

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 pursuing this subject, I shall notice, according to my plan--

IV. The value and importance of Communion with God.

1. Communion with God is just as important as the true knowledge of God. No man really and truly knows any thing of God, only as God reveals Himself personally to that soul. I do not mean, that He must make to him a revelation not made in the Bible; but God must make him feel and apprehend the real meaning of the Bible. "No man can say that Jesus is the Christ, save by the Holy Ghost." No man understands any thing more than the letter of the Bible, only as he has direct and personal communion with God. The Bible is to no man a revelation any further than God makes it a revelation to him. Without this personal and direct opening up the truths of the Bible to the soul, it is only "the letter that killeth." Bible truth is to him no revelation of God. It is but blindness, darkness, and mystery. This does not seem to be understood, even by the great body of the Church--that direct communion with God, the Holy Spirit explaining his own word, and making the Bible a direct and personal revelation to him. I say, it does not seem as if the Church understood that without this, no soul has the knowledge of the true God. Why it is said, that "to know God and Jesus Christ is eternal life." But do all know God and Jesus Christ, who have the Bible? Do all who read and even study the Bible know Jesus Christ, and have they eternal life? Surely not. None know God and Christ in such a sense as to have eternal life, unless He is directly and personally revealed to them, through the word, by the Holy Spirit. What vast and ruinous mistakes are in the Church upon this subject.

2. Communion with God is just as important as true knowledge of ourselves. No man has any thorough knowledge of himself any farther than H[h]e has been revealed to himself, by his intercourse with God. The human heart is naturally such a deep pit of darkness, that we absolutely need a revelation of ourselves as much as we need a revelation of God. God is the only being in the universe that knows us. We are naturally lost, bewildered, and in almost total ignorance of our own real characters. In our long and frequent intercourse and communion with God, He takes occasion, as it were, in our protracted conversations with Him, to spread out before us our own history, to reveal us to ourselves, to command up from the deep oblivion of our own forgetfulness, the forgotten occurrences of our lives. In his light and in the light of his law alone, do we ever come to a right knowledge of ourselves. O how infinitely important is that communion with God, that reveals man to himself.

3. Communion with God is just as important as that we should be saved. No man can by any possibility be saved, without that communion with God of which I have been speaking. He cannot be saved without this communion, for the simple reason, that he cannot be saved without the knowledge of God and of himself. It is absolutely indispensable to his being sanctified and prepared for heaven.

4. Communion with God is just as important as that we should be useful to others. Here is the great secret of the inefficiency of the Christian minister--their want of that deep communion with God--that walking in the light of God--that sympathy and fellowship with God--that intercourse and fellowship with the spiritual world--that gives unction, and spirituality, and power to their preaching.

O what is a minister that does not keep up communion with God? As well might an alien, an enemy, or a rebel, be employed as an ambassador, as a minister assume that office, and attempt to treat with sinners in the name of God, without communion with Him. My ministerial brethren, will you allow me to ask you, in the kindness, sincerity and sobriety of my soul, whether you understand, in your own experience, what I have been talking about? Do you know, dearly beloved, in your own experiences, what this communion with God is? Do you live in his light? Do you walk with God? Is your conversation in heaven? Do you feel as if your souls were wafted on the Pacific Ocean of love, by the trade winds of his eternal Spirit? Do your people, when you go into the pulpit, see that your soul stands out before them as bathed in the sun light of heaven? Do your prayers, and preaching, and all your ways, impress them with the conviction, that you are a spiritually minded man--that you are risen with Christ--that your conversation is in heaven--that your heart is not set upon things on earth, but upon those things where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God?

My brother, my beloved brother, do you preach the spirit or the letter of the gospel? Are you a minister of the New or of the Old Testament? Be not offended, but let me come near, I pray you, and commune with you. Would you be useful to your fellow-men? Would you glorify God in all your ways? Are you useful to them? Does your fruit abound to the glory of God? Are you instrumental in watering their souls with the water of eternal life? Do you feed them with the bread of heaven? What is the state of the church to which you minister? What is the standard of their spirituality? Especially, how is it with those with whom you associate most, and over whom you have the most influence? Do you feed them with the "sincere milk of the word?"

If, by your daily experience, you know what that communion with God is, of which I have been speaking, I might venture to answer these questions for you; but if you do not, you are but a "blind leader of the blind." Be not displeased with this. I speak it in love, and because I deeply feel it. And if you do not know it to be true, the more deeply do I pity you, and the church to which you minister; and the more emphatically do I blame you.

5. Communion with God is as important, as it is that we should not ruin the souls of those around us. A professor of religion who has not habitual communion with God, is one of the greatest curses to the world that is in the world. He is a professor of religion, and hence the eyes of the world and of the Church are upon him. And by his profession he is publicly set forth as an example and a light to the world. He is professedly the representative of Christ. He is to be regarded as a living illustration of the truth, nature, and importance of religion. He is a "living epistle, known and read of all men." But if he has not communion with God, there is nothing in him that resembles God. Without communion with God, he is earthly, sensual, devilish; the very reverse of what he professes to be; and with his profession of religion and the spirit of the world, he is certainly one of the greatest stumbling blocks and greatest curses that can stumble and afflict the world. If this is true of any professor of religion, what must be true of a minister of Christ who does not hold habitual communion with God. I do not hesitate to say, that he is vastly worse than no minister at all; that the people had almost infinitely better be without any pastor, than to have one who has turned his back upon God, and holds little or no communion with Him from day to day. The fact is, that communion with God is the secret of all piety. It is absolutely indispensable to the usefulness of ministers and private Christians, and that without which they will certainly do almost infinitely more hurt than good in the world.

6. Communion with God is as important as that we should not be a perpetual dishonor to God. No man can honor God in his walk and conversation, without keeping up habitual communion with God. Nay, his life will be a perfect libel upon the character of God--a perfect misrepresentation of God and of his religion--just that which, of all things, is best calculated to increase and perpetuate the prejudices of the world against God.

7. Communion with God is just as important as that we should have peace of mind. Nothing so recommends the gospel to mankind, as the exhibition of that great peace of mind which they have who love the law of God. To our own happiness, to our own usefulness, to the honor of God, to the interests of the church and the world around us, our own peace of mind is of vast importance--that we should be able to pass through the storms and trials that keep the world and the great mass of the Church in a state of great fermentation and distress, in calmness and unbroken peace, is a most desirable and infinitely important thing. But this cannot be without communion with God. When storms arise, the soul must be in such a state as to take refuge in the very bosom of God; whence it can look out upon the warring elements, with the keenest composure of mind. God's heart is always calm. It is a great and infinite ocean of eternal love and peace. Infinitely serene, and calm, and pure; never disturbed by any event, nor thrown into a state of fermentation, by any or by all the occurrences of the universe.

Now nothing can calm our own minds, amidst the shocks, vicissitudes, and trials of life, but continual communion with the infinitely calm and peaceful mind of God. O when the soul has been disquieted by the occurrences of life, and takes a deep plunge into the ocean of eternal love--when it steals away from all human eyes, and holds a protracted and soul calming interview with God, how peacefully does it look about upon those occurrences that are throwing the world into fermentation around it.

8. Communion with God is just as important as we should have any grace or religion at all. No man, be his pretensions or professions what they may, has one particle of religion in exercise, any farther than he lives in communion with God. Christ says, "I am the vine, and ye are the branches." Now communion with God is just as indispensable to the life of religion in the soul, as the sap of the vine is to the life of the branches.

V. How to secure and perpetuate Communion with God.

1. It must be sought. God will be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do those things for them which they need.

The soul must desire communion with God. It must seek it. It must prize it above all price.

2. If you desire communion with God, do not neglect Him, and go into communion with other gods. Suffer no idol to have any place in your heart. Suffer nothing, of any name or nature, to draw off your heart from communion with Him. See that your heart does not, in the least degree, become divided between God and some other object of affection.

3. Be sure not to neglect his counsels, when He condescends to commune with you and give you advice. Whatever he shows to be your duty, do it at all hazards. Do not in any case, or for any consideration, confer with flesh and blood. Spare not a right hand, or a right eye; but whenever He shows you the path of duty, let it be the fixed purpose of your heart to enter upon it at once, without gainsaying or hesitation, if you face death at every step.

4. Avoid every thing which you would avoid, were He visibly present with you. Consider how you would act, and what you would do, if Christ stood visibly before, or were God to be seen by you, pouring the blaze of his searching eye upon all your ways. Now be sure, if you mean to keep up communion with God, to be as holy in heart and life, and conversation, as you would be were Christ your visible and constant companion.

5. Engage in nothing that shall in any way interrupt your communion with Him. Engage in no more business than is consistent with living and walking with God. Engage in no such kinds of business, adopt no such business principles, read no such books, have no such companions, spend no time in such a way as is inconsistent with a state of entire consecration to God.

6. Keep your whole heart open to Him. Let the door of your heart, as it were, stand open, and your heart lie all spread out continually before God. Habitually and daily lay open the secrets of your whole heart before Him. Cultivate this state of mind, and rest not short of feeling that you keep your whole mind in a state of entire transparency, before God, with nothing covered up. or in the least degree veiled or concealed from the inspection of his eye. I do not speak thus because I suppose any thing can be concealed from God; but because it is one thing for God to see through your whole being, whether you will or not, and quite another for you to come, and habitually, and voluntarily show Him your whole heart.

7. Give yourself wholly up to his guidance. Let it be the fixed purpose of your heart to spare no idol, to indulge no sin, to do nothing, say nothing, think nothing, be nothing, more nor less, than is in exact accordance with his guidance and instruction. Have no more desire or thought of varying a hair's breadth from his instruction, than you would of cutting your own throat, or even of leaping into hell.

8. Rest not, if your communion with God is interrupted but for one hour. Let the medium between your heart and God be so clear, that the least mist or thickness of atmosphere shall at once alarm your soul. Whatever you are engaged in, wherever you are, let your very first business be to inquire what it is that is causing the Sun of Righteousness to shine more dimly upon your soul. And be not satisfied until you ascertain and remove the cause. Nay, you must set your heart upon keeping in the pathway of the just, that shineth more and more until the perfect day. Better, vastly better for you, to sacrifice any worldly good, and make any earthly sacrifice, than to have your intercourse with God at all interrupted. It is better far to live in a dungeon, in communion with God, than to sit upon a throne in an earthly mind.

9. Expect much, and adequate guidance and grace. Christ says, his "grace is sufficient for thee." It is was sufficient for Paul, under the circumstances in which he was, it is sufficient for every saint. Do not be afraid then to ask and expect great things. The greater things the better. "Open your mouth wide," He says, "and I will fill it. Call unto me and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things which thou knowest not." And remember that He is able to do "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." He has told you, that "it is more blessed to give than to receive." If, therefore, you limit his giving by your unbelief, you grieve his heart. You cannot do Him a greater injury than by your unbelief, to prevent his bestowing upon you the blessing he so greatly desires to give.

10. Show Him that nothing is valued by you in comparison with communion, with Him,--Let Him see, that you will deny your appetites, your lusts, and whatever would in the least degree divert you from Himself. Do not surround yourself with idols, nor with such creature comforts as will show Him that you feel as if He were not a sufficient portion. He calls you his bride. Let your soul be satisfied with his love and wander not at all after other loves. Let Him see, that you consider Him an all-sufficient and infinitely satisfying portion, and that you desire no other.

11. Form no unnecessary attachments to any being or thing on earth. Guard your heart as you would guard the apple of your eye. "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." And remember that the Lord your God is a jealous God; you cannot have communion with Him and communion with the world at the same time.

12. Aim just as much at being wholly consecrated to Him as you aim at being religious at all. Have no thought, and make no calculation at all inconsistent with this. Form no plans, entertain no desires, and engage in nothing whatever, that shall be in the least degree inconsistent with your being as holy as He is holy.

13. Be sure, as far as possible, to avoid temptation. It would seem as if the great mass of professors of religion are either perfectly blind in regard to exposing themselves to temptation, or that they think themselves able to overcome in their own strength. I have often been struck and shocked with the state of mind in which those persons are who deny the doctrine of entire sanctification or entire consecration to God in this life. It is manifest that they expect to continue to sin, as much as they expect to live; that they make all their calculations accordingly; that they do not so much as mean to live in a state of entire consecration to God. No, not for a single day.

A brother minister said, but a short time since, in my hearing, that on being requested, some time since, by a brother minister to engage in a certain business which he feared would be a great temptation to him, he declined, upon the ground that he feared, that in so doing he should sin. His brother replied, "O what of that? we are sinning all the time. If we sin we must repent, you know."

Now I cannot tell in how many instances I have seen this state of mind developed, among professors of religion, within a few years past. And it sets in a most striking and abhorrent light, the sentiment that Christians are not to expect to be entirely sanctified until death.

Now, Christian, let me tell you, before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, what, if you are a Christian, you know to be true--that you cannot live in communion with God, only as you give yourself up to Him, in a state of entire consecration. Whenever you are overcome by sin, your communion is interrupted of course; and unless you really mean, intend, and expect to be wholly and perpetually consecrated to his service, to keep up communion with God is impossible.

14. Communion with God cannot be perpetuated, without watching unto prayer, and praying in the Holy Ghost. "Pray without ceasing, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit; watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." It is a vain dream, to expect to keep up communion with God in the neglect of frequent and protracted seasons of secret prayer. When a certain man, not long since, was asked, whether he prayed in secret, he replied, "When my friends are absent I write to them, but when they are with me I have no need to write." But I would ask such a one, when your friends are with you, do you not so much as speak to them? Communion with God, implies what is equivalent to talking with God. And more than this is implied in communion with God. It implies the most intimate and confidential interchange of views and feelings that can be conceived. Let no man dream that his communion with God will continue for any length of time, if he neglect to offer much, very much secret prayer.

REMARKS.

1. How few there be that keep up communion with God.

2. Sinning willfully against the light may cut off communion between your soul and God forever. I have known some lamentable and distressing cases, where persons by one willful sin, brought themselves into a state of protracted, if not final despair.

3. Communion with God is the secret of all ministerial usefulness. Here let me say that ministers often deceive themselves, as it respects their usefulness, through the instrumentality of pious members of their church, there may be revivals of religion in their churches, entirely independent of their instrumentality. This, I have good reason to know, is often the case. And that they are often supposed by others to be eminently useful in promoting the salvation of souls, when, as a matter of fact, they are right in the way. It is to be feared that they often think themselves in a good degree useful, because they live so far from God as not to see that they are in reality doing more hurt than good.

4. In the light of this subject, we can also see the fruit of ministerial unfruitfulness. Christ says, "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches; he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth

much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples." In this passage Christ seems expressly to teach, that if ministers are unfruitful, or if any Christian is unfruitful, it is because, as a matter of fact, he does not abide in Christ. Abiding in Christ I understand, to be the keeping up constant communion with Him. Now as these words of Christ are true, no professor of religion, and no minister, has a right to say that he abides in Christ, if he does not "bring forth much fruit."

5. From this subject we see the importance of students keeping up communion with God during the progress of their education. It is, I believe, one of the greatest, one of the most common, and ruinous errors among students to suppose that they can give up in a great measure communion with God while pursuing their college education, and that they shall naturally resume it again when they shall enter upon Theology, or at all events when they shall enter the ministry. Now, beloved young men, let me warn you against this delusion, as fatal to your future usefulness. Inquire the world around among all the fruitless ministers of your acquaintance, and you will find almost without exception that this has been the "stone of stumbling" to them. They were pressed in their studies. They gave up communion with God for communion with their authors, their teachers, and their fellow students. They became earthly, sensual, devilish. And the results of their ministry, can tell you the consequences of their folly.

6. The privileges of Christians now are greater than if they enjoyed the personal presence and preaching of Christ. Christian, what would you say, if you could have Christ for your pastor. Should you not expect to grow in grace? Would you not expect to live a life of entire consecration to God? Here what He say, "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart I will send Him unto you." "Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth, for He shall not speak of Himself, but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak; and He will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me; and He shall receive of mine, and shew it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine, therefore said I, that He shall take of mine and shew it unto you." "These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." Here then we have the express mind of Christ, that the presence of the Holy Spirit which we may always enjoy, is of more importance to us than his personal teachings. Christ could not be every where in his bodily presence. But the Holy Ghost is every where. Christ could only instruct us by his words and example were He personally present with us. But his Spirit can directly approach our minds and put us in possession at once of the whole truth. Christian brother, sister, ministerial brethren, I beseech you, understand your privilege and know that as a matter of fact, they are greater, if you will lay hold of them, than if you lived in the same house, eat at the same table, enjoyed the daily conversation, and personal preaching of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

O, then keep up constant communion with God. And may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all, Amen.