

Fellowship With the Father and With the Son.

by Edward Payson

The sermon emphasizes the importance of fellowship or communion with God and Christ, which is enjoyed by all true Christians through various means such as the works of creation, the dispensations of providence, and the word of God.

Scripture: Isaiah 64:4, John 4:23, John 14:23, Romans 8:15, 1 Corinthians 3:16, Galatians 2:20, Philippians 4:7, Hebrews 12:23, 1 John 1:3, Revelation 5:12

Topics: "Communion With God", "Fellowship With Christ"

Description

Edward Payson preaches about the intimate fellowship and communion that true Christians have with God and Jesus Christ, highlighting the similarity between the church on earth and the church in heaven in their worship and enjoyment of God. He emphasizes that even in this world, believers experience the revelation of God's glory through His Spirit. Payson explains that communion with God is a blessed reality, enjoyed by those who are reconciled to Him through Christ, and that this communion involves mutual giving and receiving through Jesus Christ as the mediator. He encourages believers to seek and maintain this communion with God in various aspects of life, such as in creation, providence, His word, public worship, and private meditation, prayer, and praise.

Transcript

"Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

1 John 1:3

, my friends, as is the difference, between the church militant on earth, and that of the Church triumphant in heaven, the employments and enjoyments of their respective members nearly resemble each other, differing not in kind, but only in degree. Is it true that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived the glorious things, which God has prepared, in the world to come, for those who love him? It is also true, that even in this world, he reveals those things by his Spirit to believers.

Do the saints above sing a news song, saying, Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive blessing, and glory, and honor, and power; for thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood? The saints on earth unite with them in heart and voice to sing the same song, though in feebler strains. Do the blessed inhabitants of heaven rejoice over every sinner that repenteth? Christians on earth, according to their measure of grace, do the same. Do the spirits of just men made perfect resemble God, behold him

face to face, and see him as he is?

So just men on earth bear the image of God, behold him in his word and works, and endure as seeing him who is invisible. Do Christ's members above reside with him, behold his glory and rejoice in his presence? His members on earth enjoy his presence, when they assemble in his name, and though with their senses they perceive him not, yet contemplating him with the eye of faith, they rejoice in him with joy unspeakable and full of glory. In a word, do the saints above enjoy a most intimate fellowship or communion with God and his Son?

Saints on earth enjoy fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. To animate and assist his fellow disciples in seeking and enjoying this glorious privilege, was, we are told, the object of St. John in writing this epistle: The things which we have seen and heard, says he, declare we unto you, that ye may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. To prove that all true Christians enjoy a kind of fellowship or communion with God in Christ, to which other men are total strangers, and to show the nature of this communion, and in what it consists, is the object of the following discourse.

I. All true Christians enjoy a kind of fellowship or communion with God and Christ, to which mankind are, in their natural state, total strangers. Though I doubt not, that there are many here present, who from their own happy experience have learned the truth of this assertion, yet there are probably still more who will ridicule and deny it. Those who are entirely unacquainted with experimental religion, and who deny the power of godliness, while they possess the form of it, will and must consider all pretences to communion with God as the effects of superstition and enthusiasm, the dreams and reveries of weak and deluded minds.

When the profane scoffer, the cold hearted infidel, the formal hypocrite, and the self righteous moralist, hear the Christian conversing on these subjects, they are ever ready to exclaim, with a mixture of indignation and contempt, Thou art beside thyself; too much false religion has made thee mad! With the utmost justice and propriety, however, may the Christian deny the charge; for he is not mad, nor enthusiastic, nor superstitious; but speaks the words of truth and soberness.

That communion with God, of which he speaks, and which constitutes his supreme felicity, is no fancied delusion, no enthusiastic dream, but a blessed reality; it is heaven begun in the soul, and is enjoyed in a greater or less degree by all without exception, who will ever be admitted into the kingdom of heaven. This is evident from innumerable passages in the word of God. The high and holy One, who inhabits eternity, condescends, as he himself informs us, to dwell with those who are of a humble and contrite spirit, to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

I will not leave you comfortless, said our blessed Saviour to his disciples, I will come unto you; yet a little while and the world seeth me no more, but ye see me, and ye shall know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. Abide in me, and I in you; for, as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me. Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me and I in him. He that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.

Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us and not unto the world? Jesus answered, if a man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. Here you see, that in a spiritual sense every true Christian

dwells in Christ, and Christ in him, and that he manifests or reveals himself to those who love him in such a manner, as he does not to the rest of the world; and that both he and the Father take up their abode in the hearts of all his true disciples.

To the same purpose the apostle says, I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. Know ye not, says he to the Corinthians, that Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates? Ye are the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwelleth in you. Because ye are children, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father; and the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirits, that we are the children of God. All true believers are also represented as having already received the earnest and first fruits of the heavenly inheritance, as rejoicing in Christ with joy unspeakable and full of glory, as walking in the light of God's countenance, as beholding the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, and as enjoying the communion of the Holy Ghost.

The inspired writers invariably use the strongest expressions which language affords, when they would show the intimate union which subsists between Christ and his church. He is the Shepherd, and they the sheep; he is the vine, and they are the branches; he is the Head, and they are his members; he is the soul, and they are the body. It would be easy to multiply passages to the same purpose, but surely, if there be any meaning in words, enough has been said to show that there is a most intimate union and communion between God and Christ and all real Christians, of which mankind, in their natural state, can form no conception.

I proceed, II. To show what this communion implies and in what it consists. The original word, which is here rendered fellowship, and which is elsewhere rendered communion, signifies that reciprocal intercourse, or communion, which subsists between beings who are partakers of the same nature, whose moral characters are similar, and who mutually know and esteem each other. It is an observation no less just, than common, that like rejoices in like, and where there is no likeness, there can be no communion.

Thus, for instance, there can be no communion between the inhabitants of the water and those of the air; for what is life to the one, is death to the other. There can be no communion, in the proper sense of the term, between mankind and the brutal world, because the former are endowed with reason, and the latter are not. It is the same in a less general sense, with respect to men of different ages, characters, and situations in life. The old cannot enjoy communion with the young in the pleasures of youth, nor the philosopher with the ignorant savage, in the pursuits of the chase.

The blind can enjoy no fellowship with those who see, in the beauties of vision, nor the deaf, with those who hear, in the harmony of sounds. Unless persons resemble each other, therefore, in a greater or less degree, there can be no mutual communication of joys and sorrows between them; they cannot enter into each other's views and feelings, clearly understand each other's language, enjoy each other's society, or form an intimate, happy, and lasting union. But, on the other hand, when persons meet who resemble each other in temper, character, age, and situation, who love and hate the same things, and pursue and avoid the same objects, they readily unite, like drops of dew when brought into contact, and appear to compose but one soul in different bodies.

Similitude, similarity of nature, of character and pursuits, must therefore be the basis of all true fellowship or communion. Hence it appears, that no creatures can enjoy communion with God and his Son, but those, who are partakers of his divine nature, who resemble him in their moral character, and who love, hate and pursue those things which are respectively the objects of his love, hatred, and pursuit. But in

none of these particulars are mankind qualified to enjoy communion with God, while in their natural, sinful state.

Once indeed, they were like God; but, at the fall, they lost his Spirit which originally dwelt in them; they lost his image and likeness, in which they were created; they lost all regard for his law, which was once written in their hearts; and became enemies to him by wicked works. Instead of pursuing his glory, they now regard only their own selfish interests; they have no desire to enjoy communion with him, nor any conception of what it implies; they do not even seek after God, but the language of their hearts is, Depart from us, for we desire not a knowledge of thy ways.

In a word, their feelings, inclinations and pursuits, are diametrically opposite to the laws and character of a holy God. Now it is too evident to require proof, that such beings cannot enjoy communion with God and Christ, for, what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? or what communion hath light with darkness? or what concord hath Christ with Belial? As well might fire and frost form an alliance; as well might heaven and hell meet and mingle, as unrenewed sinners have communion with a holy God.

But very different is the case, with respect to the true disciples of Christ. They are reconciled to God through the blood of his Son; they are renewed in the spirit of their mind, and have become new creatures. The law of God is written anew on their hearts, the lost image of God is in some measure restored to their souls, the Spirit of God returns to dwell in them, and thus again they become partakers of the divine nature. They are adopted into the number of God's children, and, according to the measure of grace given them, become holy as he is holy.

They love what he loves, hate what he hates, and pursue what he pursues. Thus their natures and characters are made in some measure to resemble his, and a foundation is laid for the restoration of that ennobling, purifying, enrapturing communion, which constitutes the supreme felicity of all true believers, both in this world, and in that which is to come. This communion consists in a mutual giving and receiving, which is constantly maintained between God and the renewed soul; and which is carried on through the medium of the Lord Jesus Christ; who being Head over all things to his church, and uniting God and man in one person, is admirably qualified to discharge the office of mediator between God and his people.

This is he, of whom Jacob's ladder was a type. By him all temporal and spiritual blessings descend from heaven to his people, and through him, all their prayers, and praises, and thanksgivings, come up for a memorial before God, being perfumed with the incense of his precious blood. In him all fullness dwells, and of this fullness all his friends receive, and grace for grace. As the sun is continually pouring forth a flood of light, and heat, and sweet attractive influences, on the planets, which harmoniously revolve around him, rejoice in his beams, and by reflection, return them again to their source, so the Sun of Righteousness, whose riches of grace and glory are unsearchable, and inexhaustible, is continually pouring forth enlightening, purifying, and life-giving influences, into the souls of believers, while they revolve around him, receive and rejoice in his beams, and return them back to him in grateful ascriptions of thanks giving and praise.

He gives himself, and all that he has to his people, engaging to be their God, their father, their friend and protector, and their exceeding great reward; and promising to love them, keep and guide them, even unto death; to watch over them as the apple of his eye, to gather them with his arm, and carry them in his bosom; to cause all things both in time and eternity to work together for their everlasting good. His people, on the other hand, humbly, gratefully and joyfully receive him, as their God and portion, and in return, give

up themselves and all that they have to him, without reserve, as his people, engaging to love him, trust in him, worship him, to spend and be spent in promoting his cause, honor, and interest in the world.

Various; and almost innumerable are the ways in which this communion with God is enjoyed by his people. We shall only mention some of the principal. 1. Christians enjoy communion with God in the works of creation. They contemplate the universe as a temple in which the most High sits enthroned; as a body, of which God is in a certain sense the soul; and as we love the bodies of our friends for the sake of the souls which inhabit them, as we are peculiarly pleased with the works of our friends; for the sake of the hands which formed them, so Christians are ineffably pleased and delighted with the great work of creation, because it was formed and is filled by their Father and their God.

Being possessed of that faith which is the evidence of things not seen, and which brings invisible things to the mind with all the force of realities, they hear and see God on every side, and enjoy him in all the works of his hands. They see his power, wisdom and goodness, embodied and personified in the beauties and glories of creation, and feel that it is he, who "Warms in the sun, refreshes in the breeze."

They can

" Look abroad through nature, to the range

Of planets, suns, and adamantine spheres,

Wheeling, unshaken, through the void immense,"

and triumphantly exclaim, 'Our Father made and preserves them all.'

In the sun they see an emblem of Christ, the Sun of righteousness; in the rainbow they behold a token of God's covenant love; in the showers and dews of heaven, they see an emblem of the refreshing influences of divine grace. In short, from the sun in the heavens, to the plant which rejoices in its influence, or the insect which is gladdened by its beams, there is nothing which is not full of instruction and consolation to the people of God; nothing which does not lead them to remember, love, and adore him. Even in the midst of conflicting elements, while the fair face of creation is deformed by storms and tempests, they can joyfully sing;

"The God who rules on high,

And thunders when he please,

Who rides upon the stormy sky,

And manages the seas;

This awful sod is ours, &c."

2. The Christian enjoys communion with God in all the dispensations of his providence. He not only acknowledges, but feels and rejoices, that the Lord reigns, that all events are at his disposal, and that not a hair can fall from his head, or a sparrow to the ground, without him. He does not rest in second causes, nor ascribe the events which befall him to lack and chance, as mankind are naturally prone to do; but refers them at once to the great First Cause, and last end of all things.

With the eye of faith, he looks up and beholds his God, his Father, and his friend, seated on the throne of the universe, working all things according to the counsel of his own will, and causing them to work together for his own glory and the good of his people. If he is chastised, he looks not at the rod, but at the hand that holds it, knows that in faithfulness and mercy he is afflicted, and that though his afflictions for the present are not joyous, they shall, in the end, produce the peaceable fruits of righteousness, and work out for him an eternal weight of glory.

When he is favored with peace and prosperity, and his cup is made to overflow with blessings, he rests not in the streams, but follows them up to the fountain of goodness, from which they flow; and every temporal mercy which he receives, is rendered doubly sweet by the consideration that it comes from his Father's hand, and is a new proof of his Father's love. Thus he enjoys communion with God, in all the common mercies and events of life; and his heart, like a fertile field, which the Lord has blessed, brings forth in return fruit to the glory of God and eternal life, while its grateful language is, What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits? 3.

The Christian enjoys communion with God in his word, read and preached. To the sinner the word of God is a sealed book. He may read, and he may hear, but he cannot understand it; for its contents are in a great measure foolishness to him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned, and he has no spiritual faculties to discern them. He understands no more of the Bible, than a man born blind would understand of an elaborate treatise on light and colors; for the god of this world has blinded his eyes, and he is justly left under the power of this spiritual blindness, because he will not sincerely seek for the enlightening influences of the divine Spirit, nor embrace Christ as a prophet to instruct him.

From those who thus proudly trust to their own wisdom, God hides the great truths of his gospel, and reveals them to those, who, like babes, desire the sincere milk of the word that they may grow thereby, and receive them with the meekness and docility of children. To such Christ opens the book and looses the seals. He also takes away the veil from their hearts, and opens their eyes, that they may behold wondrous things out of his law; and thus enables them to receive his word, not as the word of man, but as it is in truth, the word of God.

In this word he speaks to their very souls with the most astonishing majesty, authority, clearness, and energy; displays to their view the inexhaustible treasures of wisdom, and knowledge which it contains, leads them to the unfailing streams of joy and consolation which flow from his gracious promises, sets before them the glories and beauties of his own character and the wondrous plan of redeeming love. By his Spirit he applies it in such a manner to their hearts and consciences, as their several wants and circumstances may require; and thus comforts, animates, reproves, instructs, and counsels them, no less powerfully and effectually, than if he spoke to them by a voice from heaven.

He causes it to become bread to the hungry, water to the thirsty, cordials to the faint, medicines to the sick, oil and wine to the wounded, consolations to the distressed, strength to the weak, rest to the weary, and armor both offensive and defensive, to the Christian warrior, and light to those who sit in darkness. In short, the Christian finds in the word of God something suited to every want, sorrow, and temptation, and therefore like David, he esteems it more than gold, yea than much fine gold, and considers it as sweeter to his taste than honey, or the honey comb.

Again, Christians enjoy communion with God and his Son in the public exercises of religious worship. Christ has said, that where only two or three are gathered together in his name, there he is in the midst of

them; and this assurance his people find, by blessed experience, is still fulfilled. He meets with his people on these occasions to bless them, moves on their hearts by his Spirit, and thus causes them to burn with a holy flame of affection and desire; manifests himself unto them as he does not unto the world, and enables them, though they perceive him not with their bodily senses, so to contemplate him with the eye of faith, as to realize his presence with them, and to rejoice in him, with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

He also dwells in them all as one soul in different bodies, and thus draws and unites them together in the bond of peace and charity, and enables them to exercise that holy love for the brethren, that blessed union and oneness of spirit, which they ought ever to feel as members of the same body. Then they, in some measure find that petition of our Saviour answered, which he offered up in his last prayer: I pray that all who may believe on me, may be one; as thou Father art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; I in them, and they in me, that they may be made perfect in one.

Thus they enjoy, at the same time, communion with each other, with their Saviour and their God. Lastly, Christians enjoy communion with God and Christ, in the exercise of private meditation, prayer and praise. As children, they have liberty of access to God at all times; and their prayers cannot fail of an answer, because Christ ever liveth at the right hand of God to spread out their cause and make intercession for them. In his name they may come to God with more freedom and confidence than they could come to any earthly friend, and pour forth all their sorrows into his bosom, spread all their difficulties, perplexities, trials, and temptations before him, and cast all their cares upon him, knowing that he careth for them.

Wherever they are, or however employed; whether they are at home or abroad, in the house or by the way, in society or in solitude, in sickness or in health; in prosperity or adversity, they may still feel that God is with them; still enjoy the most delightful meditations on his character and perfections; still be employed in raising their hearts to him in prayer and praise. To assist and encourage them in the performance of these duties, God is sometimes pleased to pour out upon them a spirit of grace and supplications, to assist their infirmities, and make intercession for them with groanings which cannot be uttered.

He sets forth Christ crucified before them, enables them with the eye of faith to look on him whom they have pierced, and mourn, and he in bitterness for their sins; to lie at the feet of their offended, but compassionate and long suffering Saviour, and wash them with the tears of sincere contrition and repentance, while they loathe and abhor themselves for their pride, coldness, selfishness, and ingratitude, and repent as in dust and ashes. Lest, however, they should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow, God is pleased, at other times, to revive and strengthen their fainting spirits with the cordials of his love.

He sends down the spirit of adoption into their hearts, whereby they are enabled to cry, Abba, Father; and to feel all those filial affections of love, joy, trust, hope, reverence, and dependence, which it is at once their duty and their happiness to exercise toward God. By the operation of the same Spirit, he shines into their minds, to give them the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ, opens and applies to them his exceeding great and precious promises, makes them to know the great love wherewith he has loved them, and reveals to them those unutterable, inconceivable, and unheard of things which he has prepared for those who love him.

He also shines in upon their souls with the pure, dazzling, melting, overpowering beams of celestial mercy, grace, and love, displays to their enraptured view the glories and beauties of him, who is the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely, and gives them to know the heights and depths, the lengths and breadths, of that love of Christ which passeth knowledge. Thus he gives them as great foretastes of

heaven, as their feeble natures can support, fills their souls to the very brim with all the fullness of God, and makes them understand that peace of God which passes all understanding.

On the other hand, the happy Christian in these bright, enraptured moments, while he is thus basking in the beams of celestial light and splendor; forgets the world, forgets himself, forgets his existence, and is wholly absorbed in the ravishing, the ecstatic contemplation of untreated loveliness, glory, and beauty. He contemplates, he wonders, he admires, he loves, he adores. His whole soul goes forth in one intense flame of gratitude, admiration, love, and desire; and he longs to plunge himself into the boundless ocean of perfection, which opens to his view, and to be wholly swallowed up and lost in God.

With an energy and activity unknown before, he roams and ranges through this ocean of perfection and glory, of power and wisdom, of truth and justice, of light and love, where he can find neither a bottom nor a shore. His soul dilates itself beyond its ordinary capacity, and expands to receive the flood of happiness which overwhelms it. All its desires for earthly happiness are dried up, and it no longer inquires, Who will show me any good? The scanty, thirst-producing streams of worldly delight, only increase the feverish desires of the soul; the noisy, tumultuous transports, and fancied raptures of the enthusiast, the visionary, and fanatic, which proceed merely from the fervor of the passions and affections, soon die away, and leave no fruit behind; but the tide of joy which flows in upon the Christian, when he thus enjoys communion with God, is as full, as constant, as unfathomable, as the source from whence it flows.

No language can do justice to his feelings, for his happiness is unutterable; but with an emphasis, a meaning, an expression, which God only could excite, and which none but God can comprehend, he exclaims, in broken accents, My Father, my God! whom have I in heaven but thee, and what can a miserable worm of the dust desire beside thee? Thus, my friends, have I endeavored to describe the nature of that communion with God, which, in a greater or less degree, every true Christian enjoys.

But how weak, how cold, how imperfect the description, how wretchedly inadequate is earthly language, to give a just representation of heavenly things! But you, my Christian friends, who have tasted the happiness of communion with God, you know what we would say, could language be found; and to your own experience we must refer you for clearer ideas on this interesting subject. Your own hearts must supply the deficiency. IMPROVEMENT.

1. To some of you, my friends, I doubt not that the preceding observations must appear enthusiastic, foolish, and absurd. Nor is this matter of wonder or surprise; for the things of the Spirit have long been foolishness to natural men, and ever will be, till they are enlightened and taught of God. And unless you have been thus taught and enlightened, unless you have tasted, in some degree at least, the happiness of communion with God and his Son Jesus Christ, you are still strangers to true religion, still unprepared to be admitted into the heavenly mansions.

In communion with God, most of the happiness of heaven will consist, and unless you are capable of enjoying this happiness here, you must be incapable of enjoying it hereafter. You may have a name to live, but you are really dead: you have the form of godliness, but you can know nothing of the power of it, until you experimentally learn what it is to have fellowship with those whose fellowship is with the Father, and his Son Jesus Christ. 2. However foolish or enthusiastic the idea of such a kind of communion with God, as has now been described, may appear to some in this assembly, yet there are others who know, yea infallibly know, that it is a blessed reality; and that it affords such a happiness as the world cannot give nor take away.

To such we can say, Happy, yea, thrice happy is your lot. If you really enjoy communion with God, though but in the smallest degree, your names are written in heaven; a harp, a crown, and a mansion are prepared for you, and though at present, your communion with God is frequently interrupted by clouds and darkness, yet the time is fast approaching, when you shall behold with unveiled face the glory of the Lord, and be perfectly transformed into the same glorious image, and enjoy an indissoluble union, a most perfect, intimate, and uninterrupted fellowship with God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ.

Seeing then you look for such things, give all diligence to maintain a daily and hourly intercourse with the heavenly world. Let your thoughts, your affections, and your conversation, be in heaven; draw near to God, and he will draw nigh to you, and cause his face to shine upon you, that you may be saved. Like Moses, live much upon the mount with God in prayer; and then like him, you will cause your light to shine before others, and adorn the doctrine of God your Saviour. We naturally copy the manners, learn the language, and imitate the example, of those with whom we associate, and if we have our fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, we shall gradually become conformed to their image, and the world will lose its power, offering its temptations, and spreading its snares in vain, for those who have been renewed in the spirit of their mind.

Consider then, my friends, the infinite, astonishing condescension of Jehovah; consider what manner of love he has bestowed upon you, that you should be called the sons of God, and be admitted to friendship and communion with him; and let this incite you to make every possible exertion to glorify him by bringing forth fruit unto God. And let not those who are hungering and thirsting after communion with God, but who enjoy it only imperfectly or interruptedly, suddenly conclude that they know nothing of religion.

The path of the just is as the rising light, faint and almost indistinguishable at first, but gradually advancing to the perfect day. Christ will not despise the day of small things. He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. Be of good courage therefore, wait on the Lord, and he shall strengthen thine heart. Finally, whatever our character and pursuits may have hitherto been, let us all, from this moment, resolve to make God our chief good, and seek communion with him as our only happiness.

Without this there is indeed no happiness, either in this world, or that which is to come. Without this, man is no better than the brutes that perish; for it is this alone which dignifies, exalts, and purifies his nature. This is the happiness for which he was made. This is the happiness which was prepared for him. O then, seek this happiness, and no longer exhibit the preposterous sight of rational, immortal beings cleaving to ashes, earth, and dust; chasing eagerly bubbles which elude their pursuit, and burst ere they can grasp them, while they neglect heavenly and divine things, and leave their never dying souls to perish.

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