

Charles G. Finney:

TEXT.--2 Cor. 13:14: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all. Amen."

In discussing this subject, I shall--

I. CONSIDER THE MEANING OF THE TERM COMMUNION.

II. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN COMMUNION WITH THE HOLY GHOST.

III. HOW WE MAY KNOW WHETHER AND WHEN WE HAVE COMMUNION WITH GOD.

IV. THE VALUE AND IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNION WITH GOD.

V. HOW TO SECURE AND PERPETUATE IT.

I. Meaning of the term Communion as used in the Bible.

It sometimes means friendly intercourse, as in Gen. 18:33: "And the Lord went his way, as soon as He had left COMMUNING with Abraham." Sometimes it means counsel, advice, and instruction; 1 Kings 10:2: "She came to Jerusalem with a very great train, with camels that bare spices, and very much gold and precious stones; and when she was come to Solomon, she COMMUNED with him of all that was in her heart." It is the same term in the original that is rendered fellowship in Phil. 2:1: "If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any FELLOWSHIP of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies." And 1 John 1:3: "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye may also have FELLOWSHIP with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." To commune with God, then, is to have fellowship with Him, friendly intercourse, consultation, advice, instruction.

II. What is implied in communion with the Holy Ghost.

1. It implies that He is a moral agent, and not a moral attribute of God.

2. His actual and personal presence, and indwelling, in the heart, of him with whom He communes. He must be actually present with our spirits, to render it possible to commune with Him.

3. The communion kept up between the Holy Spirit and all his saints in every part of the world, implies both the omnipresence and the omniscience of the Holy Spirit.

4. It implies infinite love and condescension in Him. What infinite condescension in God, to suffer such worms as we are, to consult and commune with Him, to hold frequent and protracted private interviews with Him, and to commune with Him of all that is in our hearts. This, surely, is condescension infinitely great.

5. Communion with the Holy Spirit implies a disposition in us to consult Him, and commune with Him, in respect to our duty, his will, and the affairs of his kingdom.

6. It implies a disposition in Him to be consulted by us. It implies a constant readiness on his part, to admit us into his presence, to give us audience, and to listen attentively to all that we have to say, and to encourage us to lay open our whole case before Him.

7. It implies a sense of our own ignorance and deep dependence upon Him. We never seek communion with God, only in proportion as we are emptied of dependence upon ourselves. A man who is not deeply sensible of his own ignorance will not seek communion with God, for the purpose of receiving instruction of Him. A man who is not emptied of self-dependence, will not seek to lay himself all along in the arms of the Savior.

8. It implies that He takes the deepest interest in us. Surely his interest in us must be exceedingly great, to be willing to hold consultation with us so often, to commune with us so deeply, to enter so much into the detail of

all our affairs, and interest Himself in our slightest grievances, trials, and difficulties. To do this constantly, without weariness or impatience, certainly implies, on his part, a most profound interest in us.

9. It implies a deep sympathy and fellowship between the Holy Ghost and us; that we feel as He does, and that He feels as we do; that we have a common object in view; that we are influenced by the same motives, interested in the same objects, employed in the same labors, and, in short, it implies that our fellowship and sympathy with Him are equal to our communion, for they are in fact the same thing.

III. How we may know whether and when we have communion with God.

1. When we are conscious of being drawn by his silent but powerful influence, very near to Him in prayer. Every true Christian knows what it is to feel a secret moving of heart toward God; a silent, but deep, powerful melting, drawing of soul away from the world, from society, from business, from every thing else, into a most sacred private interview with God.

In such cases the soul seeks to be alone with God. It naturally follows, crying after God, and its desires are like a liquid stream, flowing and flowing; and as he is on his way to some retired spot, or upon his knees in his closet, or perhaps in the night season upon his bed, "his heart and his flesh cry out for God, for the living God." From the deep bottom of his heart, his soul cries out, "Father, Father," and repeats and echoes, over and over, all the dear names, the titles, and relations of God; and his soul seems to be all liquid, and flowing, and gushing, and drawn into the deep waters of his love.

2. We have communion with God, when we have great freedom and enlargement in prayer. Sometimes the soul feels unutterably burdened with conviction and distress, but has no words. It is bowed down to the earth, but cannot express, nor even think over, in any order, its sins, its burdens, or its sorrows. It seem to be shut up to God, and yet feels as if it could not approach and fully lay the heart open before Him; but at other times, there is great freedom and enlargement of mind. Our thoughts and words flow like a river. We find not only our desires enlarged, but our views of ourselves and of Him greatly enlarged. We have a kind of supernatural ability, to express ourselves in a most emphatic and elevated manner, in pleading our cause before Him. There seems to be room enough in the benevolent yearnings of our hearts to embrace the world, and the universe; and we seem as it were to embosom the whole race, and bring them before God, in earnest longings, with strong cryings and tears, that He would have mercy on them. We seem to see every thing and feel every thing, and express every thing, on an enlarged scale. We enter into such a deep sympathy with God, as to feel our whole souls drawn away with benevolent desires. In this state of mind we may rest assured we are in communion with God.

3. We have communion with God when our necessities are laid open to us. Sometimes we are hard and dark. We know that something must be wrong, but have no clear idea of what it is. I speak now of the case of those who have not yet learned to abide all the while in the light. But those who have made the greatest attainments, of any persons in this world, no doubt, often feel their spiritual necessities laid open before them, in a most remarkable manner. If not conscious of present or recent sin; yet they are often made to see how vastly they fall short of what they should have been had they never sinned at all. How much ignorance, how much weakness, how many infirmities, are upon and about them, in consequence of their former sins, and habits of selfishness. God often draws us into deep communion with Him, and has protracted and close interview with us, sometimes for hours and even days together, for the purpose of kindly calling our attention to, and laying open before us, those particulars in our character and infirmities in which we need greater measures of his grace. He makes us to see the depth of our ignorance, how weak we are under temptation, and how certainly we shall be overcome, but for his ever present grace. In this state of mind, we may be sure that we are in communion with God.

4. When we are able to spread our whole case, and open up the deepest necessities and secrets of our hearts before God, we are in communion with Him. We sometimes feel as if we could go to the very bottom of our whole being, and bring forth every secret thought, affection, emotion, and whatever has been deep and concealed, and spread them out in the light of his countenance.

5. When we are enabled to bring forth our strong reasons in pleading with God, we are in a state of communion with Him. Sometimes we find ourselves able to plead and reason with God, as a man would plead with his friend, to bring forth our reasons, and array our arguments, with a strong confidence and almost assurance, that they will affect his mind as they do our own. The reasons which we offer to God, appear to be weighty, and sufficient to our own minds; and we feel a kind of supernatural confidence, that they will, and must, and do influence the mind of God. We press Him with them. We turn them over and over; lay them out in their connections and bearings, and feel as if they could not be resisted. Nay, we insist upon their weight and force,

and often urge them upon God, with a kind of supernatural vehemency of spirit, which refuses to be denied. This was no doubt the state of Jacob's mind, when he wrestled all night with God. This state of mind is what is intended by wrestling with God. In this state the soul uses the strongest language, feels the utmost confidence in the ground it takes, takes hold of the very strength of God, and casts its whole being upon Him, and upon the strong reasons which it urges, and upon his immutable faithfulness and promises. But this state of mind is only understood by those who have experienced it. The stranger intermeddled not with such things as these. And could any cold hearted professor or ungodly sinner be concealed in some secret place, and witness the secret intercourse of such a soul in communion with God; could he listen to his language, behold his streaming perspiration, the whole scene would, no doubt, impress him with mingled feelings of wonder and consternation.

6. When we feel like consulting God on almost every thing that interests us, and that concerns the interests of his kingdom, we are in communion with Him. Christians sometimes feel, and many habitually feel a disposition to ask God's opinion, consent, and advice, at every turn. They seem to abide in that state of mind in which Paul was, when he said, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" With others, less advanced in grace, this feeling is not so habitual; but yet all true Christians know what it is to feel their hearts drawn into an attitude of constant consultation with God, a fleeing and running to Him for advice, a breathing out its ejaculations to Him for counsel; a disposition to consult Him about the minutest things, and mention to Him even the most trivial occurrences and circumstances of life. In this state, the soul feels like a very little child, consulting a most wise and affectionate father.

7. Whenever we feel disposed to make God a sacred confidant, and disclose to Him all those secret things which we would confide to no other being in the universe, we are in a state of communion. The Christian's soul is sometimes drawn into such a state as to feel an intense longing to treat God as the most sacred and confidential friend, laying open before Him all those secret things with which no other being has any right to intermeddle. The Christian's soul is united to God, and sustains a thousand endearing and interesting relations to Him, that it sustains to no other being. It is sometimes compared to the married state; but it almost infinitely exceeds it in the deep and sacred confidence it reposes in God. No conjugal confidence ever began to equal it. The sweet, sacred, deep, profound confidence of the soul in God. No husband ever laid open to his wife, or wife to the husband, the deep springs of action, the most retired and secret workings of the soul, as one in communion with God will often do. O the unspeakable confidence which the soul feels, when it discloses to Him the deepest, darkest, profoundest necessities of the whole being.

8. When the scriptures are opened to our understandings, and made to take hold upon our hearts, we are in communion with God. A soul not in communion with God, may be interested in the Bible as a history; but its more spiritual parts are like a sealed or an uninteresting book. The mind's eye will wander over chapter after chapter, wander through its sacred pages, and amidst all the glories it reveals, without being struck, and fixed, and held as by enchantment, in view of its glorious developments. But when in communion with God, every sentence bears the impress of God. It is full of meaning, full of light, and love. It discloses the very secrets of the heart of God, and lays his very being bare to our inspection. The soul pauses at every sentence, and wonders, and admires, and adores. It looks into the deep profound. The spiritual world is open to its view. It seems, as with a telescope, to have bidden eternity into his presence. And the whole spiritual world seems to be so uncovered before him, that he is almost in the state in which Paul was, not able to tell whether he is in the body or out of the body. It is easy for a mind in this state to conceive what Paul meant, when he said, "I knew a man fourteen years ago, whether in the body or out of the body, I cannot tell; God knoweth; I knew such a one caught up into the third heavens, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." The fact is, his mind was so entirely absorbed with the objects presented to his spiritual eye--his attention was so entirely engrossed with them, as to be unconscious of the presence of any objects of sense. And he could not afterwards tell, whether he was in the body or out of the body. It is related of Xavier, that his communion with God was so intense, that when he retired for secret devotion, he was obliged to leave word with his servant to call him off at a certain hour. Sometimes his servant would go, after he had remained for hours in secret communion with God, and find him upon his knees, the Bible open before him, with his eyes fixed, and lost in deep, secret communion with God, so that his servant would be obliged to shake him, before his attention could be so drawn off from spiritual objects, as to be conscious that he was still a resident of earth. I have myself known instances, in which persons were very much in this state of mind.

Now there are many degrees of this kind of communion with God, when the scriptures are so opened up to the mind, and so understood, and its truths so apprehended, and appear to the soul so glorious and ravishing, as to swallow up in a greater or less degree, the thoughts, attention, and whole being.

9. When we are made deeply sensible of our character, past and present, we are in communion with God. Sometimes Christ has intercourse with the soul, and calls its attention to a great many things, that make it

vastly ashamed of itself. The whole soul is filled with shame, confusion and blushing. The Holy Spirit gently but thoroughly opens up to the mind, the past, and the present, and lifts up the vail of oblivion, quickens the memory, and as it were causes our whole character to stand out before our mind's eye, like a hideous and unseemly ghost. The soul in this state seeks to find the very lowest place in the whole universe. it cries out, from its deepest foundations, "O to get infinitely low before God." Sometimes persons in this state of shame, self-abasement, and unutterably self-abhorrence, seem not at all to be aware, that this is communion with God. Being in the habit of considering communion with God to consist altogether in those joys which the saints sometimes experience, they do not realize that these deeply self-abasing thoughts and views, are only the result of a close and searching interview with God. In this state of mind, they sometimes feel as if God had forsaken them, and can see it to be so infinitely reasonable, that He should, as not to be aware that they are now, perhaps, more thoroughly in the light, and really in a state of more deep and thorough communion with God than perhaps they have been at any other time.

10. We are in communion with God, when we have great confidence in Christ. The mind is sometimes filled with adoring views of the fulness there is in Christ, as its Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption. It oftentimes, when drawn into this form of communion with the Holy Spirit, whose business it is to take the things of Christ and show them to us, sees in Him such infinite fulness and security, such a world of promises, so vast in their meaning, so true, so infinitely certain is their fulfillment, that they are all yea and amen in Christ Jesus. The soul feels at such times that it is indeed complete in Him; that He is a perfect Righteousness, a perfect Sanctification, a perfect Redemption; that his grace and fulness are large enough to swallow up all thought, all finite conception; that the sins of all mankind might be merged in the ocean of his grace; that all the temptations, and wants, and woes of man, might all be swallowed up in the boundless ocean of his love and grace, and would all be only as a pebble in the midst of the great Pacific Ocean. At such times, the mind can see that in Christ dwells the fulness of the Godhead. It feels itself set upon everlasting rock, in a large place, and its goings established. It feels such vast repose in Christ, that "as the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so is the Lord Jesus Christ round about them that fear Him."

11. When we are spiritually minded, we are in communion with God. All those states of mind of which I have spoken, are forms of spiritual mindedness; but here I mean a state of spiritual mindedness in general, upon every subject; a habitual minding of spiritual things, in opposition to minding earthly things. In this state, a man, while he lives in the flesh, is, after all, much more conversant with the spiritual and heavenly world, than with the men and things of this world. He indeed walks upon the earth; but his conversation is in heaven. He is surrounded with sensible objects; but he is so little interested in them, that he scarcely heeds them. His soul has come into the light, as God is in the light. It walks, it lives in light. It is bathed in the very sun-light of heaven. Spiritual objects are stronger and more impressive realities than sensible objects. Such a soul, and such a one only, can understand the full import of Paul's language, when he said, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live. Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. And the life that I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." The soul in this state, is in a marvelous attitude. In the body, and of course able to converse with sensible objects, and yet, so in the Spirit as to be able to hold sweet, intimate, and continual communion with the Holy Spirit. It can repose its head as upon the very bosom of Christ, while its feet are standing upon the earth.

12. When we have victory over our spiritual enemies, we have communion with the Holy Spirit. The soul in communion with God can easily bid Satan to depart, and he flees. Its faith seems to have the strength of omnipotence. It seems to vanquish all its spiritual foes with the utmost ease. The mind in this state rises above spiritual enemies and the power of temptation. The waves of temptation, that would at another time overwhelm it, seem, when in communion with God, to break harmless at its feet. It stands upon a rock above them. Temptation cannot reach it, but spends its impotent strength in beating against the everlasting rock on which it stands. It feels that Christ fights all its battles for it. It has only to hide in Him, as in the cleft of a great rock, and Christ says to the winds and waves of temptation, 'Peace, be still,' and 'there is a great calm.' Now, beloved, do you know any thing about these states of mind. If you do you know what it is to have fellowship with the Father and the Son, through the Holy Ghost.

13. There is one more form of communion which I will mention, and that is, when the soul is swallowed up, and all its will and desire lost and merged in the will of God. In this state of mind, the soul feels as if it had not and could not have any will of its own, any wish or desire, that any thing in the universe should be in any respect different from what God would have it. It feels that it has and can have no interest of its own, aside from the interest and will of God. His interest, his kingdom, and his will are its all. If in any case it is uncertain what is the will of God, it feels as if it could make no other petition, in respect to that event, than "Thy will be done." It feels such an attachment to the will of God, such confidence in it, as infinitely right and benevolent, as to feel as if it never could have a wish, desire, or thought, inconsistent with the will of God, and to feel as if the least risings

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of opposition against the will of God--the least want of most entire resignation, and most entire acquiescence in his will--were more to be dreaded and more terrible than hell itself.

I must omit the remaining heads of this discourse till my next.