all spiritual blessings in Christ, and as such, has chosen them in him to holiness and happiness, and as such, regenerates them, according to his abundant mercy; and is the Father of mercies, and the God of all grace and comfort to them; and as he is their covenant God and Father in Christ, through whom they have access to him as their Father, and address him as their Father in heaven, and call upon him for what they want, and under the witnessings of the Spirit of adoption, cry Abba, Father; and say, "doubtless, thou art our Father:" and then may they be said to have communion with him as such, when their faith and hope are exercised on him; and they are affected with his wondrous love in taking them into his family, and putting them among the children, and encouraging them to call

him their Father, and not turn away from him; which obliges them to say, "What manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!" (1 John 3:1), and when they are sensible of the feelings of his heart for them, his sympathy with them, pity and compassion on them, under all their afflictions, temptations, trials, and exercises (Isa. 63:9; Ps. 103:13), then have they fellowship with the Father.

3b. Secondly, with Christ: fellowship with him is what the Lord's people in the effectual calling are particularly called unto (1 Cor. 1:9), and what Christ himself invites them to (Song of Sol. 4:8), and which lies,

3b1. On his part, in a communication of grace unto them, which they receive at his hands; he is full of grace, all fulness of it dwells in him, and out of his fulness they receive, and grace for grace, an abundance of it, especially at first conversion, when the grace of Christ is exceeding abundant, flows and overflows; and afterwards they have a sufficiency of it to help them in all their times of need, a constant supply of it as they want; Christ has been, in all ages, "the fountain of gardens, the well of living waters, and as streams from Lebanon" to all his churches and people; and with joy do they draw water out of the full wells of salvation in him, and become strong in the grace that is in him, to which they are allowed and encouraged to have recourse at all times.

3b2. On their part this fellowship lies in the exercise of grace upon Christ; in the goings forth of their souls to him in acts of faith, hope, love, joy, &c.

3b2a. Upon his Person, as the Son of God, beholding his glory as the glory of the only begotten of the Father, and the express image of his Person; when he appears to them altogether lovely, and the chiefest among ten thousands, and the only and all sufficient Saviour, able to save to the uttermost all that come to God by him; and when they are encouraged to look to him and be saved, and live by faith on him, the Son of God, who hath loved them and given himself for them; and when their love is attracted to him, the unseen Saviour, and the desires of their souls are to his name, and to the remembrance of him; and they have hope of eternal life, and an expectation of it, as the free gift of God through him, and rejoice in him, having no confidence in the flesh, then have they fellowship with him.

3b2b. Upon him as considered in his offices of Prophet, Priest, and King. They have communion with him as their Prophet, who teaches them by his Spirit, word, and ordinances; and from whom they receive that anointing which teacheth all things; to him they hearken as the great Prophet of the church, embrace the doctrines of his gospel, and pay a regard to all the instructions of his lips, and in whose hearts the word of Christ dwells richly, and works effectually: they deal with Christ, and have fellowship with him in his priestly office; they have to do with his blood, for the remission of their sins, and the cleansing of their souls; and with his righteousness for their justification before God, and acceptance with him; and with his sacrifice, for the atonement and expiation of their iniquities; and on account of all this have

much peace, joy, and comfort, in a way of believing. They consider him as the High Priest over the house of God, who transacts all affairs for them; they make use of him as their advocate and intercessor with the Father, and put their petitions into his hands, to be offered up by him, perfumed with the much incense of his mediation; they acknowledge him as their King, submit to his government, yield obedience to his commands, and esteem all his precepts concerning all things to be right. Saints have such communion and fellowship with Christ in his offices, that they have in some sense a share in them; that is, they are made by him prophets, priests, and kings; prophets to teach and instruct others, having received the anointing from him; and kings and priests unto God and his Father (1 John 1:2,7; Rev. 1:6).

3b2c. Much of fellowship with Christ is enjoyed in the use of, and by the means of the ordinances of his house, especially the ordinance of the Supper. The church is a banqueting house, into which Christ brings his people, where they sit under his shadow, and in his presence, with delight, and his banner over them is his love displayed; here he has a table spread, and at it he himself sits, and welcomes his guests, saying, "Eat, O friends! drink abundantly, O beloved!" which encourages them, and causes their "spikenard to send forth the sweet smell" thereof, or their graces to go forth in exercise on him; so that the communion is mutual; he sups with them, and they with him. Now this communion with Christ greatly arises from the saints relation to him; he is the Husband of his church and people, and they are his spouse and bride; hence a communion both of name and goods; they have the same common name, "The Lord our Righteousness" (Jer. 23:6; 33:16), and all that Christ has is theirs, they being Christ's and he theirs; he is made to them "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30; 3:21-23). Christ is the head, to which his body, the church, is joined, and the saints are members of him, and one Spirit with him; from whom they receive life and nourishment, and increase with the increase of God: he is the vine, they the branches; and by virtue of union to him, a communication of the fruits of grace, holiness, and perseverance therein is made to them from him.

3c. Thirdly, saints have also a special and particular communion with the Holy Ghost, in the gifts of his grace unto them, and which they exercise under his influence; as the grace of faith, which is of his operation, and from whence he is called, "the Spirit of faith;" and a "good hope through grace," in the exercise of which believers abound, "through the power of the Holy Ghost;" and love is a fruit of the Spirit, and which is under his cultivation. Moreover, this fellowship of the Spirit appears in the offices of grace, which he performs towards them; as the guide, teacher, and comforter of them; as a Spirit of grace and supplication, making intercession in them; as a Spirit of adoption, witnessing to their spirits, that they are the children of God; and as the earnest of the heavenly inheritance to them, and the sealer of them up unto the day of redemption; in whom he dwells, as in his temple, enabling them to exercise every grace and perform every duty, working them up for that self same thing, eternal glory and happiness.

4. The properties of it; showing the excellency of this communion and fellowship.

4a. It is a wonderful instance of condescension in God; that he who is the high and lofty One, who dwells in heaven, the high and holy place, and yet with such also who are of a contrite and humble spirit; that he whose throne the heaven is, and the earth his footstool, and yet condescends to dwell with men on earth; that Wisdom, or the Son of God, should build an house, furnish a table, and invite sinful unworthy creatures to partake of the entertainments of it; that Father, Son, and Spirit should come and make their abode with sinful men, and admit them to the greatest intimacy with them.

4b. It is very honorable to the sons of men to be favored with such communion: if it was an honour to Mephibosheth to sit at the table of king David, as one of the king's sons; or for an Haman to be invited to a banquet with the king and queen; how infinitely more honorable is it to be admitted to sit with the King of kings at his table, and be entertained by him as royal guests!

4c. This is a privilege very desirable, nothing more so; this is the one thing saints are desirous of in public worship, to behold the beauty of the Lord; to see his power and his glory in his sanctuary; to sit under his shadow, and taste his pleasant fruits. This is no other than the gate of heaven.

4d. It is exceeding valuable; it is beyond all the enjoyments of life, preferable to everything that can be had on earth; the light of God's countenance, his gracious presence, communion with him, put more joy and gladness into the hearts of his people, than the greatest increase of worldly things; it is this which makes wisdom's ways of pleasantness, and her paths of peace; it is this which makes the tabernacles of God amiable and lovely, and a day in his house better than a thousand elsewhere; and because so valuable, hence the apostle John, in an exulting manner, says, "Truly, our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ!" (1 John 1:3).