

OF COMMUNION WITH GOD THE FATHER, SON AND HOLY GHOST (3)

John Owen, 1657

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Part 2: Communion With the Father

Chapter 4: Implications of Communion With the Father in Love

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

We Must Exercise Ourselves to View God as Loving Us

This is a duty wherein it is most evident that Christians are but little exercised, namely, in holding immediate communion with the Father in love. Unacquaintedness with our mercies and our privileges is our sin as well as our trouble. We hearken not to the Spirit who is given unto us, “that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God” (I Cor. 2:12). This makes us go heavily, when we might rejoice; and to be weak, where we might be strong in the Lord. How few of the saints are experientially acquainted with this privilege of holding immediate communion with the Father in love! With what anxious, doubtful thoughts do they look upon Him! What fears, what questioning are there, of His good will and kindness toward us! At best, many think there is no sweetness at all in Him toward us, except what is purchased at the high price of Christ’s blood. It is true, Christ alone is the way of communication but the free fountain and spring of all is in the bosom of the Father. “That eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us” (I John 1:2).

Let us, then, eye the Father as love; look not on Him as an always angry father, but as one most kind and tender. Let us look on Him by faith, as One that hath had thoughts of kindness toward us from everlasting. It is misapprehension of God that makes any who have been moved by the Spirit to seek

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Him run from Him. “They that know thy name will put their trust in thee” (Ps. 9:10). Men cannot abide with God in spiritual meditations. They fix their thoughts only on His terrible majesty, severity and greatness; and so their spirits are not endeared. Would a soul continually eye His everlasting tenderness and compassion, His thoughts of kindness that have been from of old, His present gracious acceptance, that soul could not bear an hour’s absence from Him; whereas now, perhaps, it cannot watch with Him one hour. Let, then, this be the saints’ first notion of the Father: that He is full of eternal, free love toward them. Then their hearts and thoughts will break through all discouragements that lie in the way.

Aids to Viewing the Father as Loving Us

Let us consider whose love it is. It is the love of Him who is in Himself all sufficient, infinitely satiated with Himself and His own glorious excellencies and perfections; who hath no need to go forth with His love unto others, nor to seek an object of it outside Himself. There might He rest with delight and complacency to eternity. He is sufficient for His own love. He had His Son, also, His eternal Wisdom, to rejoice and delight Himself in from all eternity (Prov. 8:30). This might take up and satiate the whole delight of the Father; but He determined to love His saints also. It is such a love, as wherein He seeks not His own satisfaction only but our good therein also.

Let us also consider what kind of love it is. It is an eternal love that was fixed on us before the foundation of the world. Before we were or had done the least good, then were His thoughts upon us, then was His delight in us, then did the Son rejoice in the thoughts of fulfilling His Father’s delight in Him (Prov. 8:30). Indeed, the delight of the Father in the Son in Proverbs 8:30-31 is not so much His absolute delight in Jesus as the express image of His person and the brightness of His glory, wherein He might behold all His own excellencies and perfections. Rather the Father’s delight in the Son is due to the Father’s love and delight in the “sons of men” (v. 31). So the order of the words requires us to understand it: “I was daily his delight” and “My delights were with the sons of men;” that is, in the thoughts of kindness and redemption for them: and in that respect, also, was He His Father’s delight. It was from eternity that the Father laid in His own bosom a design for our happiness. The very thought of this is enough to make all that is within us,

like the babe in the womb of Elisabeth, to leap for joy. A sense of it cannot but prostrate our souls to the lowest abasement of a humble, holy reverence and make us rejoice before Him with trembling.

Further, let us remember that His love is free. He loves us because He determined so to do. There was, there is, nothing in us for which we should be beloved. Did we deserve His love, it would only devalue it. Things reckoned as a payment of debt, such as fair wages, are seldom the matter of thankfulness; but that which is eternally antecedent to our very existence must needs be absolutely free with respect to us and cannot be motivated by anything in us. This gives it life and being, is the reason for it and gives it its great value (Rom. 9:11; Eph. 1:3-4; Titus 3:5; James 1:18).

His love is also unchangeable. Though we change every day, yet His love changeth not. Could any kind of provocation turn it away, it had long since ceased. Its unchangeableness is that which carrieth out the Father unto that infiniteness of patience and forbearance (without which we die, we perish, II Pet. 3:9) which He exerciseth toward us.

And it is discriminating. He hath not thus loved all the world: "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated" (Rom. 9:13). Why should He fix His love on us, and pass by millions from whom we differ not by nature, that He should make us sharers in it, and all the fruits of it, from which most of the great and wise men of the world are excluded?

Let us not stop at simply so viewing the Father's love but let us also receive it. Without this, all is in vain as to any communion with God. We do not hold communion with Him in anything, until it be received by faith. This is that unto which I would provoke the saints of God, even to believe this love of God for themselves and their own part, believe that such is the heart of the Father toward them and accept of His witness herein. His love is not ours in the sweetness of it until it be so received. Continually, then, act thoughts of faith on God, as love to thee, as embracing thee with the eternal free love before described. When the Lord is, by His Word, presented as such unto thee, let thy mind know it and assent that it is so; and let thy will embrace it, in its being so; and all thy affections be filled with it. Set thy whole heart to it; let it be bound with the cords of this love. If the King be bound in the galleries with thy love (Song 7:5), shouldest thou not be bound in heaven with His?

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Having received the Father's love, let it have its proper fruit and efficacy upon thy heart, in returning love to Him again. So shall we walk in the light of God's countenance and hold holy communion with our Father all the day long. Let us not deal unkindly with Him by repaying His love to us with doubts and fear. Let us not deal so unthankfully with our God.

Exhortations Not to Doubt the Father's Love for Us

To aid us in this duty, and the daily constant practice of it, I shall add one or two considerations. It is exceedingly acceptable unto God, even our Father, that we should thus hold communion with Him in His love, that He may be received into our souls as One full of love, tenderness and kindness toward us. Flesh and blood are apt to have very hard thoughts of Him, to think He is always angry, yea, implacable; that it is not for poor creatures to draw nigh to Him; that nothing in the world is more desirable than never to come into His presence. "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" say the sinners in Zion (Isa. 33:14). "I knew thee that thou art an hard man," claims the evil servant (Matt. 25:24). There is nothing more grievous to the Lord, nor more subservient to the design of Satan upon the soul, than such thoughts as these. Satan claps his hands (if I may so say) when he can take up the soul with such thoughts of God: then he has enough, all that he doth desire. This has been his design and way from the beginning. The first blood that murderer shed was by this means. He leads our first parents into hard thoughts of God: "Hath God said so? Hath He threatened you with death? He knows well enough it will be better with you." With this engine did he batter and overthrow all mankind in one; and being mindful of his ancient conquest, he readily useth the same weapons wherewith he so successfully conducted his warfare. It is exceeding grievous to the Spirit of God to be so slandered in the hearts of those whom He dearly loves. How doth He expostulate this with Zion! "Thus saith the LORD, What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain?" (Jer. 2:5); "Have I been a wilderness unto Israel? a land of darkness?" (v. 31). "Zion said, The LORD hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee" (Isa. 49:14-15). The Lord takes nothing worse at the hands of His, than such hard thoughts of Him, knowing

full well what fruit this bitter root is likely to bear, what alienations of heart, what drawings back, what unbelief in our walking with Him. How unwilling is a child to come into the presence of an angry father!

Consider this in the first place: receiving love of the Father as He holds out love to the soul, gives Him the honour at which He aims and is exceedingly acceptable unto Him. He often sets it out in an eminent manner, that it may be so received: “He commendeth his love toward us” (Rom. 5:8); “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us” (I John 3:1). Whence, then, is this folly? Men are afraid to have good thoughts of God. They think it a boldness to eye God as good, gracious, tender, kind, loving. I speak of saints; but for the other side, they can judge Him hard, austere, severe, almost implacable and fierce (the very worst affections of the very worst of men, and most hated of Him, Rom. 1:31; II Tim. 3:3), and think herein they do well. Is not this soul-deceit from Satan? Was it not his design from the beginning to inject such thoughts of God? Assure thyself there is nothing more acceptable unto the Father, than for us to keep up our hearts unto Him as the eternal fountain of all that rich grace which flows out to sinners in the blood of Jesus.

So much as we see of the love of God, so much shall we delight in Him and no more. Every other discovery of God, without this, will but make the soul fly from Him; but if the heart be once much taken up with this the eminency of the Father’s love, it cannot choose but be overpowered, conquered and endeared unto Him. This, if anything, will work upon us to make our abode with Him. If the love of a father will not make a child delight in him, what will? Put this to the venture: exercise your thoughts upon this very thing, the eternal, free and fruitful love of the Father, and see if your hearts be not wrought upon to delight in Him. I dare boldly say, believers will find it as thriving a course as ever they pitched on in their lives. Sit down a little at the fountain and you will quickly have a farther discovery of the sweetness of the streams. You who have run from Him, will not be able, after a while, to keep at a distance for a moment.

But some may say, “Alas! How shall I hold communion with the Father in love? I know not at all whether He loves me or not; and shall I venture to cast myself upon it? How if I should not be accepted? Should I not rather perish for my presumption, than find sweetness in His bosom? God seems to me only as a consuming fire and everlasting burnings; so that I dread to look up unto Him.”

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I know not what may be understood by “knowing whether God loves me,” though it be carried on in a spiritual sense and experience, yet it is received purely by believing. Our knowing of it is our believing of it as revealed. “We have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love” (I John 4:16). This is the assurance which, at the very entrance of walking with God, thou mayest have of this love. He who is truth hath said it. Whatever thy heart says, or Satan says, contrary to what God says makes Him a liar (I John 5:10).

Another may object, “I can believe that God is love to others, for He hath said He is love; but that He will be so to me, I see no ground of persuasion; there is no cause, no reason in the world, why He should turn one thought of love or kindness toward me: and therefore I dare not cast myself upon it, to hold communion with Him in His love.”

I answer, God hath spoken it as particularly to thee as to anyone in the world. For cause of love, He hath as much to fix it on thee as on any of the children of men; that is, none at all without Himself. Thus I make speedy work of this objection. No one from the foundation of the world, who believed such love in the Father, and made returns of love to Him again, was deceived; neither shall ever any to the world’s end be so, in so doing. Thou art, in this, upon a most sure bottom. If thou believest and receivest the Father as love, He will infallibly be so to thee, though others may fall under His severity.

But “I cannot find my heart making returns of love unto God. Could I find my soul set upon Him, I could then believe His soul delighted in me.”

This is the most preposterous course that possibly thy thoughts can pitch upon, a most ready way to rob God of His glory. “Herein is love,” saith the Holy Ghost, “not that we loved God, but that he loved us” first (I John 4:10-11). Thou wouldest invert this order, and say, “Herein is love, not that God loved me, but that I loved Him first.” This is to take the glory of God from Him: that, whereas He loves us without a cause that is in ourselves, and we have all cause in the world to love Him, thou wouldest have the contrary, namely, that something should be in thee for which God should love thee, even thy love to Him; and that thou shouldest love God, before thou knowest anything lovely in Him, namely, whether He love thee or not. This is the way of the flesh: it will never bring glory to God, nor peace to thy own soul. Lay down, then, thy reasonings; take up the love of the Father upon a pure act of believing, and that will open thy soul to let it out unto the Lord in the communion of love.

Good Works the Fruit of Communion With the Father

If these things be so, “what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?” (II Pet. 3:11). “Our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29). What communion is there between light and darkness? Shall sin and lust dwell in those thoughts which receive in and carry out love from and unto the Father? Holiness becometh His presence forever. An unclean spirit cannot draw nigh unto Him; an unholy heart can make no abode with Him. A lewd person will not desire to hold fellowship with a sober man; and will a man of vain and foolish imaginations hold communion and dwell with the most holy God? There is not any consideration of this love but is a powerful motive unto holiness, and leads thereunto. Ephraim says, “What have I to do any more with idols?” (Hos. 14:8) when in God he finds salvation. Communion with the Father is wholly inconsistent with loose walking. “If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth” (I John 1:6). “He that saith, I know him [i.e., I have communion with Him], and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (I John 2:4). The most glorious claims of an acquaintance with the Father, without holiness and obedience to His commandments, only prove the pretenders to be liars. The love of the world and of the Father dwell not together.

If this be so, how many that go under the name of Christians come short of the truth of it! How unacquainted are many professors with the mystery of this communion and its fruits! Do not many very evidently hold communion with their worldly lusts and yet would be thought to have an inheritance among them that are sanctified? They have neither new name nor white stone, and yet would be called the people of the Most High. May it not be said of many of them, rather, that God is not in all their thoughts, than that they have communion with Him? The Lord open the eyes of men, that they may see and know that walking with God is a matter not of form but power!

And so far of peculiar communion with the Father, in the instance of love which we have insisted on. “God is also faithful by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord” (I Cor. 1:9), of which communion with the Son in the next place.