OF COMMUNION WITH GOD

JOHN OWEN

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John Owen

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About this Book

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A masterwork of Puritan devotion, this treatise unfolds the **distinct communion** believers enjoy with each Person of the Trinity — with the **Father in love**, the **Son in grace**, and the **Holy Spirit in consolation**. Drawing on 1 John 1:3 and the Song of Songs, Owen demonstrates that genuine fellowship with the triune God is the heart of Christian experience. Three parts trace the grounds, nature, and practical pursuit of this holy communion, with two celebrated digressions meditating on the **excellencies of Christ**.

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Contents

Title Page 6
To the Reader 7
Part 1, Chapter 1: The Grace of Christ — General Desc... 8
Part 1, Chapter 2: The Grace of Christ's Person 14
Part 1, Chapter 3: The Things of Our Communion with... 25
Part 1, Chapter 4: Inferences on Communion with the 44
Part 2, Chapter 1: The Grace of Christ — General Desc... 55
Part 2, Chapter 2: The Grace of Christ's Person 64
Part 2, Chapter 3: The Things of Our Communion wit... 75
Digression 1: The Excellencies of Christ — Song of Son... 83
Digression 2: Further Meditation on Christ's Excellen... 111
Part 2, Chapter 4: General Consequences of the Holy 159
Part 2, Chapter 5: Observations on the Spirit — Conte... 179
Part 2, Chapter 6: Of Particular Communion with the 207
Part 2, Chapter 7: General Ways of the Saints Acting i... 228
Part 2, Chapter 8: How Saints Hold Communion with 236
Part 2, Chapter 9: Communion with Christ in Holiness 271
Part 2, Chapter 10: Communion with Christ in Privile... 284
Part 3: Communion with the Holy Spirit 307
Part 3, Chapter 1: Of Communion with the Holy Spirit 308
Part 3, Chapter 2: The Actings of the Holy Spirit — He... 325

Part 3, Chapter 3: The Things of Our Communion wit... 328
Part 3, Chapter 4: General Consequences of the Holy ... 349
Part 3, Chapter 5: Observations on the Spirit — Conte... 355
Part 3, Chapter 6: Of Particular Communion with the ... 362
Part 3, Chapter 7: General Ways of the Saints Acting i... 370
Part 3, Chapter 8: Particular Directions for Communi... 377

Title Page

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Of Communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, each person distinctly, in love, grace, and consolation. Or, the saints' fellowship with the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, unfolded. By John Owen, Doctor in Divinity, a servant of Jesus Christ in the work of the gospel.

God is love.

1 John 4:8.

Tell me, O you whom my soul loves, where you feed.

Song of Songs 1:7.

Make haste, my beloved.

Song of Songs 8:14.

Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby you are sealed to the day of redemption.

Ephesians 4:30.

Now there are diversities of gifts but the same Spirit, and there are differences of administrations but the same Lord, and there are diversities of operations but it is the same God.

1 Corinthians 12:4, 5, 6.

Oxford: Printed by A. Lichfield, Printer to the University, for Tho. Robinson, 1657.

To the Reader

What you are about to read was originally prepared and delivered in another setting. The author had no intention of publishing it. Repeated requests, along with a sense of particular blessing on one portion of it, persuaded him to make it public. If the Lord is pleased to make it useful to you in His way, the purpose of its publication is fulfilled. To help you know what to expect, here is a brief overview. This work contains a discussion of our communion with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — the grounds of that communion and the ways to deepen it. There is a section that digresses from the main subject, and it is clearly marked so that readers who have no interest in that particular controversy may skip over it. For an experienced Christian — someone who knows what it means to have the light of God's face shining on them, to hold God as their portion, to live in the felt embrace of the Son of God, who knows the joy unspeakable and full of glory that comes through faith, the consolations and visits of God, the inward breathings of the Holy Spirit — such a reader needs little encouragement to read a work like this. To others, it will seem empty and unsatisfying. Let them know that the things of God are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:14). Reader, there is truly nothing in

this world worth your time and heart except Jesus Christ. Whatever you do, make sure He is yours. Let Him be your life, your righteousness, your portion.

John Owen, Christ Church College, Oxford, July 10, 1657.

Part 1, Chapter 1: The Grace of Christ — General Description

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That the saints have communion with God. 1 John 1:3 considered to that purpose. Somewhat of the nature of communion in general.

In his first epistle, chapter 1, verse 3, the apostle assures his readers that the fellowship of believers is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. He does this with an unusual kind of emphasis — the kind that carries the force of a solemn declaration — which is why we translate it as, "Truly our fellowship," and so on.

The outward appearance and condition of the saints in those days was lowly and contemptible. Their leaders were regarded as the filth of the world and the scum of all things. So when the apostle invited others to fellowship with them and to share in the precious things they enjoyed, his invitation was open to many objections. What benefit is there in joining them? Is it anything more than becoming a partner in troubles, reproaches, contempt, and every kind of suffering? To head off these objections, the apostle tells his readers — with real earnestness — that despite all the disadvantages their fellowship appeared to have from a worldly point

of view, it was in truth very honorable, glorious, and worth pursuing, because of those with whom it was held. For truly, he says, our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

Since the apostle asserts this so earnestly and directly, we can confidently follow him with our own affirmation: the saints of God have communion with Him. It is a holy and spiritual communion, as will be explained. How this communion is distinct in relation to the Father and the Son will be fully worked out in what follows.

By nature, since the entrance of sin, no one has any communion with God. He is light; we are darkness — and what fellowship does light have with darkness? He is life; we are dead. He is love; we are enmity — and what agreement can exist between us? People in that condition have neither Christ, nor hope, nor God in the world (Ephesians 2:12), being cut off from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them (Ephesians 4:18). Two people cannot walk together unless they are in agreement (Amos 3:3). As long as this distance exists between God and man, there is no walking together in any fellowship or communion. Our original relationship with God was so completely lost through sin that there was no possibility of recovery left in us. We had deprived ourselves of all power to return, and God had not yet revealed any way of access to Himself, or that He could in any way be approached by sinners in peace. Nothing in all of creation, nothing in any of the attributes He had revealed, could give the slightest hint of such a possibility.

The revelation of grace and pardoning mercy — which is the only doorway into this communion — has been entrusted to none other than the One in whom it dwells, by whom it was purchased, through whom it is given out, and who reveals it from the bosom of the Father. This is why this communion and fellowship with God is

not explicitly mentioned in the Old Testament. The reality itself is there, but the clear understanding of it, and the bold confidence of faith in it, comes to light in the Gospel and through the Spirit who works through it. By that Spirit we have this freedom (2 Corinthians 3:17-18). Abraham was the friend of God (Isaiah 41:8). David was a man after His own heart. Enoch walked with Him (Genesis 5:24). All of them enjoyed this communion for what it essentially was — but the way into the holiest place had not yet been fully opened while the first tabernacle was still standing (Hebrews 9:8). Though they had communion with God, they did not yet have boldness and confidence in that communion. That confidence comes after our High Priest entered the Most Holy Place (Hebrews 4:16; 10:9). A veil still lay over them, hindering their free and open access to God (2 Corinthians 3:15-16). But now in Christ we have boldness and confident access to God (Ephesians 3:12). This boldness was unknown to the saints of the old covenant. Through Jesus Christ alone — in terms of both its existence and its full revelation — is this distance removed. He has opened for us a new and living way (the old being entirely closed) through the veil, that is, His flesh (Hebrews 10:20), and through Him we have access by one Spirit to the Father (Ephesians 2:18). We who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ, for He is our peace (Ephesians 2:13-14). More will be said about this foundation of all our communion with God. On this new footing, and by this new and living way, sinners are admitted into communion with God and enjoy fellowship with Him. Truly, for sinners to have fellowship with the infinitely holy God is a staggering grace. To say a little about it in general: communion involves persons and things. Sharing in anything together — whether good or evil, duty or en-

joyment, nature or action — creates this kind of bond between those who share it. A common share in the same nature gives all people a fellowship in that nature. Of the elect it is said (Hebrews 2:14) that these children shared in flesh and blood — the same human nature as the rest of mankind — and so Christ also entered into that same fellowship. There is also a communion in condition or circumstance, whether good or evil, whether internal and spiritual — such as the fellowship of the saints with one another — or in outward things. So it was with Christ and the two criminals: all three were under the same sentence to the cross (Luke 23:40), companions in that suffering. They shared in that terrible condition to which they had been condemned. One of them asked for, and received, a share in the blessed condition our Savior was about to enter. There is also communion in actions, whether good or evil. In good actions, this is the fellowship in the Gospel — the sharing in the worship of God that has been appointed in the Gospel — which the saints enjoy (Philippians 1:5), and which David rejoiced in so greatly in Psalm 42:4. In evil, there was the fellowship in which Simeon and Levi were brothers (Genesis 49:5): they shared in that cruel act of revenge and murder. Our communion with God does not fit neatly into any one of these categories; some it explicitly excludes. It cannot be a natural fellowship. It must be willing and by mutual agreement. It cannot be merely a shared condition; it must involve action. And it cannot be joint action directed at a third party, but rather a mutual exchange between the two parties themselves. The enormous gap between God and man led one great philosopher to conclude that friendship between them was impossible. He could allow for some degree of difference in persons who hold a friendship, though he could not determine exactly

how much — but the distance between God and man, in his view, left no room for it at all. Another philosopher acknowledged a kind of fellowship between God and man, but had in mind nothing more than the general workings of providence. Some others reached for higher language, but did not understand what they were saying. This knowledge is hidden in Christ, as will be shown. It is beyond what fallen and sinful nature can reach. Nature, in its corruption, can only arrive at terror and the dread of death in God's presence. But we have, as was said, a new foundation and a new disclosure of this privilege.

Communion, then, is the mutual sharing of good things — things in which both parties take delight — and it rests on some union between them. This was true of Jonathan and David: their souls were bound to one another (1 Samuel 20:17) in love. The union of love was the foundation, and from it they genuinely shared love's fruit with each other. In spiritual matters, this is all the more profound. Those who enjoy this communion have the most excellent union as its foundation, and the things they mutually share are the most precious and glorious of all.

I have spoken at length elsewhere about the union that is the foundation of all our communion with God, and have nothing further to add here.

Our communion with God, then, consists in His communicating Himself to us, and our returning to Him what He requires and accepts — all flowing from the union we have with Him in Jesus Christ. It takes two forms. First, there is perfect and complete communion — the full enjoyment of His glory and the total giving over of ourselves to Him, resting in Him as our ultimate end, which we will experience when we see Him as He is. Second, there

is initial and incomplete communion — the firstfruits and early light of that perfection, which we have here in grace. It is this second kind that I will be addressing.

We are speaking, then, about that mutual communication — in a most holy and spiritual manner — which takes place between God and His saints while they walk together in a covenant of peace sealed in the blood of Jesus. This is what we intend to treat, God willing. In the meantime, we pray to the God and Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ — who, out of the riches of His grace, has brought us from a state of enmity into a condition of communion and fellowship with Himself — that both the writer and the readers of these words of mercy may taste something of His sweetness and excellence in this, and be stirred up to long more deeply for the fullness of His salvation and the eternal enjoyment of Him in glory.

Part 1, Chapter 2: The Grace of Christ's Person

That the saints have this communion distinctly with the Father, Son, and Spirit. 1 John 5:7 opened to this purpose. Also 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 and Ephesians 2:18. Father and Son mentioned jointly in this communion. The Father solely; the Son also; and the Holy Spirit singly. The saints' respective regard in all worship to each person manifested. Faith in the Father, John 5:9-10, and love toward him, 1 John 2:15. Malachi 1:6. So is prayer and praise. It is so likewise with the Son, John 14:1. Of our communion with the Holy Spirit. The truth further confirmed.

Chapter one established that the saints have communion with God, and explained what communion is in general. Next comes the question of how this communion is carried on and what it consists of. In terms of the distinct persons of the Godhead with whom the saints have fellowship, this communion is either distinct and particular, or shared and exercised jointly. The first thing to establish is that the saints have distinct communion with the Father, with the Son, and with the Holy Spirit — and what each person's particular role in that distinct communion is.

In 1 John 5:7, the apostle tells us that there are three who bear witness in heaven — the Father, the Word, and the Spirit. They are in heaven and bear witness to us. What do they bear witness to? To the sonship of Christ and the salvation of believers in His blood. How do they bear witness? As three — as three distinct witnesses. When God bears witness concerning our salvation, we are bound to receive His testimony, and to receive it in the same way He gives it. He gives it distinctly: the Father bears witness, the Son bears witness, and the Holy Spirit bears witness — for they are three distinct witnesses. We therefore receive their testimonies separately, and in doing so we have communion with each of them individually. What their distinct witnessing consists of will be explained later.

In 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, speaking of the distribution of gifts and graces to the saints, the apostle assigns them distinctly — in terms of their source — to the distinct persons. There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit — the one Holy Spirit (verse 12). And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord — the Lord Jesus (verse 3). And there are diversities of operations, but the same God — the Father (Ephesians 4:6). Graces and gifts are both given and received in this threefold way.

This same distinction applies not only to the outpouring of grace from God and the Spirit upon us, but also to all our approaches to God. Through Christ we have access by one Spirit to the Father (Ephesians 2:18). Our access to God — in which we have communion with Him — is through Christ, in the Spirit, and to the Father. The persons are here understood as each playing a distinct role in carrying out the plan of God's will as revealed in the Gospel.

Sometimes only the Father and the Son are explicitly mentioned. 1 John 1:3: our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. The word 'and' here both distinguishes and unites. Also John 14:23: if a man loves Me, he will keep My words, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. It is in this communion that the Father and the Son make their home in the soul.

Sometimes only the Son is spoken of in this regard. 1 Corinthians 1:9: God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord. And Revelation 3:20: if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will eat with him, and he with Me — which will be discussed later.

Sometimes the Spirit alone is mentioned. 2 Corinthians 13:14: the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. The distinct communion of the saints with the Father, Son, and Spirit is quite clear in Scripture, but it can be demonstrated further. One caution must be noted beforehand: everything argued in what follows is to be understood in light of the explanation given at the start of the next chapter.

The means by which the saints, in Christ, enjoy communion with God are all the holy and spiritual movements of their souls in those graces and through those ways that make up both the moral and instituted worship of God. Faith, love, trust, joy, and the like are the natural or moral worship of God through which those who possess them have communion with Him. These are either directed immediately toward God with no outward form or means, or they are expressed further in solemn prayer and praise accord-

ing to the way He has appointed. Scripture distinctly assigns all of these to the Father, Son, and Spirit — showing that the saints, in all of their worship, whether purely moral or clothed in instituted forms, direct their attention to each person respectively. I will demonstrate this further with particular examples.

Regarding the Father: faith, love, obedience, and the like are peculiarly and distinctly directed by the saints to Him, and He reveals Himself distinctly through these means as acting toward them in ways that are meant to draw those responses out of them. He gives testimony to His Son and bears witness of Him (1 John 5:9): this is the testimony of God, which He has testified of His Son. In His bearing of witness, He presents Himself as an object of belief. When He gives testimony — which He does as the Father, because He does it concerning the Son — we are to receive it by faith. This is what verse 10 says: he who believes on the Son of God has the witness in himself. To believe on the Son of God in this passage means to receive the Lord Christ as the Son — the Son given to us for all the ends of the Father's love — on the basis of the Father's testimony. In doing so, faith is immediately directed to the Father. This is confirmed in the next words: he who does not believe God — that is, the Father, who bears witness to the Son — makes Him a liar. Our Savior says (John 14:1): 'You believe in God' — that is, the Father as such — 'believe also in Me.' God as the first truth, upon whose authority all divine faith is ultimately grounded, is not to be understood as referring peculiarly to any one person but as encompassing the whole Deity, which is undividedly the primary object of faith. But in this particular context we are speaking

of the testimony and authority of the Father as such, upon which faith is distinctly fixed on Him. This must be so, for otherwise the Son could not add, 'Believe also in Me.'

The same is said of love. 1 John 2:15: if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. This means the love we bear to Him, not the love we receive from Him. The Father is placed here as the object of our love, in contrast to the world that takes up our affections. The Father here refers to the object of love, not its cause. And this love of Him as Father is what He calls His honor (Malachi 1:6).

Furthermore, these graces as expressed in prayer and praise — as clothed with instituted worship — are peculiarly directed to Him. We call on the Father (1 Peter 1:17). Ephesians 3:14-15: for this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named. Bowing the knee encompasses the whole worship of God, both the moral worship of universal obedience and the particular forms of worship He has appointed. Isaiah 45:23: to Me, says the Lord, every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall swear. He explains in verses 24-25 that this consists in people acknowledging Him for righteousness and strength. At times this phrase seems to embrace the orderly subjection of all creation to His sovereignty. In the apostle's passage, however, it has a much narrower meaning and is simply a figurative expression for prayer, drawn from the most expressive bodily posture used in that duty. He makes this clearer in verses 16-17, laying out at length what he had in mind and what his thoughts were occupied with in that bowing of his knees. The inner workings of the Spirit of grace in that duty are distinctly directed to the Father as such — as the source of the Deity and of all good

things in Christ, as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. So the same apostle, in another place, expressly joins and yet expressly distinguishes the Father and the Son in directing his prayers: God Himself, even our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ direct our way to you (1 Thessalonians 3:11). You also have a precedent for thanksgiving: blessed be the Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and so on (Ephesians 1:3-4). I will not add the many other passages where the various elements of divine worship — worship that belongs to God alone and cannot be given to any creature without idolatry — are distinctly directed to the person of the Father.

The same is true with respect to the Son. John 14:1: 'You believe in God,' says Christ, 'believe also in Me.' Believe also in Me — exercise divine, supernatural faith on Me — that same faith by which you believe in God, that is, the Father. There is a believing that Christ is the Son of God and the Savior of the world. This is what Jesus so solemnly warned the Pharisees about: if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins (John 8:24). In this sense, faith is not immediately fixed on the Son, but is simply an acknowledgment that He — the Christ — is the Son, based on the Father's testimony about Him. But there is also a believing on Him, called believing on the name of the Son of God (1 John 5:13; John 9:36) — the distinct fixing of faith, trust, and confidence on the Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God, as the Son of God — and this is emphasized throughout. John 3:16: God — that is, the Father — so loved the world that whoever believes on Him — that is, the Son — should not perish. The Son, who is given by the Father, is believed on. He who believes on Him is not condemned (verse 18). He who believes on the Son has eternal life (verse 36). This is the

work of God — that you believe on Him whom He has sent (John 6:29, 40; 1 John 5:10). The whole is grounded in John 5:23: all should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father; he who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. I have treated the worship and honor of the Son at length elsewhere and will not repeat it here. For love, I will only add that solemn apostolic benediction: grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity (Ephesians 6:24) — that is, with the love of divine worship, which is the only pure and uncorrupted love of the Lord Jesus.

Moreover, that faith, hope, and love — expressed in all manner of obedience and appointed worship — are distinctly due from the saints to the Son is abundantly shown in that solemn doxology in Revelation 1:5-6: to Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to God and His Father — to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever, Amen. This is set forth with even greater glory in chapter 5:8: the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one of them having harps and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And in verses 13-14: every creature in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and in the sea — and everything in them — I heard saying, blessing, honor, glory, and power be to Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb forever and ever. The Father and the Son — He who sits on the throne and the Lamb — are presented jointly and yet distinctly as the full and proper object of all divine worship and honor forever. So also Stephen, in his solemn dying prayer, directs his faith and hope distinctly to the Son: Lord Jesus, receive my spirit; Lord, do not hold this sin against them (Acts 7:59-60). The apostle

makes this worship of the Lord Jesus the defining mark of the saints: with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours (1 Corinthians 1:2) — that is, with all the saints of God. And invocation, broadly understood, encompasses the whole worship of God. This worship, then, is the right of our Mediator — though as God, as the Son, not merely as Mediator.

The same is true with respect to the Holy Spirit of grace. The great sin of unbelief is consistently described as opposition to and resistance of the Holy Spirit. There is also specific mention of the love of the Spirit (Romans 15:13). The apostle also directs his prayer to the Spirit in that solemn benediction: the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you (2 Corinthians 13:14). All such benedictions are, at their core, prayers. The Spirit is likewise entitled to all instituted worship, as seen in the command to administer baptism in His name (Matthew 28:18). More will be said about these things later.

The sum of everything said so far is this: there is no grace by which our souls go out to God, no act of divine worship offered to Him, no duty or obedience performed, that is not distinctly directed to the Father, Son, and Spirit. Through these means and others like them we hold communion with God — and therefore we have that communion distinctly, as has been described.

This can be seen further when we consider how distinctly the persons of the Godhead are revealed to act in communicating those good things in which the saints have communion with God. Just as all the soul's spiritual ascent toward God is assigned to the persons respectively, so all the inward receiving of what God com-

municates is presented in a way that points to distinct sources — not distinct sources of being in themselves, but of distinct ways of working toward us. This is shown in two ways.

First, when the same thing is assigned jointly and yet distinctly to all three persons at once. So grace and peace are given in Revelation 1:4-5: grace be to you and peace from Him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits before His throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, and so on. The seven Spirits before the throne are the Holy Spirit of God, understood as the perfect source of every perfect gift and dispensation. All three are mentioned together, and yet each is named distinctly as a source of grace and peace to the saints.

Second, when the same thing is separately attributed to each person individually. There is no gracious influence from above, no outpouring of light, life, love, or grace into our hearts, that does not come through this kind of dispensation. I will give just one example — one that is comprehensive and may be thought to include all the others — and that is teaching. The teaching of God is the real communication of every particular gift He sends down to the saints and in which they participate. That promise — 'they shall all be taught of God' — contains within itself the entire mystery of grace as it is actually dispensed to us, as far as we truly receive it. This teaching is assigned to each person.

First, to the Father. The fulfillment of that promise is peculiarly referred to Him. John 6:45: it is written in the Prophets, 'And they shall all be taught of God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me. This teaching — by which we are transferred from death to life, brought to Christ, to a share in His life and love — comes from the Father. We hear Him, we learn

from Him, He brings us into union and communion with the Lord Jesus. This is His drawing us, His begetting us anew of His own will by His own Spirit.

Second, to the Son. The Father proclaims Him from heaven as the great Teacher in that solemn command to hear Him, which came once more from the excellent glory: 'This is My beloved Son; hear Him.' The whole of His prophetic office, and a large part of His kingly office, consists in this teaching. It is in this teaching that He is said to draw people to Himself, just as the Father does through His teaching (John 12:32) — and He does this with such power that the dead hear His voice and live. The teaching of the Son is life-giving, Spirit-breathing teaching: an effective outpouring of light by which He shines into darkness; a communication of life that raises the dead; an opening of blind eyes and a transformation of hard hearts; a pouring out of the Spirit with all His fruits. Therefore He claims it as His own privilege to be the sole Teacher: one is your Teacher, who is Christ (Matthew 23:10).

Third, consider the Spirit. John 14:26 says the Comforter will teach you all things. And the anointing you have received remains in you, so you do not need anyone else to teach you. Instead, that same anointing teaches you about all things. It is truth and not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will remain in Him (1 John 2:27). This teaching anointing, which is not only true but truth itself, is the Holy Spirit of God alone. He also teaches us in this way, since He was given to us so that we might understand the things God has freely given us (1 Corinthians 2:12). I have chosen this particular example because, as I mentioned, it is comprehensive and includes within itself most of the specific details that could be listed, such as giving life, preserving, and similar works.

This further confirms the truth we are demonstrating: since there is such a distinct sharing of grace from the individual persons of the Godhead, believers must have distinct communion with each of them.

It only remains to briefly explain where this distinction lies and what its basis is. The Father acts by way of original authority, the Son by way of distributing from a treasury He purchased, and the Holy Spirit by way of immediate power and effectiveness.

The Father communicates all grace by way of original authority. He gives life to whoever He chooses (John 5:21). By His own will He brought us to new life (James 1:18). The power to give life, in terms of original authority, belongs to the Father in a supreme way. Therefore, when Christ sends the life-giving Spirit, He is said to do it from the Father, or the Father Himself is said to do it (John 14:26; John 15:26).

The Son communicates by distributing from a treasury He purchased. From His fullness we have all received grace upon grace (John 1:16). It pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell in Him (Colossians 1:19). Isaiah 53:10-11 says: when You make His soul an offering for sin, He will prolong His days, and the purpose of the Lord will succeed in His hand. By His knowledge My righteous Servant will justify many, for He will bear their sins. Along with this fullness, He also has the authority to distribute it (John 5:25-26; Matthew 28:18).

The Spirit does it by way of immediate power. Romans 8:11 says: if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. All three per-

sons are included here, each with their distinct role in giving us life. Here is the Father's authoritative life-giving work: He raised Christ from the dead, and He will give you life. Here is the Son's mediating life-giving work: it is accomplished through the death of Christ. And here is the Spirit's immediate power: He will do it through the Spirit who dwells in you. In this way, the distinct communion we have been discussing is both proved and demonstrated.

Part 1, Chapter 3: The Things of Our Communion with the Holy Spirit

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Of the peculiar and distinct communion which the saints have with the Father. Observations for clearing the whole are given first. Our peculiar communion with the Father is in love. 1 John 4:7-8, 2 Corinthians 13:13, John 16:26-27, Romans 5:5, John 3:16, John 14:23, Titus 3:4, opened to this purpose. What is required of believers to hold communion with the Father in love. His love received by faith. Returns of love to Him. God's love to us and ours to Him — wherein they agree and wherein they differ.

Having proved that there is a distinct communion with the Father, Son, and Spirit as described, it remains to clarify further with specific examples what it is in which the saints peculiarly hold communion with each person. I will do this after first setting out several observations that must be understood in order to clarify what has already been said.

First observation: when I say something is particular to our distinct communion with any one person, I am not excluding the other persons from communion with the soul in that same thing.

What I mean is this: in a primary, immediate, and eminent sense, we hold communion with one particular person in a given thing, and through that, secondarily and by way of consequence, with the others. The person as such — the individual person of any one of the three — is not the primary object of divine worship in isolation, but only as identified with the nature or essence of God. Now the works of God that are directed outward — commonly called the Trinity's outward works — are either entirely common to all three, or they are common in their actions but distinguished in the way each person contributes. So creation is appropriated to the Father, redemption to the Son — and it is in this sense that we speak of these things.

Second observation: in every act of communion we hold with any one person, there is a concurrent working of the whole Godhead. By whatever act we hold communion with any person, every person contributes to making that act possible. Take faith as an example. It is given to us by the Father — it is not of ourselves; it is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8). It is the Father who reveals the Gospel and Christ in it (Matthew 11:25). It is purchased for us by the Son — it is granted to you for Christ's sake to believe in Him (Philippians 1:29). In Him we are blessed with every spiritual blessing (Ephesians 1:3). And it is worked in us by the Spirit (Ephesians 1:19-20; Romans 8:11).

Third observation: when I assign a particular thing as the medium of communion with any one person, I am not saying this is the only way of communion, but only giving a clear and notable example to support and illustrate the general claim made earlier. In every grace and every duty, we have communion with God in

the way described. In every way we are made partakers of the divine nature, there is communication and receiving between God and us. That is how near we are to Him in Christ.

Fourth observation: in asserting this distinct communion — which simply reflects the order of God's grace as He has been pleased to reveal it in the Gospel — I do not in the least intend to confine all communion with God within these particular categories. His ways are exceedingly broad, and there is no end to their fullness. Nor do I intend to diminish that holy fellowship we have with the whole Godhead in our walking before Him in covenant obedience, which I will also address later.

With those few observations in place, I now come to declare what it is in which the saints have peculiar and eminent communion with the Father. It is love — free, undeserved, and eternal love. This the Father fixes peculiarly upon the saints; this is what they are to look for in Him, to receive from Him, and to return to Him in ways that delight Him. This is the great discovery of the Gospel. For apart from this, the Father — as the fountain of the Godhead — is known only as full of wrath, anger, and indignation against sin. Human beings can form no other thought of Him (Romans 1:18; Isaiah 33:15-16; Habakkuk 1:13). But now He is revealed in a uniquely new way as love, as full of love toward us — and making this known is the particular work of the Gospel (Titus 3:4).

1 John 4:8: God is love. That 'God' here refers personally to the Father, not to the divine essence in general, is clear from verse 9, where He is distinguished from His only begotten Son whom He sends into the world. So the apostle says: the Father is love — meaning not only that He is of an infinitely gracious, tender, com-

passionate, and loving nature, as He proclaimed of Himself (Exodus 34:6-7), but also that He eminently and particularly makes Himself known to us through free love. The apostle unpacks this in the following verses. This is love (verse 9) — this is what I want you to see in Him: that He pours out love toward you by sending His only begotten Son into the world, so that we might live through Him. So also verse 10: He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. That this is to be seen particularly in Him is plainly declared by the Holy Spirit in making it the prior cause of Christ's sending and every mercy that flows from it. This love in itself precedes the purchase made by Christ, though all its fruit is brought to us through that purchase alone (Ephesians 1:4-6).

Second, in the apostle's solemn parting benediction in 2 Corinthians 13:13 — the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you — where he assigns distinct things to the distinct persons, it is love that he peculiarly gives to the Father. The fellowship of the Spirit is mentioned alongside the grace of Christ and the love of God because it is through the Spirit alone that we have fellowship with Christ in grace and with the Father in love — though we also have distinct fellowship with the Spirit, as will be explained.

Third, in John 16:26-27 our Savior says, "I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf, for the Father Himself loves you." But how can our Savior say, "I do not say that I will ask the Father for you," when He plainly says in chapter 14:16, "I will ask the Father for you"? The disciples, after hearing all the gracious words, comforting and faithful promises of their Master, and His deeply moving revelations of His heart toward them, were fully

convinced of His dear and tender affection for them. They were also sure of His continued care and kindness, knowing He would not forget them when He physically left them. But all their concern was about the Father — how they would be accepted by Him, and what regard He had for them. Our Savior responds: do not worry about that. Do not place on Me the burden of winning the Father's love for you. Instead, know that this is His own special attitude toward you — He Himself loves you. It is true that I will ask the Father to send you the Spirit, the Comforter, and with Him all the gracious fruits of His love. Yet when it comes to love itself — free love, eternal love — there is no need for any intercession. The Father Himself loves you in a supreme way. Be assured of this, so that you may hold communion with Him in it and be troubled about it no longer. Just as your greatest worry is about the Father's love, so there is no way you can trouble or burden Him more than by your lack of trust in refusing to believe it. This is always the case when sincere love is questioned.

Fourth, the apostle teaches the same thing in Romans 5:5: the love of God is poured out in your hearts by the Holy Spirit. The God whose love this is, is clearly distinguished from the Holy Spirit who pours out that love. In verse 8, He is also distinguished from the Son, since it is from this love that the Son is sent. What does Paul attribute to the Father? Love — which He displays to us in such a remarkable and outstanding way that we may recognize it and embrace Him in it. Not only is there very frequent specific mention of the love of God where the Father is clearly intended, but He is also called the God of love (2 Corinthians 13:11) and is

said to be love. So whoever wants to know Him (1 John 4:8) or dwell in Him through fellowship and communion (verse 16) must do so recognizing that He is love.

Fifth, there are two kinds of divine love — a love of good pleasure and purpose, and a love of friendship and approval — and both are specifically assigned to the Father in a supreme way.

John 3:16: God so loved the world that He gave — that is, with the love of His purpose and good pleasure, His determined will to do good. This is specifically attributed to Him, presented as the cause and source of sending His Son. The same is seen in Romans 9:11-12, Ephesians 1:4-5, 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14, and 1 John 4:8-9.

John 14:23 mentions the other kind of love we are discussing. "If anyone loves Me," says Christ, "he will keep My words, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him." The love of friendship and approval is here specifically attributed to the Father. Christ says: We will come, both Father and Son, to such a person and dwell with him — that is, by the Spirit. But He wants us to notice that when it comes to love, the Father holds a special priority: "My Father will love him."

Just as this love should be especially recognized in the Father, it should also be seen as the fountain of all the gracious blessings that follow. Christians often live with deeply troubled hearts about the Father's thoughts toward them. They are well convinced of the Lord Christ and His goodwill, but the difficulty lies in knowing whether the Father accepts them. "Show us the Father, and it will be enough for us" (John 14:8). His love should be viewed as the fountain from which all other blessings flow. The apostle describes

it this way in Titus 3:4: "After the kindness and love of God our Savior toward mankind appeared." He is speaking of the Father, because verse 6 tells us that He pours this out on us through Jesus Christ our Savior. And this love is the turning point on which the great transformation of believers depends. Verse 3 says: we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various desires and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. Where does our recovery come from, then? It all rises from this love of God, flowing out through the means described there. To assure us of His love, there is nothing in the world with a loving and tender nature that God has not compared Himself to — a father, a mother, a shepherd, a hen over her chicks (Psalm 103:13; Isaiah 63:16; Matthew 6:6; Isaiah 66:13; Psalm 23:1; Isaiah 40:11; Matthew 23:37).

I do not need to add any more evidence. This is what has been demonstrated: there is a love in the person of the Father that is specifically offered to believers, and in this love He will and does hold communion with them.

Now to have complete communion with the Father in love, two things are required of believers.

First, that they receive it. Second, that they make a fitting response to Him.

Regarding the first — that they receive it: communion consists in giving and receiving. Until the Father's love is received, we have no communion with Him in it. How then is this love of the Father to be received so that we can have fellowship with Him? By faith. Receiving it means believing it. God has so fully and clearly re-

vealed His love that it can be received by faith. "You believe in God" (John 14:1) — that is, the Father. And what is to be believed about Him? His love, for He is love (1 John 4:8).

It is true that faith does not act directly on the Father except through the Son. He is the way, the truth, and the life — no one comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6). He is the merciful high priest over the house of God, through whom we have access to the throne of grace. Through Him we believe in God (1 Peter 1:21). But here is what I am saying: when through Christ we gain access to the Father, we then see His glory and recognize His special love for us, and we place our faith in it. We are to focus on it, believe it, and receive it as it truly is in Him. Though there is no light for us except in the beams, yet through the beams we can see the sun, which is their source. Though all our refreshment lies in the streams, yet through them we are led back to the fountain. Jesus Christ, when it comes to the Father's love, is the beam and the stream. Though all our light and refreshment actually lies in Him, yet through Him we are led to the fountain — the sun of eternal love itself. If believers practiced this, they would find it produces no small spiritual growth in their walk with God.

This is the goal. Many dark and unsettling thoughts tend to arise here. Few can lift their hearts and minds to this height by faith so as to rest their souls in the love of the Father. Instead, they live below it in the troubled region of hopes and fears, storms and clouds. But up above, all is calm and quiet. This is the will of God: that He may always be seen as gracious, kind, tender, loving, and unchangeable in His love — specifically as the Father, as the great fountain and source of all gracious gifts and expressions of love. This is what Christ came to reveal — God as a Father (John 1:18).

That is the name He declares to those the Father gave Him out of the world (John 17:6). And this is what He effectively leads us to through Himself, as He is the only way to God as a Father (John 14:5-6) — that is, as love. By doing so, He gives us the rest He promises, because the love of the Father is the only true rest for the soul. Faith searches for rest for the soul. Christ the Mediator presents Himself as the only one who can secure it. But faith does not stop there. Through Christ it gains access to the Father (Ephesians 2:18), enters into His love, and discovers that He is love — having a design and purpose of love, a good pleasure toward us from eternity, a delight and satisfaction and goodwill toward us in Christ, with every cause of anger and rejection removed. When the soul is brought by faith through Christ into the heart of God, into a confident assurance and spiritual awareness of His love, it rests there. This is the first thing believers do in their communion with the Father.

As for the fitting response required, it mainly consists in love. God loves so that He may be loved in return. When He commands the response to His love in order to complete communion with Him, He says: "My son, give Me your heart" (Proverbs 23:26) — your affections, your love. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind" (Luke 10:27). This is the response He requires. When the soul sees God in His outpouring of love to be love itself — to be infinitely lovely and loving — and rests in Him and delights in Him as such, then it has communion with Him in love. This is love: God loves us first, and then we love Him in return. Love is a bond of union and closeness, with delight in that connection. As long as the Father is viewed in any other way than as

someone acting in love toward the soul, it produces dread and avoidance. This explains why sinners flee and hide in the Scriptures. But when the one who is the Father is understood as a Father pouring out love on the soul, this stirs the soul to love Him back. This is the foundation, through faith, of all acceptable obedience.

The apostle lays out this whole matter in Ephesians 1:4: "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love." It begins in the love of God and ends in our love for Him. That is what the eternal love of God aims to produce in us and works us toward. It is true that our overall obedience falls within our communion with God. But that is with Him as God — our blessed sovereign lawgiver and rewarder. As He is the Father, our Father in Christ, revealed to us as love beyond and contrary to all the expectations of the natural person, it is specifically in love that we have this relationship with Him. And I do not mean only the love that is the life and essence of all moral obedience, but a special delight and contentment in the Father, who has been effectively revealed as love to the soul.

To make this communion with the Father in love clearer and more evident, I will show two things.

1. How this love of God for us and our love for Him are similar, sharing a certain resemblance. 2. How they differ, which will further reveal the nature of each.

1. They agree in two things. 1. Both are a love of rest and delight.

1. God's love is this kind of love. Zephaniah 3:17 says, "The Lord Your God in the midst of You is mighty: He will save, He will rejoice over You with joy, He will rest in His love, He will exult over You with singing." Both of these qualities are attributed to God in His love: rest and delight. He will be silent because of His love. To rest with contentment is expressed as being silent — that is, without complaining or finding fault. God does this because of His own love, so full and completely sufficient that it will not allow Him to complain about anything in those He loves. Instead, He is silent on account of it. Or "rest in His love" means He will not remove it. He will not look elsewhere for another object of His affection. His love will remain on the soul where it is once placed, forever. And there is also delight: He rejoices with singing, as someone who is fully satisfied in the one He has set His love on. Two words are used here to express the delight and joy that God has in His love. The first describes the inner feeling of the mind, the joy of the heart. To show how intense this is, the text says He does it with gladness, or with joy. To have heart-deep joy combined with gladness is the highest expression of delight in love. The second word describes not the inner feeling, but its outward expression. It means to celebrate with outward demonstrations of inner delight and joy. It is like leaping, as people do when overcome by some joyful surprise. This is why God is said to do this with a joyful sound, or singing. To rejoice with gladness of heart and to celebrate with singing and praise shows the greatest possible delight and satisfaction. When He wants to express the opposite of this love, He says He was not well pleased (1 Corinthians 10:5). He did not fix His delight or rest on them. And if anyone draws back, the Lord's soul has no pleasure in him (Hebrews 10:38; Jeremiah

22:28; Hosea 8:8; Mark 1:10). He takes pleasure in those who remain with Him. He sings to His church, "A vineyard of red wine. I the Lord do keep it" (Isaiah 27:3; Psalm 147:11; Psalm 149:4). There is rest and delight in His love. In Hebrew, there is only a switching of a letter between the word for a love of will and desire and the word for a love of rest and contentment, and both are applied to God. He wills good for us so that He may rest in that will. Some say that to love is to perfectly find contentment in the thing loved. And when God calls His Son "beloved" (Matthew 3:17), He adds as an explanation, "in whom I am well pleased."

2. The response believers make to complete communion with Him in this also resembles His love, because it is likewise a love of rest and delight. "Return to your rest, O my soul," says David (Psalm 116:7). He makes God his rest — the one in whom his soul finds contentment without looking any further for a more suitable and desirable object. "Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides You" (Psalm 73:25). In this way, the soul gathers itself in from all its wandering and from all other loves, to rest in God alone, to be satisfied and content in Him, choosing the Father as its present and eternal rest. And this also comes with delight. "Your lovingkindness is better than life, therefore I will praise You" (Psalm 63:3). Better than life — better than many lives. I do not deny that life is sometimes expressed in singular terms, but always with emphasis, so that the whole of life with all its advantages is intended. Augustine, reading this passage as "above lives," extends it to the various courses of life that people pursue. At the very least, the whole span of life with all its advantages is meant. Even if he were in the jaws of death, rolling toward the grave through countless troubles, David found more sweetness

in God than in a long life considered at its best and most noble, accompanied by every enjoyment that makes it pleasant and comfortable. From both of these comes what the church says in Hosea 14:3: "Assyria shall not save us, we will not ride on horses, neither will we say anymore to the work of our hands, 'You are our gods,' for in You the fatherless find mercy." They reject the most attractive appearances of rest and security in order to find everything in God, casting themselves on Him as otherwise helpless orphans.

The mutual love of God and believers agrees in this: the way of sharing the results and fruits of this love is only through Christ. The Father shares no expression of His love with us except through Christ, and we make no response of love to Him except through Christ. He is the treasury where the Father stores all the riches of His grace, drawn from the bottomless mine of His eternal love. And He is the priest into whose hands we place all the offerings that we return to the Father. For this reason, He is said first and with special emphasis to love the Son — not only as His eternal Son, who was the delight of His soul before the foundation of the world (Proverbs 8:30), but also as our Mediator and the means of conveying His love to us (Matthew 3:17; John 3:33; John 5:21; John 10:17; John 15:9; John 17:24). And we are said to believe in God and have access to Him through Christ.

The Father loves us and chose us before the foundation of the world, but in carrying out that love He blesses us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ (Ephesians 1:3-4). From His love He pours out the Holy Spirit richly on us through Jesus Christ our Savior (Titus 3:6). In the pouring out of His love, not a single drop falls outside the Lord Christ. The holy anointing oil was all poured on the head of Aaron (Psalm 133:2) and from

there flowed down to the hem of his garments. Love is first poured out on Christ, and from Him it drops like the dew of Hermon on the souls of His people. The Father will have Christ hold the supreme place in all things (Colossians 1:18). It pleased Him that all fullness should dwell in Christ (verse 19), so that from His fullness we might receive grace upon grace (John 1:16). Although the love of the Father's purpose and good pleasure has its origin and foundation in His sheer grace and will, the plan for its fulfillment is only in Christ. All the fruits of it are first given to Christ, and only through Him are they distributed to us. Though believers may see an infinite ocean of love for them in the heart of the Father, they should not expect a single drop from Him except what comes through Christ. Love in the Father is like honey in the flower — it must be gathered into the comb before we can use it. Christ must extract and prepare this honey for us. He draws this water from the fountain; we by faith draw from the wells of salvation that are in Him.

Our responses of love are all in Christ and through Him as well. And it is a good thing for us that this is so — what weak and flawed offerings we would otherwise present to God! He bears the guilt of our offerings and adds incense to our prayers. Our love is fixed on the Father, but it is conveyed to Him through the Son of His love. He is the only way for our expressions of devotion, as well as for our persons, to reach God — through Him passes all our desire, our delight, our satisfaction, and our obedience.

In these two things, then, there is some resemblance between the mutual love of the Father and believers in which they hold communion.

There are several ways in which they differ.

First, the love of God is a love of generosity; our love for Him is a love of duty.

The love of the Father is a love of generosity, a descending love — a love that moves Him to do good things for us and great things on our behalf. His love lies at the foundation of all His dealings with us, and we hardly ever find it mentioned without it being presented as the cause and fountain of some free gift flowing from it. He loves us and sends His Son to die for us. He loves us and blesses us with every spiritual blessing. Loving is choosing (Romans 9:11-12). He loves us and disciplines us. It is a love like the heavens to the earth — when they are full of rain, they pour out showers to make it fruitful. Just as the sea shares its waters with the rivers by generosity from its own fullness, and the rivers return to it only what they received from it. It is the love of a spring, of a fountain, always giving. It is a love from which everything that is lovely in the ones loved comes — it pours into them and creates goodness in the persons who are loved.

Our love for God is a love of duty — the love of a child. His love descends on us in generosity and fruitfulness; our love rises to Him in duty and thankfulness. He adds to us by His love; we add nothing to Him by ours. Our goodness does not benefit Him. Though our love is fixed directly on Him, no fruit of our love reaches Him directly. Even though He requires our love, He is not enriched by it (Job 35:5-8; Romans 11:35). Our love for God is made up of four things: rest, delight, reverence, and obedience. Through these we hold communion with the Father in His love. This is why God calls the love that is due to Him as a Father "honor": "If I am a Father, where is My honor?" (Malachi 1:6). It is a rightfully owed act of duty.

Second, they differ in this: the love of the Father for us comes first; our love for Him follows.

The love of the Father for us comes first, and that in two respects.

First, it comes before our love. 1 John 4:10: "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us." His love goes before ours. A father loves the child when the child does not yet know the father, much less love him. By nature we are haters of God (Romans 1:30). He is by His own nature a lover of people. And surely all mutual love between Him and us must begin on His side.

Second, it comes before anything in us that is lovable. The Father's love goes not only before our love, but also before any quality in us that could attract love. Romans 5:8: "God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Not only His love, but its most outstanding fruit, is directed toward us as sinners. Sin displays everything that is unlovely and undesirable in a creature. Yet even in that condition, we receive the display of the Father's love through the most remarkable testimony. Not only when we have done nothing good, but when we are still covered in our sin, He loves us. Not because we are better than others, but because He Himself is infinitely good. His kindness appears when we are foolish and disobedient. This is why He is said to love the world — that is, those who have nothing but what belongs to and comes from the world, whose entire existence lies in evil.

Our love follows in both of these ways. First, in relation to the love of God: no creature ever turned its affections toward God unless God's heart was first set on that person. Second, in relation to

reasons for loving: God must be revealed to us as lovely and desirable, as a fitting and suitable object for the soul to find its rest in, before we can have any love for Him. In this sense, believers do not love God for no reason, but because of the excellence, loveliness, and desirability that is in Him. As the Psalmist says about one specific experience, "I love the Lord — because" (Psalm 116:1). So we may say the same in general: we love the Lord because. If anyone asks about our love for God, we can say: what have we done? Is there not good reason?

Third, they also differ in this: the love of God is like Himself — constant, steady, and unable to increase or decrease. Our love is like ourselves — uneven, rising and falling, growing and declining. His love is like the sun, always the same in its light, even though a cloud may sometimes come between. Ours is like the moon, with its expanding and shrinking.

The love of the Father is constant. Whoever He loves, He loves to the end, and He loves them the same always. The Strength of Israel is not a man that He should change His mind. When He fixes His love on someone, it is unchangeable. It does not grow throughout eternity, and it is not reduced at any time. It is an eternal love that had no beginning, that will have no end, that cannot be increased by anything we do, and that cannot be diminished by anything in us. In itself this love is unchanging — though in two respects it may seem to change.

First, in terms of its fruits. It is a fruitful love, a love of generosity. With regard to those fruits, it may sometimes be greater and sometimes less — its outpourings vary. Which of the saints has not experienced this? What life, what light, what strength at some times — and then how lifeless, how dark, how weak at others, as

God chooses to release or hold back the fruits of His love. All the graces of the Spirit in us and all our sanctified blessings are fruits of His love. How differently these are given out, and how varied they are at different times for the same people, experience will abundantly confirm.

Second, in terms of its revelations and expressions. He pours out His love in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5) and gives us an awareness of it. Now this varies and changes — sometimes more, sometimes less. At one time He shines brightly; at another He hides His face, as it may be for our benefit. Our Father will not always correct us, in case we become discouraged. But He does not always smile on us either, in case we become self-satisfied and neglect Him. Yet His love in itself remains the same. When for a brief moment He hides His face, He still gathers us with everlasting kindness.

Objection: but you will say this comes close to the blasphemous idea that God loves His people while they are sinning just as much as when they are walking in strict obedience. And if that is so, who would bother to serve Him more or to walk with Him in a way that pleases Him?

Answer: the love of God in itself is the eternal purpose and act of His will, no more changeable than God Himself. If it were changeable, no one could be saved. But it does not change, and so we are not destroyed. What then — does He love His people while they are sinning? Yes, He loves His people, but not their sinning. Does He alter His love toward them? Not the purpose of His will, but the expressions of His grace. He rebukes them, disciplines them, hides His face from them, strikes them, and fills them with a sense of His displeasure. But it would be disastrous for us if He

were to change in His love or take away His kindness from us. The very things that seem to show a change in His feelings actually, at their root, come from love just as clearly as the things that seem to be the most genuine expressions of it. Will this not encourage sin? Anyone who has truly tasted the love of God could never seriously raise this objection. The teaching of grace may be twisted into an excuse for sin, but the inner reality of grace cannot. A hatred of sin in anyone can perfectly coexist with the acceptance of their person and their appointment to eternal life.

But our love for God rises and falls, shrinks and grows. We lose our first love, and then we grow in love again. Hardly a day stays the same. What weak creatures we are — how unlike the Lord and His love! Unstable as water, we cannot rise above it. One moment it is: "Though everyone else abandons You, I will not." The next: "I do not know the man." One day: "I will never be shaken; my position is so secure." The next: "Everyone is a liar; I am going to be destroyed." When has there ever been a time, or where has there ever been a place, where our love was steady toward God for even one day?

These similarities and differences further describe the mutual love of the Father and believers in which they hold communion. I will not give additional examples regarding the person of the Father, but will instead try to make practical use of this in the next chapter.

Part 1, Chapter 4: Inferences on Communion with the Father in Love

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Having described the nature of our distinct communion with the Father, it remains that we offer some exhortations, directions, and observations from it.

First, it is abundantly clear that Christians give very little attention to this duty — namely, holding immediate communion with the Father in love. Unfamiliarity with our mercies and privileges is our sin as much as our sorrow. We do not listen to the Spirit who was given to us so that we might know the things freely given to us by God. This makes us go through life heavily when we could rejoice, and weakly when we could be strong in the Lord. How few of the saints are experientially acquainted with this privilege — holding immediate communion with the Father in love? With what anxious, doubtful thoughts they look at Him? What fears, what questionings about His goodwill and kindness? At best, many think there is no sweetness at all in the Father toward us, except what was purchased at the high price of the blood of Jesus. It

is true that this is the only channel — but the free fountain and spring of it all lies in the bosom of the Father. Eternal life was with the Father and has been revealed to us. Let us then —

First, look at the Father as love. Do not think of Him as a perpetually scowling Father, but as one most kind and tender. By faith, see Him as one whose thoughts toward us have been thoughts of kindness from before the world began. A wrong picture of God is what drives away anyone who has even the faintest longing for Him. Those who know You will put their trust in You. People cannot remain with God in spiritual reflection — they lose His company because they do not know His love. They fix their minds only on His terrible majesty, severity, and greatness, and so their spirits are never drawn to Him. If a soul would continually look at His everlasting tenderness and compassion, His purposes of kindness from of old, His present gracious acceptance — it could not bear an hour apart from Him, though now perhaps it cannot watch with Him for even one hour. Let this then be the saints' first and foundational thought about the Father: He is full of eternal, free love toward them. To raise them up to this, let them consider —

First, whose love this is. It is the love of One who is in Himself all-sufficient, infinitely satisfied with His own glorious excellencies and perfections. He has no need to reach outside Himself for love or to look for an object of it beyond Himself. He could rest with delight and contentment in Himself forever. He is sufficient to His own love. He also has His Son, His eternal wisdom, to rejoice and delight in from all eternity (Proverbs 8:30). This could fully satisfy and occupy the whole delight of the Father. Yet He also wills to

love His saints. And it is a love in which He seeks not only His own satisfaction but our good as well. It is the love of God, the love of a Father — whose natural expression is kindness and generosity.

Second, what kind of love this is.

First, it is eternal. It was fixed on us before the foundation of the world — before we existed or had done any good at all. His thoughts were on us then; His delight in us was established. The delight of the Father in the Son mentioned in Proverbs 8:30 is not so much His absolute delight in the Son as the express image of His person and the brightness of His glory — it is His delight in connection with His love and purpose toward the sons of men. The order of the words makes this clear: I was daily His delight — and My delights were with the sons of men. That is, in His thoughts of kindness and redemption toward them. From eternity He planned for our happiness within His own heart. This thought alone is enough to make everything within us leap for joy, like the child leaping in Elizabeth's womb. A sense of it must bring our souls down to the lowest depths of humble, holy reverence, and cause us to rejoice before Him with trembling.

Second, it is free. He loves us because He chooses to. There is nothing in us, and there never has been, for which we should be loved. If we deserved His love, we would think less of it. What is owed as a debt is seldom received with gratitude. But what existed from eternity before we did must be entirely free in its regard for our well-being (Romans 9:12; Ephesians 1:3-4; Titus 3:5; James 1:18).

Third, it is unchangeable. Though we change every day, His love does not change. If any kind of provocation could turn it away, it would have ceased long ago. Its unchangeableness is what sustains the infinite patience and forbearance He exercises toward us — patience without which we would die and perish (2 Peter 3:9).

Fourth, it is distinguishing. He has not loved all the world in this way. Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated. Why should He fix His love on us, passing over millions who are no different from us by nature? That He should make us partakers of this love and all its fruits, from which so many of the great and wise of this world are excluded. I have only named the headlines of these things — let those whose hearts are moved expand on them.

Let the soul frequently look at the Father's love under these headings. They are all soul-winning and heart-drawing.

Second, look at the Father's love in such a way that you receive it. Without this, everything else is in vain when it comes to communion with God. We hold no communion with Him in anything until it is received by faith. What I am pressing the saints of God to is simply this: believe this love of God for yourselves and your own part; believe that this is the heart of the Father toward you, and accept His testimony about it. His love is not ours in its sweetness until it is received in this way. Continually direct thoughts of faith toward God as love toward you — as embracing you with the eternal, free love described above. When the Lord is presented to you in His Word as such, let your mind acknowledge and assent that it is so; let your will embrace the fact that it is so; and let all your affections be filled with it. Set your whole heart on it. Let it be bound with the cords of this love.

Third, let this love produce its proper fruit and effect in your heart — return love to Him. This way we will walk in the light of God's face and hold holy communion with our Father all day long. Let us not be unkind to Him and repay His goodwill with indifference.

To help us further in this duty and its daily consistent practice, let me add one or two considerations that are especially worth having.

First, it is exceedingly pleasing to God our Father when we hold communion with Him in His love — when He is received into our souls as one full of love, tenderness, and kindness toward us. Our flesh and blood is prone to think very hard thoughts of Him — to think He is always angry, nearly impossible to appease; that it is not for poor creatures to draw near to Him; that nothing would be more welcome than never having to come into His presence. 'Who among us will dwell with the devouring fire?' say the sinners in Zion. 'I knew you were a hard man,' says the wicked servant in the parable. There is nothing more grievous to the Lord, and nothing more useful to Satan in his work against the soul, than these kinds of thoughts. Satan has everything he needs when he can fill a soul with such thoughts of God. This has been his strategy from the very beginning. He led our first parents into hard thoughts of God: has God really said that? has He threatened you with death? He knows very well it will go better for you. With this single weapon he shattered and overthrew all of humanity at once. It is exceedingly grievous to the Spirit of God to be so slandered in the hearts of those He dearly loves. How earnestly He presses this question on Zion: what wrong have you seen in Me? says He. Have I been a wasteland to you, or a land of darkness? Zion has said, the Lord

has forgotten me, and my God has forsaken me. But can a mother forget — The Lord takes nothing harder from His people than such hard thoughts of Him, knowing well what bitter fruit this root will produce: alienation of heart, drawing back, and unbelief in our walk with Him. Consider this first: receiving the Father as He reaches out His love to the soul gives Him the honor He desires, and is exceedingly pleasing to Him. Be assured of this: nothing is more acceptable to the Father than for us to keep our hearts fixed on Him as the eternal fountain of all the rich grace that flows to sinners in the blood of Jesus.

Second, this will be highly effective in drawing your soul to love God, to delight in Him, and to make your home with Him. Many saints have no heavier burden in their lives than that their hearts do not come fully and freely to a constant delight and rejoicing in God. What lies at the root of this trouble? Is it not their unfamiliarity with — or failure to practice — this duty of holding communion with the Father in love? We will delight in God exactly to the measure that we see His love, and no more. Every other revelation of God, apart from this, will only cause the soul to shrink back from Him. But if the heart is once truly occupied with the greatness of the Father's love, it cannot help but be overpowered, won over, and drawn close to Him. If a father's love cannot make a child delight in him, what will? So put this to the test: direct your thoughts to this very thing — the eternal, free, and fruitful love of the Father — and see whether your heart is not moved to delight in Him. Sit for a little while at the fountain, and you will soon discover more of the sweetness of the streams. Those who have run from Him will find before long that they cannot keep their distance for even a moment.

Someone may ask: how shall I hold communion with the Father in love? I have no idea at all whether He loves me; shall I dare to cast myself on it? What if I am not accepted? Might I not die in my presumption rather than find sweetness in His arms? God appears to me only as a consuming fire and everlasting burning — I dread to look up to Him.

I am not entirely sure what is meant by 'knowing' the love of God: though it is carried and deepened by spiritual sense and experience, it is received purely by believing. To know it is to believe it as it has been revealed. We have known and believed the love that God has toward us; God is love (1 John 4:16). This is the assurance you can have of this love from the very first step of walking with God: He who is the Truth has declared it. Whatever your heart says, whatever Satan says — unless you take God's word for it, you are doing your best to make the One who said it a liar (1 John 5:10).

I can believe that God is love toward others, because He has said He is love. But that He will be love toward me — I see no ground for that confidence. There is no reason in the world why He should turn one thought of love or kindness toward me. Therefore I dare not cast myself on it and hold communion with Him in His special love.

He has spoken it as particularly to you as to anyone in the world. And for a reason to love you — He has as much ground to fix His love on you as on any child of Adam — which is to say, none at all, apart from Himself. Not one person from the foundation of the world who has ever believed such love in the Father and returned love to Him in response has ever been deceived — and none ever will be, to the world's end. You stand on the most secure

ground there is: if you believe and receive the Father as love, He will infallibly be so to you, though others may fall under His severity.

I cannot find my heart returning love to God. If I could find my soul set on Him, then I could believe His soul delighted in me.

This is the most backwards course your thoughts could possibly take — and a sure way to rob God of His glory. Scripture says: in this is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us first (1 John 4:10, 19). Now you would invert that order and say: in this is love, not that God loved me first, but that I love Him first. This is to take glory from God: whereas He loves us without any cause in ourselves, you would have something in you to give God a reason to love you. This is a course invented by the flesh that will never bring glory to God or peace to your own soul. Lay down your reasonings then; receive the Father's love through a pure act of faith, and it will open your soul to pour itself out to the Lord in the communion of love.

This truth will also reveal the privilege and dignity of the saints of God. Whatever low opinion others may have of them, it will be clear that they have food to eat that the world knows nothing of — they have close communion and fellowship with the Father. They deal with Him in the exchange of love. People are generally esteemed according to the company they keep. It is an honor to stand in the presence of princes, even merely as servants. How much more honor do all the saints have — to stand with boldness in the presence of the Father and there enjoy His intimate love? What a blessing the Queen of Sheba pronounced on the servants of Solomon, who stood before him and heard his wisdom. How much more blessed are those who stand continually before the God of

Solomon, hearing His wisdom and enjoying His love? While others have their fellowship with Satan and their own lusts, drawing from them only short-lived and perishing consolations — the saints have this sweet communion with the Father.

What a safe and sweet refuge is here for the saints in all the contempt, ridicule, slander, and misrepresentation they face in the world. When a child is mistreated out in the street by strangers, he runs at full speed to his father's arms. There he makes his complaint and is comforted. In all the harsh judgments and verbal persecution the saints face in the world, they may run with their sorrows to their Father and be comforted. The soul may say: if I have hatred in the world, I will go where I am sure of love; though everyone else is hard to me, my Father is tender and full of compassion. Here I am despised, frowned on, and rejected — but I have honor and love with Him whose kindness is better than life itself. There I shall find everything in the fountain that others have only in drops; in my Father's love there is everything that could be desired — fully and enduringly.

The saints, then, are the most misunderstood people in the world. If they say, come and have fellowship with us, are not people ready to answer: who are you? A sorry company of troublemakers and dissenters. Let it be known — we want nothing to do with your fellowship; when we have finished with all decent and worthwhile company, then perhaps we will come to you. But how mistaken are people? Truly, their fellowship is with the Father. Whatever people may think of it, the saints have close, spiritual, heavenly refreshment in the mutual exchange of love with the Father Himself. How broadly they are misunderstood, the apostle declares: as deceivers and yet true, as unknown and yet well

known, as dying and yet behold we live, as disciplined and yet not killed, as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things (2 Corinthians 6:8-10). And as it is so in general, in no way is it more so than in this — that they are regarded as poor, lowly, and despicable people, when in fact they are the only truly great and noble persons in the world. Consider the company they keep — it is with the Father; who is more glorious? Consider the business they are engaged in — it is love; what is more precious? Truly they are the excellent of the earth (Psalm 16:3).

Furthermore, this will reveal a great difference between the saints and empty professors. When it comes to performing religious duties and enjoying outward privileges, fruitless professors often walk side by side with the saints. But look into their private, hidden lives and what a difference there is. There the saints hold communion with God. Hypocrites, for the most part, hold company with the world and their own lusts — listening to what those things say to them, and making provision for them — while the saints are sweetly wrapped up in the bosom of their Father's love. It is often nearly impossible for genuine believers to visibly outperform those whose hearts are rotten. But they have this food that others know nothing of. They have this refreshment in the banqueting hall in which others have no share. In the midst of all their thoughts and troubles, the comforts of God their Father refresh their souls.

Now, to draw toward a close of this discussion — if these things are so, what kind of people ought we to be in all our conduct? Even our God is a consuming fire. What fellowship is there between light and darkness? Shall sin and lust make their home in thoughts

that receive and carry love from and to the Father? Holiness befits His presence forever. An unclean spirit cannot draw near to Him; an unholy heart cannot remain with Him. A corrupt person has no desire for the company of a holy one — and would a person of vain and foolish thoughts hold communion and dwell with the most holy God? There is no true understanding of this love that does not powerfully drive toward holiness and lead there. Ephraim says, what have I to do anymore with idols, when in God he finds salvation. Communion with the Father is completely at odds with a loose and careless way of living. If we say we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not live the truth (1 John 1:6). The one who says, I know Him, I have communion with Him, and does not keep His commandments, is a liar and the truth is not in him (1 John 2:4). The most impressive and high-sounding claim to friendship with the Father, apart from holiness and obedience to His commandments, only proves the claimant to be a liar. Love for the world and love for the Father cannot coexist.

And if this is so — to close everything up — how many who go by the name of Christian fall short of the reality of it? How ignorant of this mystery and its fruits are the generality of professing Christians? Do many not plainly hold fellowship with their lusts and with the world, yet expect to have a place and inheritance among those who are sanctified? They have neither the new name nor the white stone, yet want to be called the people of the Most High. Could it not more truthfully be said of many of them that God is not in any of their thoughts at all, rather than that they have communion with Him? May the Lord open people's eyes to see and understand that walking with God is not a matter of outward form but of inward power. So much for the peculiar communion with

the Father in the instance of love that we have been considering. He is also faithful who has called us to the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord — of which we will speak next.

Part 2, Chapter 1: The Grace of Christ — General Description

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Of the fellowship which the saints have with Jesus Christ the Son of God. That they have such a fellowship proved — 1 Corinthians 1:9; Revelation 3:20; Song of Solomon 2:1-7 opened. Proverbs 9:1-5.

Having treated the distinct communion we have with the person of the Father in the preceding chapters, we now turn to the communion we have with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. The fellowship we have with the second person is with Him as Mediator — in that office which, by divine arrangement, He took on for our sake, being made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive the adoption as sons (Galatians 4:4-5). In treating this, I will do two things:

1. Declare that we have such fellowship with the Son of God. 2. Show what that fellowship or communion consists of.

For the first, I will only bring forward a few Scripture passages to confirm the fact. 1 Corinthians 1:9: God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. This is what all the saints are called to, and in which by the faith-

fulness of God they will be kept — fellowship with Jesus Christ our Lord. We are called by God the Father, as Father, acting out His love, to communion with the Son as our Lord.

Revelation 3:20: Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will eat with him, and he with Me. This is certainly fellowship — if there is such a thing. Christ will eat with believers: He refreshes Himself in His own graces that He has given them by His Spirit. The Lord Christ is greatly delighted in tasting the sweet fruits of the Spirit in the saints. This is why the bride prays that she may have something prepared for His reception when He comes to her. Song of Solomon 4:16: Awake, O north wind, and come, wind of the south; make my garden breathe out its fragrance; let my beloved come into his garden and eat its choice fruits. The souls of the saints are the garden of Jesus Christ — the good ground (Hebrews 6:7-8). A garden for delight: He rejoices in them; His delight is with the sons of men (Proverbs 8:31), and He rejoices over them (Zephaniah 3:17). And a garden for fruit — indeed for pleasant fruit. He describes it in Song of Solomon 4:12-14: a garden locked is my sister, my bride, a rock garden locked, a spring sealed up; your plants are a paradise of pomegranates with choice fruits, henna with nard, nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all the trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, along with all the finest spices. Everything that is sweet and delicious, everything fragrant and savory, everything useful and healing, is in this garden. There is every kind of spiritual refreshment in the souls of the saints for the Lord Jesus. This is why the bride prays so earnestly for an increase of these things — so that her beloved may eat with her as He has promised. 'Awake, O north wind,' and so on. Oh, that

the breathings and workings of the Spirit of all grace might stir up all His gifts and graces in me, so that the Lord Jesus, the beloved of my soul, may find a fitting and welcome reception from me. God complains of the lack of fruit in His vineyard (Isaiah 5:3; Hosea 10:1). The lack of good fruit for Christ's reception was what the bride feared and labored to prevent. A barren heart is not fit to receive Him. And the delight He takes in the fruits of the Spirit is beyond description. He expresses this at length in Song of Solomon 5:1: I have come into my garden; I have gathered my myrrh along with my balsam; I have eaten my honeycomb and my honey; I have drunk my wine and my milk. He calls them His own sweetnesses — most pleasing to Him. Moreover, as Christ eats with His saints, so He has promised they shall eat with Him, completing the fellowship they have with Him. Christ prepares for their reception in a most generous way. Beasts are slaughtered, wine is mixed, and a table is set (Proverbs 9:2). He calls the spiritual delicacies He has prepared for them a feast, a wedding banquet, a feast of rich food, wine aged on the lees, and so on. The fattened calf is killed for their welcome. Such is the communion, and such is the mutual hospitality of Christ and His saints in that communion.

Song of Solomon 2:1-7: I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys. As the lily among the thorns, so is my darling among the maidens. Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the young men. In his shade I took great delight and sat down, and his fruit was sweet to my taste, and so on.

In the first two verses you have the description Christ gives — first of Himself, then of His church. Of Himself in verse 1 — that is, what He is to His bride: I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys. In Scripture, the Lord Christ is compared to everything of

eminence in all creation. In the heavens He is the sun and the bright morning star. Among the beasts, the lion — the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Among the flowers of the field, here He is the rose and the lily. The two great excellencies of flowers — sweetness of scent and beauty of color — are divided between these two. The rose for sweetness, and the lily for beauty (Solomon in all his glory was not dressed like one of these) hold the first place. More than this, He is the rose of Sharon — a fruitful valley where the finest herds grazed (1 Chronicles 27:29), so renowned that it is promised to the church that she will be given the glory of Sharon (Isaiah 35:2). That fertile plain undoubtedly produced the finest roses. Christ, in the fragrance of His love and in His righteousness — which is like the garment in which Jacob received his blessing, giving out a scent like that of a rich field (Genesis 27:27) — is like this excellent rose, drawing and alluring the hearts of His saints to Himself. As God received a pleasing aroma from the blood of His atonement (Ephesians 5:2), so from the graces with which Christ is anointed for their sake, His saints receive a reviving and refreshing fragrance (Song of Solomon 1:2). A sweet fragrance expresses what is acceptable and delightful (Genesis 8:21). He is also the lily of the valleys — the most eminent of flowers in beauty (Matthew 6:29). He is supremely desirable for the loveliness and perfection of His person, incomparably more beautiful than the children of men — of which more later. Since He is all of this to them — abundantly satisfying all their spiritual senses, their refreshment, their beauty, their delight, their glory — He next tells us in verse 2 what they are to Him: like a lily among the thorns, so is my darling among the maidens. That Christ and His church are likened to the same thing — here both called the lily — reflects both their union through the

indwelling of the same Spirit, and the conformity and likeness between them that the saints are destined to attain. She is a lily, very beautiful to Christ — a lily among the thorns. First, in terms of eminence: as the lily surpasses the thorns, so do the saints surpass all others in the eyes of Christ. Make the comparison, and so it will be found. Second, in terms of the trial they face: the rest of the world are like prickling briers and grieving thorns to the house of Israel (Ezekiel 28:24). The best of them is a brier, and the most upright of them sharper than a thorn hedge (Micah 7:4). This is what they are among the maidens — even the most impressive gatherings of the most developed professors who are no more than that. No comparison could more powerfully exalt the excellence of anything. So Christ is to them in reality (verse 1), and so they are in His estimation and in reality (verse 2). How He is in their estimation and in reality we see in verse 3.

Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the young men. In his shade I took great delight and sat down, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. Carrying on this exchange, the bride now speaks of and shows her delight in the Lord Christ. As He compares her to the lily among the thorns, so she compares Him to the apple tree among the trees of the forest. She gives her reason: He alone among all trees has the two things that matter — fruit for food, and shade for rest. From the one she eats; under the other she rests — both with great delight. All other sons — whether angels, the sons of God by creation (Job 1:6; 38:7), or the sons of Adam, the best of his offspring, the leaders of those companies called 'maidens' in verse 2 — or the highest branches of all creation's desirable things — are, to a hungry and weary soul (and only such know to seek shade and fruit), like the fruitless,

leafless trees of the forest, which yield neither food nor refreshment. In Christ, she says, there is fruit — fruit sweet to the taste. His flesh is true food and His blood is true drink (John 6:55). Moreover, He has brought forth that everlasting righteousness that will abundantly satisfy any hungry soul that has gone to many a barren tree for food and found none. Besides this, He abounds in precious and pleasant graces, of which I may eat — and He calls me to do so, and to eat abundantly. These are the fruits Christ bears. People speak of a tree that provides everything needed for life in food and clothing. Christ is that tree of life which has produced everything needed for eternal life. In Him is the righteousness we hunger after; in Him is the water of life, of which whoever drinks will never thirst again. How sweet are the fruits of Christ's mediation to the faith of His saints! Anyone who can find no relief in mercy, pardon, grace, acceptance with God, holiness, and sanctification has never tasted these things — these rich spiritual provisions, like aged wine on the lees — that are prepared for believers. He also has shade for rest and shelter. Shelter from wrath on the outside, and refreshment for weariness on the inside. The first use of shade is protection from the heat of the sun, as Jonah's plant was. When the burning heat of wrath is about to scorch the soul, Christ steps in and bears it all. Under the shadow of His wings we sit down — steadily, quietly, safely — putting our trust in Him. And all this with great delight. Who can express the joy of a soul safely sheltered from wrath under the cover of the righteousness of the Lord Jesus? There is also rest in shade from weariness: He is like the shade of a great rock in a parched land (Isaiah 32:2). From the

power of corruption, the trouble of temptation, the distress of persecution — in Him there is quiet rest and repose (Matthew 11:27-28).

Having thus described each other, and shown that they cannot but delight in fellowship and communion together, the following verses set forth and describe that communion at length. I will briefly note four things in it.

1. Sweetness. 2. Delight. 3. Safety. 4. Comfort.

Sweetness: He brought me to the banqueting house, or house of wine. Everything here is expressed in terms of the greatest sweetness and most delicious refreshment — flagons, apples, wine, and so on. These represent the provisions of grace and mercy, love, kindness, and supply revealed in the Gospel, declared in the assemblies of the saints, and made real by the Spirit. This love is better than wine (Song of Solomon 1:1); it consists not in food and drink but in righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17). Whether these banqueting houses are the Scriptures, the Gospel, the ordinances administered in the assemblies of the saints, or any particularly clear and signal manifestation of special love — it is all one. The grace that Christ gives in His ordinances is refreshing, strengthening, comforting, and full of sweetness to the souls of the saints; and so Christ makes every gathering of His saints a banqueting house, where He entertains His guests.

Delight: the bride is quite overwhelmed by the sweetness of this reception — finding love, care, and kindness poured out by Christ in the assemblies of the saints. So she cries out (verse 5): 'Sustain me with raisin cakes, refresh me with apples, for I am

lovesick.' Upon tasting the excellence and sweetness of Christ in the banqueting house, the soul is instantly overwhelmed and cries out for more. She is lovesick — not fainting from a lack of any sense of love while dreading wrath, but overcome by the mighty working of divine affection having once tasted the sweetness of Christ in the banqueting house. When a person is fainting, two things must be done: strength must be given to support them so they do not fall, and comforting things must be applied to revive their spirits. So the soul, overwhelmed and fainting under the force of its own love, prays for strengthening grace to support it and for the consolations of the Holy Spirit to satisfy and revive it, until it comes to the full enjoyment of Christ. And so, sweetly and with delight, this communion is carried on.

Safety: His banner over me is love (verse 4). A banner is a symbol of safety and protection — a sign of the presence of an army. Those who belong to that army camp under their banner in security. Christ has a banner for His saints, and that banner is love. All their protection comes from His love, and they receive every protection His love can give them. This shields them from hell, death, and all their enemies. Whatever presses against them must first pass through the banner of the love of the Lord Jesus. They have therefore great spiritual safety — another glory and excellence of their communion with Him.

Support and consolation (verse 6): His left hand is under my head, and His right hand embraces me. Here Christ takes the posture of a most tender friend toward one who is sick and sorrowful. The soul faints with love — with a spiritual longing for His presence — and Christ comes with His embrace. He nourishes and cherishes His church (Ephesians 5:29). The hand under the head is

support — sustaining grace in times of pressure and difficulty. The hand that embraces — the hand placed over the heart — is joy and consolation. To lie in the arms of Christ's love like this, under a continual influence of support and refreshment, is indeed to hold communion with Him.

In brief, this entire book is occupied with the description of the communion between the Lord Christ and His saints, and it would be needless to take more particular examples from it.

I will only add Proverbs 9:1-5: Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn out her seven pillars; she has prepared her food, she has mixed her wine; she has also set her table; she has sent out her maidens, she calls from the tops of the heights of the city: whoever is naive, let him turn in here; to him who lacks understanding she says, come, eat of my food and drink of the wine I have mixed.

The Lord Christ, the eternal wisdom of the Father — who of God is made wisdom for us — builds a spiritual house in which He provides entertainment for those guests He so freely invites. His church is the house He has built on a perfect number of pillars, giving it a stable foundation. His slaughtered animals and mixed wine — with which His table is furnished — are those spiritually rich things of the Gospel He has prepared for those who come in at His invitation. Surely to eat of this bread and drink of this wine that He has so graciously prepared is to hold fellowship with Him — for in what ways or things is there nearer communion than in these.

I could further establish this truth by examining all the relationships in which Christ and His saints stand — relationships that necessarily require communion if we suppose both parties are

faithful in them. But this is commonly treated elsewhere, and something will be said about it in one prominent instance later.

Part 2, Chapter 2: The Grace of Christ's Person

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What it is in which we have peculiar fellowship with the Lord Christ. This is in grace. This proved. John 1:14, 16, 17. 2 Corinthians 13:14. 2 Thessalonians 3:17, 18. Grace, of various meanings. Personal grace in Christ proposed for consideration. The grace of Christ as Mediator intended. Psalm 45:2. Song of Solomon 5:9. Christ how white and ruddy. His fitness to save from the grace of union. His fullness to save. His suitableness to endear. These considerations applied.

Having shown that the saints hold distinct fellowship with the Lord Jesus, we next need to show in what it is that they have this particular communion with Him.

This is in grace. It is ascribed to Him throughout Scripture with special emphasis (John 1:14): He dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. Grace in its truth and substance. Everything that came before was only type and shadow — the reality and substance comes only through Christ. Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (verse 17). And from His fullness we have all received grace

upon grace (verse 16) — that is, we have communion with Him in grace; we receive from Him all manner of grace, and therein we have fellowship with Him.

The same is true in that apostolic benediction where the communication of spiritual blessings from the several persons to the saints is so precisely distinguished — it is grace that is ascribed to our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 13:14): the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Paul is so struck by this that he makes it his motto, and the identifying mark by which he wanted his letters recognized (2 Thessalonians 3:17-18): the salutation of Paul in my own hand — the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. He actually treats 'grace be with you' and 'the Lord Jesus be with you' as equivalent expressions, for while he says one is the identifying mark of all his letters, he sometimes uses one, sometimes the other, and sometimes both together. This then is what we are particularly to look for in the Lord Jesus and receive from Him — grace, gospel grace, revealed in and offered through the Gospel. He is the capstone in the building of the temple of God, to whom 'Grace, grace!' must be cried (Zechariah 4:7).

Grace is a word with several meanings. In its most important uses, it falls under one of these three categories:

1. The grace of personal presence and beauty. We call a person graceful or attractive, whether from their own nature or their adornments. This is in Christ the subject of nearly half the book of Song of Solomon, and is also mentioned in Psalm 45:2: You are fairer than the sons of men; grace is poured upon Your lips. Under

this first category with respect to Christ I also place what, with respect to us, I assign to the third. The extraordinary gifts and fruits of the Spirit that were bestowed on Him and brought forth in Him contribute to His personal excellence, as will appear later.

2. The grace of free favor and acceptance. By this grace we are saved — that is, the free favor and gracious acceptance of God in Christ. In this sense it is used in that common expression, 'if I have found grace in your sight' — meaning, if I am freely and favorably received before you. In this sense He gives grace — that is, favor — to the humble (James 4:6; Genesis 39:21; 41:37; Acts 7:10; 1 Samuel 2:26; 2 Kings 25:27).

3. The fruits of the Spirit — sanctifying and renewing our natures, enabling us to do good, and keeping us from evil — are also called grace. In this sense the Lord tells Paul that His grace was sufficient for him — meaning the strength He provided against temptation (Colossians 3:16; 2 Corinthians 8:6-7; Hebrews 12:28).

These last two, as they relate to Christ with respect to us who receive them, I call purchased grace — since He purchased them for us. Our communion with Him in these is described as a fellowship in His sufferings and in the power of His resurrection (Philippians 3:10).

Let us begin with the first, which I call personal grace, and about it do two things.

1. Show what it is and what it consists of — I mean the personal grace of Christ. And 2. Declare how the saints hold immediate communion with Him in it.

Before treating the first, I offer one preliminary observation. We are speaking of Christ as Mediator, and therefore by the grace of His person I do not mean:

1. The glorious excellencies of His deity considered in itself, apart from the office He took on for us as God and man.

2. Nor the outward appearance of His human nature — neither as He lived here on earth bearing our infirmities (of which the prophet gives a very different account on account of the burden laid on Him, Isaiah 52:14), about which some of the early writers were rather too poetic in their descriptions; nor as He is now exalted in glory. A mistaken imagination about this latter has led many into a false and distorted regard for Christ — a merely fleshly reverence based on carnal impressions of the greatness of His exalted human nature, which is simply to know Christ according to the flesh (2 Corinthians 5:19), a damage greatly increased by the corruption of foolish religious images. What I mean is this: the graces of the person of Christ as He is clothed with the office of Mediator — His spiritual excellence, beauty, and comeliness as appointed and anointed by the Father for the great work of bringing all His elect into the Father's arms.

In this respect, Scripture describes Him as supremely excellent, beautiful, and desirable — incomparably beyond the finest created good or any other attraction imaginable.

Psalm 45:2: You are fairer than the sons of men; grace is poured upon Your lips. He is without comparison — more beautiful and gracious than any earthly being. The expression is intensified to lift its subject above all comparison. The Aramaic translator says: Your beauty, O King Messiah, surpasses the sons of men.

Exceedingly desirable. Inward beauty and glory is here expressed through outward form and appearance, because in those days great personal beauty was highly valued in rulers and leaders. Isaiah 4:2: the prophet, calling Him the Branch of the Lord and the fruit of the earth, declares that He shall be beautiful and glorious, excellent and comely — for in Him all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily (Colossians 2:9).

Song of Solomon 5:9. The bride is asked directly about the personal excellencies of her beloved, the Lord Christ. 'What is your beloved more than another beloved, O most beautiful among women? What is your beloved more than another beloved?' (ask the daughters of Jerusalem). She answers in verse 10: my beloved is dazzling and ruddy, outstanding among ten thousand. She then proceeds to describe Him by His excellencies through to the end of the chapter, concluding that He is altogether lovely (verse 16) — which will be treated at length later. Particularly He is here said to be white and ruddy — a fitting blend of which creates the most beautiful appearance. He is white in the glory of His deity, and ruddy in the preciousness of His humanity. His teeth are white with milk and His eyes are red with wine (Genesis 49:12). Whiteness — if I may say so — is the color of glory. In that appearance of the Most High, the Ancient of Days (Daniel 7:9), His garment was white as snow and the hair of His head like pure wool. And at Christ's transfiguration — when the full brightness of His deity shone through — His face shone like the sun, and His garments became white as light (Matthew 17:2), described by another Gospel writer as white as snow, so that no launderer on earth could make them that white (Mark 9:3). It was a divine, heavenly, surpassing glory that was upon Him (Revelation 1:14). For this

reason, the angels and glorified saints who always behold Him and have been fully transformed into the image of that same glory are always described as clothed in white robes. His whiteness is His deity and the glory of it. On this basis, the Aramaic translator applies this entire passage to God, paraphrasing it as the house of Israel declaring the praises of the Ruler of the world: I will serve that God who is clothed in a garment white as snow, the radiance of whose glorious face is like fire. He is also ruddy in the beauty of His humanity. Man was called Adam from the red earth from which he was made. The word used here points to Him as the second Adam, a partaker of flesh and blood — because the children also shared in the same (Hebrews 2:14). The beauty and loveliness of the Lord Jesus in the union of both these natures in one person will be described further later.

2. He is white in the beauty of His innocence and holiness, and ruddy in the blood of His sacrifice. Whiteness is the emblem of innocence and holiness. Of the Nazirites, set apart as types of holiness, it was said they were purer than snow and whiter than milk (Lamentations 4:7). And the prophet shows that scarlet, red, and crimson are the colors of sin and guilt, while white is the color of innocence (Isaiah 1:18). Our beloved was a lamb without spot or blemish (1 Peter 1:18). He committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth (1 Peter 2:22). He is holy, innocent, undefiled, and separate from sinners (Hebrews 7:24), as will appear further. And yet He who was so white in His innocence was made ruddy in His own blood — in two ways. First, physically: in the pouring out of His precious blood in the agony of His soul, when thick drops of blood fell to the ground (Luke 22:44), and again when the whip and thorns, nails and spear, poured it out abundantly — blood and

water flowed from His side (John 19:34). He was made ruddy by being drenched in His own blood. Second, in a moral sense: by the imputation of sin, whose color is red and crimson. God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). He who was white became ruddy for our sake, pouring out His blood as an offering for sin. This too makes Him beautiful: by His whiteness He fulfilled the law; by His redness He satisfied justice. This is our beloved, O daughters of Jerusalem.

3. His endearing excellence in the exercise of His kingdom is also expressed here: He is white in love and mercy toward His own, and ruddy in justice and judgment toward His enemies (Isaiah 63:3; Revelation 19:13).

There are three things in general that make up this personal excellence and grace of the Lord Christ.

1. His fitness to save — from the grace of union, and its necessary consequences. 2. His fullness to save — from the grace of communion, that is, the free consequences of the grace of union. 3. His excellence to endear — from His complete suitableness to every need of the souls of men.

1. His fitness to save — His being the kind of Savior perfectly suited to the work. This comes from the grace of union. The uniting of the natures of God and man in one person made Him fit to save to the uttermost. He lays His hand upon God by sharing His nature (Zechariah 13:7), and He lays His hand upon us by sharing our nature (Hebrews 2:14, 16), and so becomes the mediator and daysman between both. By this means He bridges all the distance that sin created between God and us — and we who were far off are brought near in Him. For this reason, there was room enough in

His breast to receive, and power enough in His spirit to bear, all the wrath prepared for us. Sin was infinite in respect of its object, and punishment was infinite in respect of its subject. This all flows from His union.

Union is the joining of the two natures — God and man — in one person (John 1:14; Isaiah 9:6; Romans 1:3; 9:5). The necessary consequences of this are: first, that the human nature subsists in the person of the Son of God, having no independent subsistence of its own (Luke 1:35; 1 Timothy 3:16). Second, the communication of attributes in the person — whereby the properties of either nature are appropriately attributed to the whole person of Christ, whatever name He is given, whether God or man (Acts 20:28; Acts 3:21). Third, the exercise of His office of Mediator in His single person in respect of both natures. Here we must consider: first, the agent — Christ Himself, God and man — who is the principle that gives life and power to the whole work. Second, both natures as the distinct instruments through which He operates. Third, the effective working of each nature. And finally, the effect produced — which arises from all and relates to all — thus grounding the excellence I speak of in His personal union.

2. His fullness to save — from the grace of communion, or the free consequences of His union — which is all the equipment He received from the Father through the anointing of the Spirit for the work of our salvation. He is able to save completely those who draw near to God through Him (Hebrews 7:26), having had all fullness communicated to Him for this purpose, for it pleased the Father that in Him all fullness should dwell (Colossians 1:19). He received the Spirit without measure (John 3:34), and from this

fullness He supplies all who belong to Him — grace upon grace (John 1:16). If it had been given to Him in limited measure, we would have exhausted it.

3. His excellence to endear — from His complete suitableness to every need of the souls of men. Whatever any person lacks in relation to the things of God, Christ will be to them exactly what they need — I speak of those given to Him by the Father. Is someone spiritually dead? Christ is life (Colossians 3:4). Is someone weak? Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24, 30). Does someone feel the weight of guilt? Christ is complete righteousness — the Lord our righteousness (Jeremiah 23:6). Many poor souls are aware of their needs but do not know where their remedy is. Yet whether it is life, or light, or power, or joy — all of it is wrapped up in Him.

This may be enough to say in general about the personal grace of the Lord Christ. He has a fitness to save — with compassion, and ability, with tenderness and power to carry that work through to the uttermost. He has a fullness to save — of redemption and sanctification, of righteousness and the Spirit. And He has a suitableness to every need of all our souls, making Him supremely desirable — indeed altogether lovely, as will appear in detail later. The saints have distinct fellowship with the Lord Christ first and above all in this, and the way in which they hold that communion will be described in the chapter that follows.

From this entrance into the description of the One with whom the saints have communion, some motivations can be drawn to stir us up to it — and also to expose the emptiness of all the other things and pursuits to which people give their hearts and desires. The daughters of Jerusalem — ordinary, common professors —

having heard the bride describe her beloved (Song of Solomon 5:4, 10), are instantly stirred up to seek Him along with her: 'Where has your beloved gone, that we may seek him with you?' (Song of Solomon 6:1). What Paul said of those who crucified Christ may be said of all who reject Him or refuse communion with Him: had they known Him, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. If people truly knew Him, they would not so readily reject the Lord of glory. He calls those who despise His gracious invitation simple ones, fools, and mockers (Proverbs 1:24). No one despises Christ except those who do not know Him — those whose eyes the god of this world has blinded so that they cannot see His glory. Human souls naturally seek something to rest on and find satisfaction in — something to delight in and commune with. People pursue this in two ways. Some fix on a clear goal — perhaps pleasure, profit, or in the realm of religion, acceptance with God. Others drift toward some vague end, without any settled purpose, pleasing themselves now with one path, now with another, with varied thoughts and pursuits — like those in Isaiah 57:10 who wear themselves out but will not stop because every so often they find a little something along the way. Whatever condition you are in — whether you are eagerly chasing some fixed aim, whether worldly or religious, or wandering aimlessly in your own thoughts, exhausting yourself in the broad roads of your own devising — compare what you are pursuing and what you are doing with what you have heard of Jesus Christ. If anything you are aiming at is like Him, or anything you desire is equal to Him, then reject Him as one with neither beauty nor appeal. But if everything you pursue is only emptiness

and chasing the wind in comparison to Him — why do you spend your thoughts on what gives no bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?

You who are in the flower of your years, full of health and strength, each pursuing something with all the vigor of your spirits — consider, I ask, what are all your beloveds compared to this beloved? What have you gained from them? Tell me — what peace, what quietness, what certainty of everlasting blessing have they given you? Their paths are crooked; whoever walks in them will not know peace. Behold here a fitting object for your finest affections — One in whom you may find rest for your soul; One in whom there is nothing that will grieve or trouble you to eternity. He stands at the door of your souls and knocks. Do not reject Him, lest you seek Him and not find Him. Give Him a little thought. You do not love Him because you do not know Him. Why does one of you spend time in idleness and folly — wasting precious hours, perhaps in outright moral destruction? Why does another keep company with those who mock religion and the things of God? Simply because you do not know our dear Lord Jesus. Oh, when He reveals Himself to you and tells you that He is the Jesus you have treated with contempt and refused — how it will break your heart, and make you grieve like a dove, that you neglected Him. And if you never come to know Him, it would have been better you had never existed. While it is still called today, do not harden your hearts.

You who are perhaps earnestly seeking righteousness, who consider yourselves religious — consider quietly within yourselves: has Christ His proper place in your heart? Is He your all? Does He occupy your thoughts? Do you know Him in His excellence and

loveliness? Do you truly count all things loss and refuse for the surpassing worth of knowing Him? Or do you actually prefer almost everything in the world over Him? But more of these things later.

Part 2, Chapter 3: The Things of Our Communion with the Holy Spirit

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Of the way and manner whereby the saints hold communion with the Lord Christ as to personal grace. The conjugal relation between Christ and the saints — Song of Solomon 2:16; Isaiah 54:5; Song of Solomon 3:11 — opened. The way of communion in this conjugal relation (Hosea 3:3; Song of Solomon 1:15): on the part of Christ; on the part of the saints.

We now come to consider the way in which we hold communion with the Lord Christ with respect to that personal grace we have spoken of. Scripture reveals this to be through a conjugal relationship — He is married to us, and we to Him. This spiritual union is attended by corresponding conjugal affections. And it is through this that we have fellowship with Him in terms of His personal excellencies.

The bride expresses this in Song of Solomon 2:16: 'My beloved is mine, and I am his.' He is mine — I possess Him, I have a claim on Him as my head and my husband. And I am His — possessed by Him, owned by Him, given over to Him — and all this as to my beloved in a conjugal relationship.

So also Isaiah 54:5: 'Your Maker is your husband — the Lord of hosts is His name — and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel; He will be called the God of the whole earth.' This is given as the reason why the church need not be ashamed or confounded in the midst of her troubles and trials — she is married to her Maker, and her Redeemer is her husband. Isaiah 61:10 sets out the mutual glory of Christ and His church as they walk together — like a bridegroom adorning himself with a garland, and a bride adorning herself with her jewels. Such is their condition because such is their relationship. He further expresses it in Isaiah 62:5: 'As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so your God will rejoice over you.' As it is with such persons on the day of their betrothal, in the day of the gladness of their hearts — so it is with Christ and His saints in this relationship. He is a husband to them, providing everything that befits the station and condition into which He has taken them.

To this end we have His faithful pledge in Hosea 2:19-20: 'I will betroth you to Me forever; yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and in justice, in lovingkindness and in compassion, and I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness.' The main purpose of the ministry of the Gospel is to prevail on people to give themselves to the Lord Christ as He reveals His kindness in this pledge. So Paul tells the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 11:2) that he had betrothed them to one husband, to present them as a pure virgin to Christ. Through his preaching of the Gospel he had persuaded them to give themselves up as a bride to the One who had betrothed Himself to them as a husband.

The Lord Jesus takes great delight in this relationship and invites others to behold Him in this glory of His. Song of Solomon 3:11: 'Go out, O daughters of Zion, and gaze on King Solomon with

the crown with which his mother has crowned him on the day of his wedding, and on the day of his gladness of heart.' He calls out to the daughters of Jerusalem — all kinds of professing believers — to consider Him in the act of betrothing and espousing His church to Himself. He also tells them that they will find two things in Him that stand out prominently on this account.

1. Honor: it is the day of His coronation, and His bride is the crown with which He is crowned. For as Christ is a beautiful crown and a glorious diadem to Zion (Isaiah 28:5), so Zion also is a diadem and a crown to Him (Isaiah 62:3). Christ makes this relationship with His saints His glory and His honor. 2. Delight: the day of His betrothal — the day He takes poor sinful souls into His embrace — is the day of the gladness of His heart. John was merely the friend of the bridegroom, who stood and listened for the bridegroom's voice when he was taking his bride to himself, and rejoiced greatly at it (John 3:29). How much more then must be the joy and gladness of the bridegroom Himself — even the joy expressed in Zephaniah 3:17: 'He will exult over you with joy; He will be quiet in His love; He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy.'

It is the gladness of the heart of Christ, the joy of His soul, to take poor sinners into this relationship with Himself. He rejoiced in the thought of it from eternity (Proverbs 8:31). And He always showed the greatest willingness to undergo the hard task it required (Psalm 40:7-8; Hebrews 10:7-8). Indeed He was in anguish, like a woman in labor, until He had accomplished it (Luke 12:50). Because He loved His church He gave Himself for her (Ephesians 5:26), despising the shame and enduring the cross (Hebrews 12:2), that He might enjoy His bride — that He might be for her, and she for Him, and not for another (Hosea 3:3). This is His joy — when

He is thus crowned by His mother. It is believers who are the mother and brothers of this Solomon (Matthew 12:49-50). They crown Him on the day of His betrothal by giving themselves to Him and becoming His glory (2 Corinthians 8:23).

So He describes His entire communion with His church through this image — and does so with great frequency. The time of His taking the church to Himself is the day of His wedding, and the church is His bride, His wife (Revelation 19:7-8). The reception He prepares for His saints is a wedding banquet (Matthew 22:3). The graces of His church are the adornments of His queen (Psalm 45:9-14). And the fellowship He has with His saints is like that held between those who are mutually beloved in marriage (Song of Solomon 1). So Paul, in describing husband and wife, makes unconscious transitions back and forth between the two subjects (Ephesians 5:22-32), concluding the whole with an application to Christ and the church.

We now come to ask: how is it that we hold communion with the person of Christ in respect of conjugal affections, and what does it consist of? There are some things common to Christ and the saints in this, and some things peculiar to each of them, as the nature of this relationship requires. The whole can be summarized under two headings.

1. A mutual giving of themselves to one another. 2. Mutual conjugal affections that follow from that.

1. There is a mutual giving of themselves to one another. This is the first act of communion as to the personal grace of Christ. Christ gives Himself to the soul to be its own, with all the love, care, and tenderness of a husband. The soul gives itself wholly to

the Lord Christ to be His own, in loving and tender obedience. And this is at the heart of the betrothal between Christ and His saints. The prophet sets this out in a parable drawn from his own life — from his relationship with a harlot (Hosea 3:3): 'You shall stay with me for many days; you shall not play the harlot, nor shall you have a man; so I will also be toward you.' 'Poor harlot,' says the Lord Christ, 'I have bought you for Myself with the price of My own blood, and now this is what we will agree to: I WILL BE FOR YOU, and YOU SHALL BE FOR ME, and not for another.'

1. Christ gives Himself to the soul with all His excellencies, righteousness, preciousness, graces, and glory — to be its Savior, head, and husband, to dwell with it in this holy relationship forever. He looks upon the souls of His saints, finds them lovely, and calls them beautiful — because He has made them so. Song of Solomon 1:15: 'How beautiful you are, my darling, how beautiful you are! Your eyes are like doves.' Whatever others may think, Christ declares and re-declares that the souls of His saints are very beautiful — perfect with the beauty He has put upon them (Ezekiel 16:14). 'How beautiful you are, how beautiful' — and particularly that their spiritual sight is excellent and glorious, like the eyes of a dove: tender, discerning, clear, and shining. He then adds a tender longing for the enjoyment of His bride: 'O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the secret place of the steep pathway, let me see your form, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your form is lovely' (Song of Solomon 2:14). Do not hide yourself as one who flies to the crevices of the rocks; do not be downcast as one who hides behind the stairs, afraid to come out to those looking for her. Do not be troubled about the weakness of your prayers; let me hear your sighs and groans, your breathings and yearnings toward

Me — they are very sweet, very delightful. And your spiritual countenance — your appearance in heavenly things — is lovely and delightful to Me. Nor does He leave her here — in Song of Solomon 4:8 He presses her earnestly to a closer fellowship in this bond: 'Come with me from Lebanon, my bride, come with me from Lebanon; journey down from the summit of Amana, from the summit of Senir and Hermon, from the dens of lions, from the mountains of leopards.' You are in a wandering condition — among lions and leopards, sins and troubles — come from there to Me, and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:27). On the strength of this invitation, the bride boldly concludes in Song of Solomon 7:10 that His desire is toward her — that He does indeed love her and intends to bring her into this fellowship with Himself. So in carrying on this union, Christ freely gives Himself to the soul. Precious and excellent as He is, He becomes ours. He makes Himself to be so, and with Him all His graces. Hence the bride says, 'My beloved is mine' — in all that He is, He is mine. Because He is righteousness, He is the Lord our righteousness (Jeremiah 23:6). Because He is the wisdom and power of God, He is made to us wisdom, and so on (1 Corinthians 1:30). So the Branch of the Lord is beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth is excellent and lovely to those who have escaped from Israel (Isaiah 4:2). This is the first thing on Christ's part: the free gift and offering of Himself to us, to be our Christ, our beloved, as to all the purposes of love, mercy, grace, and glory for which He is appointed as Mediator — in a marriage covenant never to be broken. This is the substance of the matter. The Lord Jesus Christ, fully equipped and prepared by the accomplishment of His person as Mediator and the vast purchase of grace and glory He has made, offers Himself as a husband to His

saints and His church through the promises of the Gospel. He reveals His goodwill toward them and His all-sufficiency to supply their needs. Upon their consent to receive Him — which is all He requires or looks for from them — He commits Himself in a marriage covenant to be theirs forever.

2. On the part of the saints, it is their free and willing consent to receive, embrace, and submit to the Lord Jesus as their husband, Lord, and Savior — to remain with Him, to submit their souls to Him, and to be governed by Him forever.

This in the soul is either initial — the solemn consent given at the first moment of union — or ongoing, in renewed acts of consent throughout life. I am speaking especially of the latter, which is proper to communion, rather than the former, which primarily concerns union.

There are two things that together complete this self-surrender of the soul.

First, the preferring of Christ for His excellence, grace, and perfect suitableness — above all other loves whatever — choosing Him in mind and judgment above all of them. In Song of Solomon 5:9-10, the bride, pressed by ordinary professors to give her assessment of her beloved's excellence in comparison to everything else, answers plainly that He is outstanding among ten thousand — indeed altogether lovely — infinitely beyond comparison with the finest created good imaginable. The soul looks at everything in the world — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life — and sees it all as vanity, as something that is passing away (1 John 2:16-17). It also weighs legal righteousness, moral uprightness before others, consistency of life, duty done out of conviction — and

concludes of all of it as Paul does in Philippians 3:8: I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. So also the church in Hosea 14:3-4 rejects every apparent support — as great as Assyria, as promising as idols — so that God alone may hold first place. This is the soul's entrance into conjugal communion with Jesus Christ as to personal grace: the constant preferring of Him above all rivals for its affections, counting all things loss and refuse in comparison to Him. Beloved peace, beloved human relationships, beloved wisdom and learning, beloved righteousness, beloved duties — all loss compared with Christ.

Second, the accepting of Christ by the will as its only husband, Lord, and Savior. This is called receiving Christ (John 1:12) — it refers not only to that solemn act at the very beginning when we first embrace Him, but also to the ongoing posture of the soul in remaining with Him and owning Him as such throughout life. When the soul consents to take Christ on His own terms — to be saved in His own way — and says: Lord, I wanted You and salvation on my terms, so that it might be partly by my own effort and somewhat by the works of the law. Now I am willing to receive You and to be saved in Your way, simply by grace. And though I would have walked according to my own thinking, I now give myself completely over to be governed by Your Spirit. For in You I have both righteousness and strength; in You I am justified and I glory. At that point the soul carries on communion with Christ as to the grace of His person — this is what it means to receive the Lord Jesus in His beauty and excellence. Let believers exercise their hearts in this constantly: dwell often in thoughts of faith, comparing Him with other loves — sin, the world, legal righteousness —

and preferring Him above all of them, counting everything else loss and refuse in comparison to Him. Let our hearts give themselves to Him; let us tell Him we will be for Him and not for another. He delights to hear it, and we will not fail in the end to find sweet refreshment with Him.

Digression 1: The Excellencies of Christ — Song of Songs 5 Opened

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To strengthen our hearts in the surrender of ourselves to the Lord Christ as our husband — as described above — and to prepare the way for stirring up those conjugal affections that will be mentioned later, I will turn aside to give a fuller description of some of the personal excellencies of the Lord Christ, by which the hearts of His saints are truly drawn to Him.

In the Lord our Righteousness, then, consider the following things — each of which is especially fitted to persuade our hearts to give themselves wholly to Him.

1. He is supremely excellent and desirable in His deity and its glory. He is the Lord our Righteousness (Jeremiah 23:6). In the rejoicing of Zion at His coming to her, this is the foundation: 'Behold your God' (Isaiah 40:9). 'We beheld His glory,' says the apostle — but what glory? 'The glory of the only begotten of the Father' (John 1:14). The most devoted saints have been afraid and overwhelmed at the beauty of an angel, and the most hardened sinners have trembled at the glory of one of these creatures in a comparatively dim manifestation — representing only the faintest reflection of

their full glory. And yet those very angels, at their highest state of advancement, cover their faces in the presence of our Beloved, fully aware of their own total inability to bear the rays of His glory (Isaiah 6:2; John 12:39-40). He is the associate of the Lord of Hosts (Zechariah 13:7). Although He once appeared in the form of a servant, He even then considered it no robbery to be equal with God (Philippians 2:8). In the glory of that majesty He dwells in unapproachable light. We cannot find out the Almighty by searching to any degree of perfection: it is as high as heaven — what can you do? It is deeper than the depths — what can you know? Its measure is longer than the earth and wider than the sea (Job 11:7-9). We may all say to one another on this: surely we are more ignorant than any, and have not the understanding of a man; we have not learned wisdom, nor do we have knowledge of the Holy One. Who has ascended to heaven and come back down? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has wrapped up the waters in His garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name, and what is His Son's name — do you know? (Proverbs 30:2-4).

If someone were to ask, as those in the Song of Solomon ask, what makes our beloved Jesus more desirable and worthy of acceptance than anyone else — what makes Him more than others? I ask in return: what makes a king more than a beggar? Much, in every way. But wait — that comparison falls short: they were born the same, they will die the same, and after that comes judgment. What makes an angel more than a worm? A worm is a creature, and an angel is no more — He who made one to crawl in the dirt made the other to dwell in heaven. There is still some proportion between those two. But what are all the nothings of this world

compared to the God who is infinitely blessed forever? Shall the dust of the scale, or a drop from a bucket, be weighed against Him? This is the One of whom the sinners in Zion are terrified when they cry: who among us can live with the consuming fire? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings? I could now offer a glimpse of His excellency in many of the attributes and perfections by which He reveals Himself to the faith of poor sinners. But like a person entering a garden filled with countless flowers of great variety, who does not try to gather every flower in sight but picks one here and another there — I will seek to open a door and give an entrance into the infinite excellency of the graces of the Lord Jesus as He is God blessed forever, offering the reader one or two examples and leaving them to gather more for their own use as they please. Observe then:

1. The endless, bottomless, boundless grace and compassion in Him who is thus our husband — as the God of Zion. It is not the grace of a creature, nor all the grace that could possibly dwell at once in a created nature, that will meet our need. We are too deeply needy to be satisfied with such a supply. There was a fullness of grace in the human nature of Christ — He received the Spirit without measure (John 3:34). A fullness like that of light in the sun, or water in the sea — I speak not of its outflow but of its sufficiency. A fullness incomparably beyond the measure given to angels, yet it was not in the strict sense an infinite fullness — it was a created and therefore a limited fullness. If we could imagine it separated from the deity, the countless thirsting souls who every day drink deeply and broadly of grace and mercy from Him would drain it entirely. In any case, it could afford no real supply on its own, but only in a secondary sense. But when the channel of His

humanity is inseparably united to the infinite and inexhaustible fountain of the deity — who can see the depths of that? If there is grace enough for sinners in an all-sufficient God, it is in Christ. Indeed in anyone else, there cannot be enough. The Lord gives this as the ground for a sinner's peace and confidence: 'Do not fear, for you will not be put to shame; and do not feel humiliated, for you will not be disgraced... your Maker is your husband — the Lord of hosts is His name — and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel; He will be called the God of the whole earth' (Isaiah 54:4-5). This is the foundation of all peace, confidence, and consolation — the grace and mercy of our Maker, of the God of the whole earth. Such is the perfect blending of kindness and power in Him. He makes us and He restores us. He is our God and our Redeemer. 'Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other' (Isaiah 45:22). 'Surely one will say, In the Lord I have righteousness and strength' (verse 24).

On this basis, if all the world were to set themselves to drink in free grace, mercy, and pardon — drawing water continually from the wells of salvation, drawing from a single promise while an angel stood by crying, 'Drink, O friends; drink abundantly!' — taking in as much grace and pardon as would be abundantly sufficient for the world of sin in each one of them — they would not be able to lower the grace of that promise by a hair's breadth. There is enough for millions of worlds, if there were that many, because it flows from an infinite and bottomless fountain. 'Do not fear, O worm Jacob, for I am God and not man' — this is the foundation of sinners' consolation. This is the head of gold mentioned in Song of Solomon 5:11 — that most precious fountain of grace and mercy. The infinity of grace in its spring and source will answer every ob-

jection that might keep our souls from drawing near to communion with Him and freely embracing Him. Will this not meet us in all our distresses? What is our finite guilt before it? Show me the sinner who can stretch his sins to the dimensions of this grace. Here is mercy enough for the greatest, the oldest, the most stubborn transgressor! Why will you die, O house of Israel? Guard against those who would rob you of the deity of Christ: if there were no more grace for me than can be stored up in a mere man, I would rather my portion be under rocks and mountains.

Consider then His eternal, free, and unchangeable love. If the love of Christ toward us were only the love of a mere man — however excellent, innocent, and glorious — it would have a beginning, it would have an end, and perhaps be fruitless. The love of Christ in His human nature toward His people is intensely warm, tender, precious, compassionate — abundantly heightened by His awareness of our miseries, His feeling of our needs, His experience of our temptations — all flowing from that rich store of grace, pity, and compassion that was given Him expressly for our good and supply. But as such, this love in itself cannot be infinite, nor eternal, nor absolutely unchangeable of itself. If it were no more than this — though without parallel or measure — our Savior could not say of it what He does: 'As the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you' (John 15:9). His love could not be compared to and equated with the divine love of the Father in those properties of eternity, fruitfulness, and unchangeableness — the chief anchors of the soul resting in the bosom of Christ. But now:

1. It is eternal. 'Draw near to Me, listen to this: from the beginning I have not spoken in secret, from the time it took place, I was there. And now the Lord God has sent Me, and His Spirit' (Isaiah

48:16). He Himself is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and so is His love — being His who is the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end, who is and who was and who is to come (Revelation 1:11).

2. Unchangeable. Our love is like ourselves — as we are, so are all our affections. The love of Christ is like Himself. We love someone one day and push them away the next. They change, and we change with them — today they are our closest companion, tomorrow we cut them off. Jesus Christ is always the same, and so is His love. In the beginning He laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of His hands. They will perish, but He remains. They will all wear out like a garment, and like clothing He will fold them up, and they will be changed. But He is the same, and His years will not come to an end (Hebrews 1:10-12). He is the Lord and He does not change — and therefore we are not consumed. Whom He loves, He loves to the end. His love never had a beginning and will never have an ending.

3. It is also fruitful — fruitful in all gracious results and effects. A person may love another as their own soul, yet perhaps that love cannot help them. They may feel for someone in prison but not be able to release them; grieve over someone in misery but not be able to help; suffer alongside someone in trouble but not be able to ease it. We cannot love grace into a child, or mercy into a friend; we cannot love them into heaven, however deeply we may long to. It was love that made Abraham cry out, 'Oh that Ishmael might live before You!' — but it could not make it so. But the love of Christ, being the love of God, is effective and fruitful in producing every good thing He wills for His beloved. He loves life, grace, and holiness into us. He loves us into covenant. He loves us into

heaven. Love in Him is properly to will good to someone — and whatever good Christ by His love wills to anyone, that willing is productive of that good.

These three qualities of the love of Christ make it supremely excellent and Him supremely desirable. How many millions of sins — every one of which in any single one of the elect would be enough to condemn them all — has this love overcome? What mountains of unbelief does it remove? Look at the life of any saint, consider the condition of their heart, see the many stains and spots, the defilements and weaknesses that mark their life — and then tell me whether the love that bears with all of this is not worthy of wonder. Is it not the same toward thousands every day? What streams of grace — purging, pardoning, quickening, helping — flow from it every day? This is our beloved, O daughters of Jerusalem.

2. He is desirable and worthy of our acceptance as considered in His humanity — even there He is, with respect to us, supremely desirable. On this point I will note just two things:

1. His freedom from sin. 2. His fullness of grace — in both of which Scripture presents Him as exceedingly lovely and appealing.

1. He was free from sin: the Lamb of God, without spot and without blemish. The unblemished male of the flock to be offered to God — the curse falling on all other offerings and on those who bring them (Malachi 1:14). The purity of fresh snow is no comparison for the whiteness of this lily, this rose of Sharon, even from the womb. For such a high priest was fitting for us — one who is holy, innocent, undefiled, and set apart from sinners (Hebrews 7:26). Those who have been sanctified — even partly washed of their

stains — are exceedingly lovely in the eyes of Christ Himself. 'You are altogether beautiful, my darling,' He says, 'and there is no blemish in you.' How much more lovely then is He who never had the smallest spot or stain?

It is true that Adam at his creation had this spotless purity, as did the angels. But they came directly from the hand of God, without any secondary cause. Jesus Christ came as a plant and root out of dry ground — a blossom from the stem of Jesse, a bud from the lineage of sinful humanity — born of a woman descended from sin, after no innocent human flesh had existed in the world for four thousand years, with every person on His genealogical record infected by sin. To have a flower of rare beauty grow in paradise — a garden planted by God Himself — without being tainted in the least, is not so astonishing. But as the psalmist speaks in another kind — to hear of it in a wood, to find it in a forest, to have a spotless bud spring forth from the wilderness of corrupted human nature — is something that angels themselves long to understand. Indeed, this entire human nature was not only defiled but also under a curse — not only unclean but guilty: guilty of Adam's transgression, in whom all of us have sinned. That the human nature of Christ should be derived from this line, yet be free from guilt and free from pollution — this is cause for adoration.

But you will ask: how can this be? Who can bring something clean out of what is unclean? How could Christ take our nature without taking its defilement and guilt? If Levi paid tithes while still in the body of Abraham, how is it that Christ did not sin while in the body of Adam?

Answer: there are two things in original sin. First, the guilt of the first sin, which is imputed to us — we all sinned in Adam (Romans 5:12), whether we read it 'in whom all sinned' or 'because all sinned' — the meaning is the same: that one sin is the sin of us all. We were all that one man. We were all in covenant with him: he was not only our natural head but also our representative head — as Christ is to believers (Romans 5:17; 1 Corinthians 15:22), so Adam was to all of us. And his violation of that covenant is charged to us.

Second, there is the transmission of a corrupted and polluted nature from him. Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? What is born of the flesh is flesh and nothing more — with a mind and understanding that are also corrupted. A polluted spring will have polluted streams. The first person corrupted human nature, and that corrupted nature then corrupts all persons that follow. Now Christ was entirely free from both. He was never federally in Adam, and so was not subject to the imputation of Adam's sin on that basis. It is true that sin was imputed to Him when He was made sin — by that He took away the sin of the world (John 1:29) — but it was imputed to Him in the covenant of the Mediator, through His voluntary acceptance of it, not in the covenant of Adam by legal imputation. Had it been charged to Him as a descendant of Adam, He would not have been a fit high priest to offer sacrifice for us, not being separate from sinners (Hebrews 7:25). Had Adam stood in his innocence, Christ would not have been incarnate as a Mediator for sinners — and therefore the plan of His incarnation in its moral application did not take effect until after the fall. Although He was in Adam in a natural sense from the moment of Adam's creation, in accordance with God's purpose (Luke

3:23, 38), He was not in him in a legal sense until after the fall. So as far as His own person was concerned, He had no more to do with Adam's first sin than with the personal sin of anyone whose punishment He voluntarily took on. We ourselves are not liable for the guilt of our ancestors after Adam, even though we were naturally in them just as much as we were in him. Therefore He, throughout all His days in the flesh, served God in a covenant of works and was accepted by Him in it — having done nothing to nullify the force of that covenant as it applied to Him. This in no way diminishes His perfection.

2. As for the pollution of our nature, it was prevented in Him from the very moment of conception (Luke 1:35): 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God.' He was made of a woman (Galatians 4:4), but the portion from which He was formed was sanctified by the Holy Spirit so that what was born from it would be a holy thing. Not only was the joining of soul and body — by which a person shares in human nature and thereby in the pollution of sin as a son of Adam — prevented by the sanctification of the Holy Spirit, but the Spirit also accompanied the very separation of His bodily substance in the womb for that sacred purpose to which it was set apart. So on every count He is holy, innocent, and undefiled. Add to this that He committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in Him (1 Peter 2:22); that He fulfilled all righteousness (Matthew 3:15); that His Father was always well pleased with Him (Matthew 3:17) on account of His perfect obedience — yes, even in that very sense in which God charges His angels with folly, and those who dwell in heaven are not pure in His sight. When all this is set before us, His excellence

and desirableness in this regard will be clear. Such He was — such He is. And yet for our sake He was content not only to be counted by the most degraded people as a criminal, but to suffer from God the punishment due to the most wicked of sinners. Of which, more later.

Second, the fullness of grace in Christ's human nature also sets forth His loveliness and desirableness. If I were to examine His perfections as they belong to this part of His excellence — what He had from the womb (Luke 1:35), what grew and developed through exercise in the days of His flesh (Luke 2:52), and the completion of it all in glory — the whole would serve the same purpose. I am only surveying these things in passing. Two things are plainly visible to anyone who gives this even a first consideration: all kinds of grace were in Him, and all degrees of grace for its perfection. Both together make up the fullness that was in Him. I am speaking of created grace, and so I speak of its kinds; it is grace dwelling in a created nature — not infinite — and so I also speak of its degrees.

As for the fountain of grace, the Holy Spirit, He received Him without measure (John 3:34); and as for the communications of the Spirit, it pleased the Father that in Him all fullness should dwell (Colossians 1:19), so that in all things He might have the preeminence. But these things are commonly addressed.

This is the Beloved of our souls! Holy, innocent, undefiled. Full of grace and truth. Full to a sufficiency for every purpose of grace. Full for practice — to serve as an example to men and angels in obedience. Full to a certainty of uninterrupted communion with God. Full to a readiness to supply others. Full to suit every occasion and necessity of the souls of men. Full to a glory not unfitting for One who subsists in the person of the Son of God. Full to a per-

fect victory in trials over all temptations. Full to an exact correspondence to the whole law — every righteous and holy command of God. Full to the utmost capacity of a limited, created, finite nature. Full to the greatest beauty and glory of a living temple of God. Full to the complete pleasure and delight of His Father's soul. Full to be an everlasting monument to the glory of God in giving such inconceivable excellencies to the Son of man.

And this is the second thing that draws our souls to our beloved.

3. Consider that He is all of this in one person. We have not been speaking of two — a God and a man — but of one who is God and man. The Word who was with God in the beginning and was God (John 1:1) also became flesh (verse 14) — not by being converted into flesh, and not by appearing in the outward form and likeness of flesh, but by taking that holy thing born of the Virgin (Luke 1:35) into personal union with Himself. So the Mighty God (Isaiah 9:6) is a child given to us; and that holy thing born of the Virgin is called the Son of God (Luke 1:35). What made the man Christ Jesus a man was the union of soul and body; what made Him that particular man — without which He was not that man — was the subsistence of those united in the person of the Son of God. I have argued this at length elsewhere and will not repeat it here. I set it out here only in general, to show the loveliness of Christ on this account. In Him lies the grace, peace, life, and security of the church, of all believers — as a few considerations will clearly demonstrate.

1. For this reason He was fit to suffer, and able to bear, whatever was due to us. In that very act in which the Son of man gave His life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28), God purchased

the church with His own blood (Acts 20:28), and in this was the love of God seen — that He laid down His life for us (1 John 3:16). For this reason there was room enough in His breast to receive the points of all the swords sharpened by the law against us, and strength enough in His shoulders to carry the weight of the curse that was due to us. This is why He was so willing to undertake the work of our redemption (Hebrews 10:7-8): 'Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God' — because He knew His ability to carry it through. Had He not been man, He could not have suffered. Had He not been God, His suffering could not have availed for Him or for us — it would not have been sufficient payment. The suffering of a mere man could not bear any proportion to what was, in any respect, infinite. Suppose the great and righteous God had gathered every sin committed by all His elect from the foundation of the world — searching also every sin of those yet to come at the world's end — taking all sins from the corruption of their nature to the slightest deviation from the standard of His most holy law, and the greatest provocation in their regenerate and unregenerate condition — and laid all of that on a mere holy innocent creature. How it would have crushed him, and buried him forever from the presence of God's love! This is why the apostle, before speaking of the purging of our sin, first gives that glorious description of the One doing it. 'In these last days He has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high' (Hebrews 1:2-3). It was He who purged our sins — the One who is Son and heir of all things, by

whom the world was made, the brightness of His Father's glory and the exact image of His being. He did it; He alone was able to do it. God was manifest in the flesh (1 Timothy 3:16) for this work. The sword awakened against Him who was the associate of the Lord of Hosts (Zechariah 13:7), and by the wounds of that great Shepherd the sheep are healed (1 Peter 2:24-25).

For this reason He becomes an endless, bottomless fountain of grace to all who believe. The fullness that it pleased the Father to entrust to Christ — to be the great treasury and storehouse of the church — does not reside in the human nature considered on its own, but in the person of the Mediator, God and man. Consider how His communication of grace actually works, and this will be clear. The foundation of it all is laid in His satisfaction, merit, and purchase — these are the morally causing ground of all the grace we receive from Christ. From this, all grace becomes His — all the things of the new covenant, all the promises of God, all the mercy, love, grace, and glory that has been promised, all became His. Not as though they all actually resided in or were contained within the human nature itself and were then communicated to us by our sharing in a portion of what dwelt there. Rather, they are morally His by a covenant arrangement, to be given out by Him as He sees fit, as He is Mediator — God and man — that is, the only begotten Son made flesh (John 1:14), from whose fullness we receive, and grace upon grace. The real communication of grace is by Christ sending the Holy Spirit to regenerate us and to create all the habitual grace — with its daily supplies — in our hearts, in which we are made partakers. Now the Holy Spirit is sent in this way by Christ as Mediator, God and man, as is set out at length in John 14 and 15 (of which more later). This then is what I mean by the fullness of

grace that is in Christ — from which we have both our beginning and all our ongoing supply, which makes Him, as He is the Alpha and Omega of His church, the author and finisher of our faith, excellent and desirable to our souls. Upon the payment of the great price of His blood, and the full acquittal on the satisfaction He made, all grace whatever (of which more later) becomes in a moral sense His, at His disposal. He bestows it on and works it into the hearts of His own by the Holy Spirit, according as in His infinite wisdom He sees the need. How glorious is He to the soul when viewed from this angle? What is most excellent to us is what meets us in our need — what gives bread to the hungry, water to the thirsty, mercy to those who are perishing. All our reliefs are in our Beloved in this way. Here is the life of our souls, the joy of our hearts, our rescue from sin, and our deliverance from the wrath to come.

So He is perfectly fitted to be a Mediator, a daysman, an umpire between God and us — being one with God and one with us, and one in Himself in this oneness, in the unity of one person. His ability and universal fitness for the office of Mediator are commonly demonstrated from this. And in this He is Christ the wisdom of God and the power of God. In this shines the infinitely glorious wisdom of God — which we may better wonder at than put into words. What soul that has any acquaintance with these things does not fall down in reverence and astonishment? How glorious is He who is the Beloved of our souls? What could possibly be lacking that should encourage us to rest and find peace in His arms? Unless every road of relief and refreshment has been blocked by unbelief so completely that no consideration can reach the heart to give it the least help — it is impossible not to gather from this

something that will draw the soul to Him with whom we have to do. Let us dwell on the thought of it. This is the hidden mystery — great, undeniable, worthy of wonder to eternity. What poor, low, and perishing things do we spend our thinking on? Even if we had no personal benefit from this astonishing dispensation, its excellence, glory, beauty, and depths would deserve the best of our inquiries, the vigor of our minds, and the substance of our time. But when our very life, our peace, our joy, our inheritance, our eternity — our all — is bound up in it: shall not the thought of it always dwell in our hearts, always refresh and delight our souls?

He is excellent and glorious also in this: that He is exalted and invested with all authority. When Jacob heard of the exaltation of his son Joseph in Egypt and saw the chariots Joseph had sent for him, his spirit revived and overflowed with joy and other rushing emotions. Is our Beloved lost — He who for our sakes was on the earth, poor and persecuted, reviled and killed? No! He was dead, but He is alive — and He lives forever and ever, and holds the keys of death and the grave. Our Beloved has been made Lord and Ruler (Acts 2:36). He is made King; God sets Him on His holy hill of Zion (Psalm 2:8). He is crowned with honor and glory, after He had been made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death (Hebrews 2:7-9). And what is He made King over? All things are put in subjection under His feet (verse 8). What power does our Beloved exercise over all of this? All authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18)! Over mankind, power has been given to Him over all flesh (John 17:2). And in what glory does He exercise this power? He gives eternal life to His elect, ruling them in the power of God (Micah 5:3) until He brings them home to Himself. And toward His enemies? His arrows are sharp in their hearts

(Psalm 45:5); He dips His robe in their blood. How glorious is He in His authority over His enemies? In this world He terrifies, frightens, overawes, convicts, wounds their hearts and consciences, and fills them with fear, terror, and unrest, until they yield a forced and outward submission. At times He also brings outward judgments — breaking and crushing them, turning the grinding wheel over them, staining His garments with their blood, filling the earth with their bodies. And at last He will gather them all together — beast, false prophet, nations — and cast them into the lake that burns with fire and sulfur.

He is gloriously exalted above all angels in this authority — both good and bad (Ephesians 1:20-22) — far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but in the one to come. All are under His feet, at His command, and entirely at His disposal. He is at the right hand of God in the highest exaltation possible, in full possession of a kingdom over all creation, having received a name above every name (Philippians 2:9). How glorious is He in His throne — at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Glorious in His commission — all authority in heaven and on earth. Glorious in His name — a name above every name, the Lord of lords and King of kings. Glorious in His scepter — a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of His kingdom. Glorious in His attendants — His chariots are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels; among them He rides through the heavens and sends out the voice of His strength, attended by ten thousand times ten thousand of His holy ones. Glorious in His subjects — all creatures in heaven and on earth; nothing is left that has not been put in subjection under Him. Glorious in His way of ruling and the administration of His king-

dom — full of sweetness, power, serenity, holiness, righteousness, and grace toward His elect; of terror, vengeance, and certain destruction toward the rebellious, whether angels or men. Glorious in the outcome of His reign — when every knee shall bow before Him and all shall stand before His judgment seat. And what a small portion of His glory have we even pointed to? This is the Beloved of the church, its head, its husband. This is He with whom we have communion. But I am to treat the full exaltation of Jesus Christ at length elsewhere.

Having dwelt on these general matters to carry forward the motivations toward communion with Christ in the relationship mentioned — drawn from His excellencies and perfections — I will now reflect on the description given of Him by the bride in Song of Solomon 5:10-16 for precisely this purpose. 'My beloved is dazzling and ruddy, outstanding among ten thousand. His head is like gold, pure gold; His locks are wavy, black as a raven. His eyes are like doves beside streams of water, bathed in milk, and set like jewels. His cheeks are like a bed of balsam, banks of sweet-scented herbs; His lips are lilies, dripping with liquid myrrh. His hands are rods of gold set with jewels; His abdomen is carved ivory inlaid with sapphires. His legs are pillars of alabaster set on pedestals of pure gold; His appearance is like Lebanon, choice as the cedars. His mouth is full of sweetness. And he is wholly desirable. This is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.'

The general description given of Him in verse 10 has been considered above. The particular details that follow are illustrations to back up the claim that He is outstanding among ten thousand.

1. The bride begins with His head and face (verses 11-13). In describing His head, she speaks first of it in general — it is fine gold — and then in particular as to its adornments — His locks are wavy and black as a raven.

1. His head is as the most fine gold — or his head is gold, solid gold, as some read it; pure gold, as others; or, as some retain both Hebrew words, a mass of gold.

Two things stand out about gold: its splendor or glory, and its permanence. These are what the bride intends in speaking of the head of Christ. His head is His governance, authority, and kingdom; hence it is said that a crown of pure gold was on His head (Psalm 21:3), and His head is here called gold because of the golden crown that adorns it. Just as the monarchy in Daniel that was most eminent for glory and permanence is described as a head of gold (Daniel 2:38), so these two qualities characterize the kingdom and authority of Christ.

1. It is a glorious kingdom. He is clothed with splendor and majesty, and in His majesty He rides forth victoriously (Psalm 45:3-4). His glory is great in the salvation of God; honor and majesty are laid upon Him; He is made blessed forever and ever (Psalm 21:5-6). I could go into the details and show that there is no quality that makes a kingdom glorious that is not present in the kingdom of Christ in all its excellence. It is a heavenly, spiritual, universal, and unshakable kingdom — all of which make it glorious. But something has already been said on this.

2. It is durable — indeed eternal; solid gold. His throne endures forever and ever (Psalm 45:6). Of the increase of His government there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His

kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore (Isaiah 9:7). His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom (Daniel 7:27), a kingdom that will never be destroyed (Daniel 2:44), for He must reign until all His enemies have been subdued. This is that head of gold — the splendor and eternity of His government.

If you take the head in its natural sense, it points either to the glory of His deity or to the fullness and excellence of His wisdom, of which the head is the seat. The imagery must not be pressed too tightly, so long as we hold to the framework of faith.

As for the adornments of His head — His locks are said to be wavy or curled, black as a raven. 'As a raven' is added to describe the depth of the blackness, not with any reference to the nature of the raven. Taking the head in a political sense, His locks — described as curled, seeming tangled but in fact falling in perfect order and beauty — represent His thoughts, counsels, and ways in the administration of His kingdom. They are black or dark because of their depth and inscrutability — as God is said to dwell in thick darkness — and curled or wavy because of their precise interweaving from His infinite wisdom. His thoughts are many, like the hairs of the head, seeming complex and entangled but in fact set in perfect order — deep and unsearchable, dreadful to His enemies, and beautiful and lovely to His beloved. Such are the thoughts of His heart, the counsels of His wisdom in governing His kingdom: dark and bewildering to the worldly eye; but in themselves, and to His saints, deep, manifold, ordered in all things, lovely, and desirable.

In a natural sense, dark and wavy hair signifies the beauty and vigor of youth — the strength and power of Christ in carrying out His purposes appear glorious and lovely in all His ways.

The next feature described is His eyes (verse 12): His eyes are like doves beside streams of water, bathed in milk, and set like jewels. The reason for this image is plain: doves are gentle birds, not birds of prey, and among all birds they have the brightest, most luminous, and most penetrating eyes. Being washed in milk or crystal-clear water adds to their beauty, and they are said here to be fitly set — proportioned for beauty and brilliance, like a precious stone in the setting of a ring.

Since eyes are for sight, discernment, knowledge, and perception of things to be known, the knowledge, understanding, and discerning Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ are here in view. Four things are ascribed to His eyes through this image: first, tenderness; second, purity; third, discernment; and fourth, glory.

Tenderness: the compassion of Christ toward His church is here expressed. He looks at it with the eyes of gentle doves — with tenderness and attentive compassion, without anger, wrath, fury, or any thought of revenge. So are the eyes of Christ toward us — as the eyes of one who in tenderness cares for us, directing all His wisdom, knowledge, and understanding in tender love for our benefit. He is the stone — the foundation stone of the church — on which are seven eyes (Zechariah 3:9), a perfect fullness of wisdom, knowledge, care, and kindness for its guidance.

Purity: eyes washed in purity like doves' eyes. This may be understood either in a personal sense — for the excellence and unmixed cleanness of His own sight and knowledge in Himself — or in a relational sense, for His delight in beholding purity in others. He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity (Habakkuk 1:13); He has no pleasure in wickedness, and the foolish will not stand before Him (Psalm 5:4-5). If the righteous soul of Lot was tormented

by witnessing the degraded conduct of wicked men — and Lot had eyes of flesh, not without their own mixture of impurity — how much more must the pure eyes of our dear Lord Jesus recoil from all the filthiness of sinners. But here lies the wonder of His love for us: He takes care to remove our filth and stains so that He may take delight in us. And since we are so defiled that it could only be done one way, He does it by His own blood (Ephesians 5:25-27). He does not leave His bride until He can say of her: 'You are altogether beautiful, my darling, and there is no blemish in you' (Song of Solomon 4:7) — removing our spots and stains partly through the renewing work of the Holy Spirit, and wholly adorning us with His own righteousness.

Discernment: He sees us quickly, clearly, and thoroughly — right to the bottom of everything He looks upon. So in another place His eyes are described as a flame of fire (Revelation 1:14), that the churches might know He is the One who searches minds and hearts (Revelation 2:23). He has penetrating eyes; nothing is hidden from Him; all things are open and naked before Him with whom we have to do. While He was in this world, Jesus knew all men and did not need anyone to testify about man, for He knew what was in man (John 2:24-25). His piercing eyes look through all the thick coverings that hypocrites wear. No humble, broken, contrite soul will lose a single sigh or groan after Him; no panting of love or desire is hidden from Him. And no impressive performance by the most polished hypocrite will avail before Him — His eyes see through all of it, and the filth of their hearts lies naked before Him.

Beauty and glory are also in view: everything about Christ is beautiful, for He is altogether lovely (verse 16), but He is most glorious in His sight and wisdom. He is the wisdom of God — eternal wisdom itself. His understanding is infinite. When our knowledge is made perfect, it will still be finite and limited; His is without shadow of darkness, without the constraint of finitude.

So He is beautiful and glorious — His head is gold, His eyes are dove's eyes washed in milk and set like jewels.

The next feature is His cheeks (verse 13). His cheeks are like a bed of spices — like beds of sweet-scented herbs, or towers of perfumes, or well-cultivated flowers. Three things are plainly in view in these words.

1. A sweet fragrance, as from spices and flowers and towers of perfume. 2. Beauty and order, as spices arranged in beds or rows, as the words indicate. 3. Eminence, as in the word for 'sweet' or 'well-grown' — large, flourishing flowers.

These qualities are in the cheeks of Christ. The Aramaic translator, who applies the whole Song to God's dealings with the Jewish people, identifies these cheeks of the church's husband with the two stone tablets bearing the various lines inscribed on them — but that reading is strained, as are most of the interpretations of that commentator.

The cheeks of a man are the seat of attractiveness and manly courage. The comeliness of Christ — as has been partly described — comes from His fullness of grace in Himself for us. His manly courage relates to the exercise of His rule and government, arising from His fullness of authority, as described above. This comeliness and courage — which the bride, describing Christ as a beautiful

and desirable person, calls His cheeks, to complete His features and proportion — she ascribes three things to: a sweet fragrance, order, and eminence. A sweet fragrance: just as God is said to receive a pleasing aroma from the grace and obedience of His servants (Genesis 8:21 — the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma from Noah's sacrifice), so the saints smell a sweet fragrance from His grace as it is deposited in Christ (Song of Solomon 1:3). It is what they rest in, what they delight in, what refreshes them. Just as aromatic spices and flowers please the physical senses, refresh the spirits, and give delight to the person — so the graces of Christ do to His saints. They satisfy their spiritual sense, they revive their drooping spirits, and bring delight to their souls. When He is near them, they smell His garments, as Isaac smelled the garments of Jacob — and said it was like the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed (Genesis 27:27) — and their souls are refreshed by it.

2. Order and beauty — like spices arranged in a garden bed. Such are the graces of Christ. When spices are arranged in order, anyone can recognize what they need and gather it accordingly. Their correspondence to one another also makes them beautiful. So are the graces of Christ as set forth in the Gospel: they are presented distinctly and in order, so that sinners by faith may look on them and take from Him according to their need. They are arranged for the use of the saints in the promises of the Gospel. There is light in Him, and life in Him, and power in Him, and all consolation in Him — a constellation of graces shining with glory and beauty. Believers view them all, see their glory and excellence, and fix especially on what is most needed in their present condition. One takes light and joy; another takes life and power — gathering these things by faith and prayer from this bed of spices. No

one comes to Him and leaves without refreshment. What may they not take? What may they not gather? Whatever the poor soul lacks — behold, it is here provided, laid out in order in the promises of the Gospel, which are like the beds where these spices are planted for our use. For this reason the covenant is said to be ordered in all things (2 Samuel 23:3-4).

3. Eminence: His cheeks are a tower of perfumes — lifted up, conspicuous, visible, prominent. So are the graces of Christ when they are displayed and lifted up in the preaching of the Gospel. They are a tower of perfumes — a sweet fragrance to God and to man.

The same verse continues: His lips are like lilies, dripping with liquid myrrh. Two perfections from the natural world are combined here: the glory of color in the lily and the sweetness of fragrance in the myrrh. The beauty and glory of the lily in those lands was such that our Savior said Solomon in all his glory was not adorned like one of them (Matthew 6:29). The fragrance of myrrh was so prized that when Scripture wishes to describe any excellent aroma, it uses myrrh as the comparison (Psalm 45:8), and it was the chief ingredient of the holy anointing oil (Exodus 30:26). It is frequently mentioned in other places for the same purpose. Of Christ it is said that grace was poured upon His lips (Psalm 45:2), and so people were amazed at the gracious words that came from His mouth. So in speaking of Christ's lips and their dripping of liquid myrrh, the word of Christ is in view — its fragrance, its excellence, and its usefulness. In this He is truly excellent and glorious, surpassing the finest natural things of their kind: gloriously, beautifully, and usefully above all in the word He speaks. Hence those who preach His word to the saving of souls are said to be a fra-

grance of Christ to God (2 Corinthians 2:15), and the aroma of the knowledge of God is said to be spread through them (verse 14). I could press further the individual properties of myrrh to which the word of Christ is here compared — its bitterness in taste, its power to preserve from decay, its usefulness in perfumes and ointments — and draw out their parallels to the excellencies of the word. But I will keep to the main point. What the Holy Spirit intends here is this: the word of Christ is sweet, fragrant, and precious to believers, and in it — in its commands, promises, encouragements, and even its most solemn warnings — they see Him as excellent, desirable, and beautiful.

The bride adds: His hands are rods of gold set with precious gems. Gold rods set with glittering precious stones are both valuable and desirable — for their worth and for their beauty. So are the hands of Christ — that is, all His works. All His works are glorious; they are all fruits of wisdom, love, and generosity. His belly — or rather His inner self, which includes the heart — is carved ivory inlaid with sapphires. The smoothness and brightness of ivory and the preciousness and heavenly color of sapphires are called in to give some hint of the excellence of Christ. That 'inner self' in Scripture, whether ascribed to God or man, refers to the affections — that is well established. The tender love, inexpressible affections, and kindness of Christ toward His church and people are expressed here: as beautiful as the sight of polished ivory set with clusters of precious sapphires, so much more glorious are the tender affections, mercies, and compassion of the Lord Jesus toward believers.

The strength of His kingdom, the faithfulness and stability of His promises, the height and glory of His person in His dominion, and the sweetness and excellence of communion with Him are set forth in these words: His legs are pillars of alabaster set on pedestals of pure gold; His countenance is like Lebanon, choice as the cedars; His mouth is most sweet.

When the bride has gone this far in describing Him, she sums it all up in one sweeping declaration: He is wholly desirable — altogether to be desired and beloved. As if she had said: I have called up some of the finest things of creation — things of greatest worth, beauty, usefulness, and glory here below — and compared some of the excellencies of my Beloved to them. In this way of imagery I can carry things no higher; I find nothing better or more desirable to hold out and represent His loveliness and beauty. But all of this falls far short of His actual perfections, His beauty, and His comeliness. He is altogether to be desired, to be beloved.

Lovely in His person — in the glorious all-sufficiency of His deity, the gracious purity and holiness of His humanity, in authority and majesty, in love and power.

Lovely in His birth and incarnation: when He was rich, becoming poor for our sake; taking on flesh and blood because we share in flesh and blood; being made of a woman so that He might be made under the law for us.

Lovely throughout the whole course of His life, in the more-than-angelic holiness and obedience He exercised in the depths of poverty and perfection — doing good, receiving evil; blessing, and being cursed; reviled and reproached throughout all His days.

Lovely in His death — and most lovely of all to sinners there. Never was He more glorious and desirable than when He came broken and dead from the cross. Then He had carried all our sins into a land of forgetfulness; then He had made peace and reconciliation for us; then He had secured life and immortality for us.

Lovely in His whole undertaking — in His life, death, resurrection, and ascension — as the Mediator between God and us: to restore the glory of God's justice and to save our souls, bringing us into the enjoyment of God from whom sin had set us at an infinite distance.

Lovely in the glory and majesty with which He is crowned, now that He is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high — where, though He is terrible to His enemies, He is full of mercy, love, and compassion toward His beloved ones.

Lovely in all those supplies of grace and consolation — in all the outpourings of His Holy Spirit — in which His saints are made partakers.

Lovely in all the tender care, power, and wisdom He exercises in protecting, keeping, and delivering His church and people in the midst of all the opposition and persecution to which they are exposed.

Lovely in all His ordinances, and in the whole of that spiritually glorious worship He has appointed for His people — through which they draw near and have communion with Him and His Father.

Lovely and glorious in the vengeance He takes, and will finally execute, upon the stubborn enemies of Himself and His people.

Lovely in the pardon He has purchased and now gives out; in the reconciliation He has established; in the grace He communicates; in the consolations He administers; in the peace and joy He gives His saints; in His sure preservation of them to glory.

What shall I say? There is no end to His excellencies and desirableness. He is altogether lovely. This is our Beloved — and this is our Friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.

Digression 2: Further Meditation on Christ's Excellencies

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All solid wisdom laid up in Christ. True wisdom — what it consists of. Knowledge of God, obtainable only in Christ. What of God may be known through His works. Some properties of God not disclosed except in Christ alone: love, mercy. Others not fully disclosed except in Him: such as punishing justice, patience, wisdom, all-sufficiency. No property of God savingly known except in Christ. What is required for a saving knowledge of the properties of God. No true knowledge of ourselves except in Christ. Knowledge of ourselves — what it consists of. Knowledge of sin — how it is to be had in Christ. Also knowledge of righteousness, and of judgment. The wisdom of walking with God hidden in Christ. What is required for it. Other claimants to the title of wisdom examined and rejected. Christ alone exalted.

A second consideration of the excellencies of Christ — one that draws the hearts of those who stand with Him in the relationship described — arises from what, when wrongly understood, is the great idol of men, and when rightly grasped, is the great goal of the saints: wisdom and knowledge. If it can be shown that all true and

solid knowledge is stored up in and can only be obtained from and through the Lord Jesus Christ, then the hearts of people — if they are honest with themselves and true to their deepest convictions — will inevitably be drawn to Him. The great aim of all people who have been turned away from open slavery to the world and from sensual or self-indulgent living is to be wise. What paths people generally take in pursuit of that goal will be considered later. The purpose of this digression — for the glory of our dear Lord Jesus Christ and the strengthening of our hearts in communion with Him — is to show that all wisdom is stored up in Him, and that it can only be obtained from Him.

1 Corinthians 1:24: the Holy Spirit tells us that Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God — not the essential wisdom of God as He is the eternal Son of the Father (in which sense He is called wisdom in Proverbs 8:20-23), but as He is crucified (verse 23). As crucified, He is the wisdom of God — that is, all the wisdom that God deploys for the revealing of Himself and for saving sinners, which makes foolish all the wisdom of the world. All of that is in Christ crucified, displayed in Him, by Him, and obtainable only from Him. And through Him we see the glory of God (2 Corinthians 3:18). He is not only called the wisdom of God but is also said to be made wisdom to us (1 Corinthians 1:30). He is made — not by creation, but by appointment and ordination — wisdom for us: not only by teaching us wisdom (by a figure where the effect stands for the cause) as the great prophet of His church, but also because by knowing Him we come to know the wisdom of God, which is our wisdom. This wisdom, though truly promised, is to be

had in this way alone. The sum of the matter is stated plainly in Colossians 2:3: in Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

There are two things that might seem to have some claim on true wisdom. First, civil wisdom and practical prudence for the management of affairs. Second, the capacity of learning and literature. But God dismisses both of these as useless for the true goal of wisdom. There is in the world what is called understanding, but it comes to nothing; there is what is called wisdom, but it is turned into folly (1 Corinthians 1:19-20). God brings the understanding of the intelligent to nothing and makes the wisdom of the world foolish. And if there is no wisdom or knowledge without the knowledge of God (Jeremiah 8:9) — as there certainly is not — then it is all shut up in the Lord Christ. John 1:18: no one has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has made Him known. He is not seen at any other time (John 5:37), nor known by any other means, except through the revelation of the Son. He has made the Father known from His own bosom. And so it is said (verse 9) that He is the true light that gives light to every person coming into the world — the true light that has it in Himself; no one has any light except from Him; all who come to Him receive it; whoever does not come to Him is in darkness.

First, all true wisdom and knowledge can be grouped under three headings.

1. The knowledge of God, His nature, and His attributes. 2. The knowledge of ourselves in relation to the will of God concerning us. 3. The skill to walk with God in communion.

The knowledge of God's works and the highest purpose of all necessarily accompanies these. In these three all true wisdom and knowledge is summed up — and not one of them can be obtained to any purpose, or is revealed, except in and through the Lord Christ.

In the work of creation, God did reveal Himself to creatures capable of knowing Him, in many of His attributes — His power, His goodness, His wisdom, His all-sufficiency are made known through it. The apostle affirms this in Romans 1:19-21: in verse 19 he calls it 'what may be known of God'; in verse 20, 'His eternal power and divine nature'; and in verse 21, 'a knowing of God' — all through creation. But there are some attributes of God that all the works of creation cannot in any degree reveal or make known — such as His patience, long-suffering, and forbearance. For since everything was made good, there was no place for the exercise or manifestation of these attributes. The whole structure of heaven and earth, considered in itself as originally created, contains no hint of patience and forbearance in God — yet these are eminent attributes of His nature, as He Himself proclaims (Exodus 34:6-7).

God therefore goes further, and through the works of His providence in preserving and governing the world He made, also reveals these attributes. By cursing the earth and filling the created order at times with signs of His anger and indignation, He has — as the apostle tells us (Romans 1:18) — revealed His wrath from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Yet by not immediately destroying everything, He has also manifested His patience and forbearance to all. Paul tells us in Acts 14:16-17 that He allowed all nations to walk in their own ways, yet did not leave Himself without witness — doing good, sending rain from

heaven and fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with food and gladness. The psalmist gives an extensive account of His goodness and wisdom in these works (Psalm 104). Through these means God bore witness to His goodness and patience: and so He is said to endure with much long-suffering (Romans 9:22). But even here, the whole world comes to a standstill. Through all of this, people get only a faint and shadowy glimpse of God — they see no more than His back. Moses did not even see that much until he was hidden in the rock — and that rock was Christ. There are some of God's most eminent and glorious attributes — I mean those in whose manifestation He will be most glorified — of which there is not the slightest trace to be found outside the Lord Christ. Some we know comparatively nothing of except in Him. And of all the rest, there is no true saving knowledge except through Him.

Among the first kind — those of which nothing at all can be conceived except in Christ — are love and pardoning mercy.

1. Love: I mean love toward sinners. Without this, man is of all creatures the most miserable. And there is not the slightest trace of it that can possibly be discovered except in Christ. The Holy Spirit says in 1 John 4:8, 16: God is love — meaning not only that He is of a loving and tender nature, but that He will exercise Himself in a dispensation of His love, eternal love, toward us; that He has had purposes of love for us from of old and will fulfill them all toward us in due season. But how is this demonstrated? How may we come to know it? He tells us in verse 9: in this the love of God was manifested — that God sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. This is the only disclosure God has ever made of any such attribute in His nature, or of any intention to exercise it toward sinners — in the sending of Jesus Christ

into the world that we might live through Him. Where now is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the debater of this age with all his learning? (1 Corinthians 1:20). His voice must be that of the hypocrites in Zion (Isaiah 33:14-15). Any wisdom that cannot teach me that God is love will always count as foolishness. Let people look to the sun, moon, and stars, to rain and fruitful seasons — and answer honestly what they learn of this from those things. They should not flatter themselves that they are wiser or better than those who went before them, who gained nothing from those things except being left without excuse.

2. Pardoning mercy, or grace: without this, even His love would be without effect. What discovery a sinful person might make of this on their own is seen in our first father, who, when he sinned, had no thought of mercy at all and simply hid himself (Genesis 3:8). He did it when only the faintest breeze of God's presence was felt, and he did it foolishly — imagining he could hide among trees (Psalm 139:7-8). The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (John 1:17). Grace in its truth and substance — pardoning mercy that comes through Christ alone. That pardoning mercy which is revealed in the Gospel, and in which God will be glorified to all eternity (Ephesians 1:6). I do not mean that vague general mercy, that undefined willingness to accept, in which many place their hope (to ascribe which to God is the greatest dishonor that can be done to Him). That does not shine with a single ray except in Christ. It is entirely stored up in Him and revealed by Him. Pardoning mercy is God's free and gracious acceptance of a sinner on the basis of the satisfaction made to His justice in the blood of Jesus. No disclosure of it — except as it relates to the satisfaction of justice — is consistent with the glory

of God. It is a mercy of inconceivable condescension in forgiveness, blended with exact justice and severity. In Romans 3:25, God is said to set forth Christ as a propitiation in His blood, to declare His righteousness in the forgiveness of sins — His righteousness is also manifested in the matter of forgiveness. And so it is said everywhere that this forgiveness is wholly in Christ (Ephesians 1:7). This Gospel grace and pardoning mercy are purchased by Him alone and revealed in Him alone. This was the main purpose of all the institutions of the Old Testament — to show that forgiveness and pardon are entirely wrapped up in the Lord Christ, and that outside of Him there is not the slightest trace of it to be found, nor the smallest taste of it. Had God not set forth the Lord Christ, all the angels in heaven and all people on earth could not have conceived that there was any such thing in the nature of God as this grace of pardoning mercy. The apostle affirms that the full manifestation as well as the exercise of this mercy is in Christ alone (Titus 3:4-5): after that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared — namely in the sending of Christ and the declaration of Him in the Gospel — then was this pardoning mercy and salvation not by works disclosed.

These then are those attributes of God of which not the slightest trace can be obtained except in Christ. Whoever does not know Him through these attributes does not know Him at all. He who does not have the Son does not have the Father (1 John 2:23). He is known as a Father only as He is love and full of pardoning mercy in Christ. How this knowledge is to be had, the Holy Spirit tells us in 1 John 5:20: the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true. By the Son alone we have the understanding to know Him who is true. Christ re-

veals these attributes in His teaching as the great prophet of the church (John 17:6). But the life of this knowledge lies in a personal acquaintance with Him in whom the express image and rays of this glory of His Father shine out (Hebrews 1:3).

There are other properties of God that, though partially revealed elsewhere, are only clearly, fully, and savingly known in Jesus Christ — namely:

1. His punishing justice in punishing sin. 2. His patience, forbearance, and long-suffering toward sinners. 3. His wisdom in managing all things for His own glory. 4. His all-sufficiency in Himself and toward others.

All of these may receive some lower degree of disclosure outside of Christ, yet they shine clearly only in Him — and it is our wisdom to know them in Him.

First, His punishing justice.

God has revealed His anger against sin in many ways, so that people cannot avoid knowing that in His judgment, those who do such things deserve death (Romans 1:32). He has in the law threatened to kindle a fire in His anger that burns to the very depths of hell. In many acts of His providence His wrath is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness (Romans 1:18). Consider how angels were cast from heaven for their sin, bound in chains of everlasting darkness until the judgment of the great day. Consider how Sodom and Gomorrah were condemned and burned to ashes as a warning to those who would afterward live ungodly lives (2 Peter 2:6). But this justice shines far more clearly in the Lord Christ.

In Christ, God has revealed the essential nature of this justice — that it could not be turned away from sinners without a propitiation. Those who ground the necessity of satisfaction merely in a free act of God's will leave no firm and necessary foundation for the death of Christ. But plainly, in that God did not spare His own Son but made His soul an offering for sin and would accept no atonement except through His blood, God has abundantly shown that His holiness and righteousness necessarily require wrath to be rendered against sin. True and useful knowledge of punishing justice means understanding this: that its execution is not optional but essential to God's nature. To treat it as something God may exercise or set aside at will is to make His justice not a property of His nature but merely a free choice of His will. A willingness to punish that could just as easily refrain without any injustice is not really justice at all — it is more like ill will.

In the penalty inflicted on Christ for sin, this justice is manifested far more gloriously than in anything else. To see a world made good and beautiful wrapped up in wrath and curses, covered with thorns and briars — to see the whole beautiful creation made subject to futility, delivered over to the bondage of decay, to hear it groaning in pain under that burden — gives some glimpse of this. To consider angels, those most glorious and immortal creatures, cast down into hell, bound in chains of darkness, and reserved for an even more dreadful judgment for one sin — to consider the ocean of the blood of souls poured out to eternity on this account — sheds some light on it. But what is all of this compared to the view a spiritual eye has in the Lord Christ? All these things are nothing alongside Him. To see the One who is the wisdom and power of God, always beloved of the Father — to see Him fear,

tremble, bow, sweat, pray, and die — to see Him lifted up on the cross, the earth trembling beneath Him as if unable to bear His weight, the heavens darkened above Him as if shut against His cry, and He Himself hanging between both as if refused by both — and all this because our sins fell upon Him — this above everything else most fully reveals the severity of God's punishing justice. Here, and nowhere else, is it truly learned.

God's patience, forbearance, and long-suffering toward sinners: there are many glimpses of God's patience in His works of providence, but all of them fall far short of the revelation of it we have in Christ — especially in these three ways.

1. The manner of its discovery: it is evident to everyone that God does not ordinarily punish people immediately when they sin. From His constant way of governing the world — maintaining goodness toward people despite all their provocations, causing the sun to shine on them, sending rain and fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with food and gladness — it was easy to conclude that there was in Him an abundance of goodness and forbearance. But all of this remains in deep shadow, being only the result of human reasoning drawn from observation. In fact, the way this patience has operated has become a snare to nearly everyone toward whom it has been shown (Ecclesiastes 8:11), and a temptation to those who have observed it (Job 21:7; Psalm 73:2-4; Jeremiah 12:1; Habakkuk 1:13). The discovery of God's patience in Christ is entirely different in character. In Christ, God's very nature is revealed as love and kindness, and His commitment to extend that love to sinners is confirmed by promise, oath, and solemn covenant. To remove any uncertainty about His intention, a firm foundation for acting in keeping with these gracious properties of His nature is set

forth: the reconciliation and atonement made in the blood of Christ. Even if God's patience and kindness were revealed to us, as long as it remained unclear that His other attributes — such as His justice and His wrath against sin — had been fully satisfied, there would be little comfort to be found in that patience alone. And so, though God may teach people something of His goodness and forbearance by sending rain and fruitful seasons, He also at the same time reveals His wrath from heaven against human ungodliness (Romans 1:18). Because of this, it is impossible for people outside of Christ to do anything but waver and tremble at the outcome of these dealings. Yet this is the very best that people can have outside of Christ — the most they can attain to. They might for a time occupy their minds and satisfy themselves with the present possession of good things administered in God's patience, but they were not delivered in the least from the bondage they were under through the fear of death and the darkness that surrounds it. The law reveals no patience or forbearance in God — it speaks, concerning the outcome of transgressions, only of sword and fire, except where God intervened by a sovereign act. But in Christ, as already described, the revelation of God's forbearance comes together with the revelation that His justice and wrath against sin have been fully satisfied — so we need not fear that justice will somehow interrupt or overturn the works of His patience, which are so sweet to us. For this reason God is said to be in Christ reconciling the world to Himself (2 Corinthians 5:19) — revealing Himself in Christ as One who now has nothing left to do, for the manifestation of all His attributes and for the glorifying of Himself, but only to forbear, reconcile, and pardon sin in Him.

2. In the nature of it: what is this forbearance that is revealed outside of Christ? It is merely a withholding of immediate punishment after an offense, along with the giving and continuing of earthly blessings — things that people are prone to abuse, and with which they may perish, with their arms full of them, to eternity. But the forbearance hidden in Christ and revealed from Him is full of love, sweetness, tenderness, kindness, and grace. It is the Lord waiting to be gracious to sinners — waiting for the opportunity to show love and kindness in the most endearing way possible, drawing a soul close to Himself (Isaiah 30:18). Therefore the Lord will wait to be gracious to you; He will be exalted so that He may have mercy on you. There is no revelation of God that the soul finds more sweetness in than this. When a person is deeply convinced by experience that God has again and again passed over countless sins, they are astonished — amazed that God did not seize on their provocations as occasion to cast them from His presence. They see that with infinite wisdom and endless patience God has directed all His dealings with them — to rescue them from the power of the devil, to rebuke and discipline their spirit for sin, and to draw them closer to Himself. Nothing, I say, brings greater sweetness to the soul than this. And so the apostle says (Romans 3:25) that complete forgiveness of sins is made possible through the forbearance of God — God clears the way for full forgiveness through this forbearance, which the other kind of patience cannot do.

3. They differ in their ends and aims. What is the purpose and design of God in the forbearance He shows to people outside of Christ? The apostle tells us (Romans 9:22): 'What if God, wanting to show His wrath and make His power known, endured with much patience the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?' The

aim was simply to leave them without excuse, so that His power and wrath against sin might be displayed in their destruction. He therefore calls it allowing them to walk in their own ways (Acts 14:16) — which elsewhere He presents as a most dreadful judgment, given where it inevitably leads (Psalm 81:12): 'I gave them over to their stubborn hearts, and they walked in their own ways' — as dreadful a condition as any creature can fall into in this world. In Acts 17:30 He calls it overlooking the sins committed in their ignorance — as if taking no notice of them in their dark condition — as the contrast makes plain: 'but now He commands all people everywhere to repent.' God had not taken such notice of them as to command them to repent through any clear revelation of His mind and will. The apostle's appeal in Romans 2:4 — 'Do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?' — is addressed to the Jews, who had advantages for understanding the natural tendency of the goodness and forbearance God exercises in Christ, which genuinely leads to repentance. Or the apostle may be speaking in general terms, suggesting that reason itself ought to lead people to make better use of these things than they commonly do — which he then charges them with failing to do (verse 5): 'But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart…' At best, then, the patience of God toward people outside of Christ — because of their own stubborn refusal to change — proves like the waters of the river Phasis, which are sweet at the surface and bitter at the bottom: they swim for a time in the sweet and pleasant things of this life (Luke 16:25), and when filled with them, they sink to the depths of all bitterness.

But the end of God's patience and forbearance as it is exercised in Christ and revealed in Him to us is clear and direct: it is the saving and bringing to God of those toward whom He is pleased to show it. Peter tells us (2 Peter 3:9) that He is patient toward us, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance — that is, all of us toward whom He shows forbearance, for that is its purpose: that His will for our repentance and salvation may be accomplished. Its nature and purpose are well expressed in Isaiah 54:9: 'This is like the waters of Noah to Me; for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah would not flood the earth again, so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you.' It is God acting in His infinite wisdom and goodness to ensure that we will not be destroyed despite our sins. For this reason Paul in Romans 15:5 joins these two things together in God as flowing from the same source: the God of patience and comfort — His patience is a matter of the greatest comfort. This, then, is another property of God: though it may break forth in some rays for some purposes in other things, its treasures are hidden in Christ, and no one becomes truly acquainted with it to any spiritual benefit who does not learn it in Him.

Third, His wisdom — His infinite wisdom — in managing all things for His own glory and the good of those toward whom He has purposes of love. The Lord has displayed infinite wisdom in the works of creation, providence, and His governance of the world. In wisdom He made all His creatures; how varied are His works — the earth is full of His riches (Psalm 104:24). The same is true in His providence — His sustaining and guiding of all things toward one another and toward His own glory, and to the ends He appointed for them; for all these things come from the Lord of

Hosts, who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working (Isaiah 28:29). His law too is forever to be admired for the excellence of the wisdom it contains (Deuteronomy 4:7-8). Yet there is something more that Paul marvels at — what he calls the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God (Romans 11:33) — and that is hidden in Christ alone and revealed only by Him. For this reason, just as Christ is called the wisdom of God and said to be made wisdom for us, the plan of God carried out in Him and revealed in the Gospel is called the wisdom of God and a mystery — even the hidden wisdom that God ordained before the ages, which none of the rulers of this age knew (1 Corinthians 2:7-8). In Ephesians 3:10 it is called the manifold wisdom of God — and to show the depth and riches of this wisdom, Paul tells us that even principalities and powers, even angels themselves, could not gain the slightest acquaintance with it until God actually revealed it by gathering a church of sinners. Peter tells us that these angels, so well acquainted with all the works of God, still bow down and long with earnestness to look into these things — the things of God's wisdom in the Gospel (1 Peter 1:13). It takes great skill to build a fine structure; but if someone comes and demolishes it, and another then raises up the same building to greater beauty and glory than before — that is wisdom indeed. In the beginning God made all things good, glorious, and beautiful; when all creation bore in innocence and beauty the clear imprint of His wisdom and goodness, it was very glorious. Especially man, who was made for His special glory. But all this beauty was defaced by sin, and the whole creation was plunged into darkness, wrath, curses, and confusion — and the great praise of God was buried under it all. Man in particular was utterly lost and fell short of the glory of God for which

he was created (Romans 3:23). Here the depth of the riches of God's wisdom and knowledge opens up: a plan in Christ shines out from His heart, hidden there from eternity, to restore all things to a state that will be far more advantageous to His glory than what first appeared, and to place sinners in an inconceivably better condition than they were in before sin entered. Now He appears glorious — known as a God who pardons iniquity and sin — and He advances the riches of His grace, which was His purpose all along (Ephesians 1:6). He has also infinitely vindicated His justice in the sight of men, angels, and devils by setting forth His Son as a propitiation. It is also to our benefit: we are more fully established in His favor and are carried toward a far more exceeding weight of glory than was previously revealed. Hence the exclamation of one of the ancient fathers: O felix culpa, quae talem meruit Redemptorem — O happy fault, which merited such a Redeemer! Paul says it plainly: great is the mystery of godliness (1 Timothy 3:16) — and beyond all question. We receive grace in place of grace — for the grace lost in Adam, better grace in Christ. Of Christ's love for His church and His union with it to accomplish all this, the apostle says: this is a great mystery (Ephesians 5:32) — great wisdom lies within it.

This also, then, is hidden in Christ: the great and inexpressible riches of God's wisdom in pardoning sin, saving sinners, satisfying justice, fulfilling the law, restoring His own honor, and securing for us an even more exceeding weight of glory. All of this out of a situation where it was impossible for the minds of angels or men to conceive how the glory of God could ever be restored and a sinning creature delivered from eternal ruin. For this reason it is said that at the last day God will be glorified in His saints and marveled at

by all who believe (2 Thessalonians 1:10) — it will be a wondrous thing, and God will be eternally glorious in it, even in the bringing of believers to Himself. To save sinners through faith will be found to be a far more marvelous work than creating the world from nothing.

Fourth, His all-sufficiency — the last of this kind that I will name.

God's all-sufficiency in Himself is His absolute and universal perfection — nothing is lacking in Him, nothing can be added to His fullness, and no decrease or loss can ever come to it. There is also in Him an all-sufficiency for others: His power to impart and communicate His goodness and Himself to them in such a way as to satisfy and fill them, to their fullest capacity, with everything that is good and desirable. For the first — His all-sufficiency shown in its outward effects — God manifested this abundantly in creation by making all things good, all things perfect in their own kind, and stamping the imprint of His goodness on them all. But for the second — His giving Himself as an all-sufficient God to be enjoyed by creatures, holding out all that is in Him for their satisfaction and blessedness — that is revealed only in and through Christ. In Christ, God is a Father, a God in covenant, who has promised to pour Himself out for them; in Christ He has promised to give Himself into their everlasting enjoyment as their exceeding great reward.

And so I have finished with the second category of God's attributes — those of which, though we have some faint glimpse in other things, a clear knowledge and acquaintance with them is only to be had in the Lord Christ.

What remains is to declare briefly that no attribute of God at all can be known savingly and to our comfort except in Christ. Therefore all the wisdom of the knowledge of God is hidden in Him alone and from Him alone it is to be obtained.

There is no saving knowledge of any attribute of God — none that brings true comfort — except what is found in Christ Jesus alone. Some people contemplate God's justice and acknowledge that those who sin deserve death (Romans 1:32). But this only drives them to cry out, 'Who among us can live with the devouring fire?' (Isaiah 33:14). Others fix their attention on His patience, goodness, mercy, and forbearance — but it does not lead them to repentance at all. They treat the riches of His goodness with contempt, and by their stubbornness and unrepentant hearts they are storing up wrath for the day of wrath (Romans 2:3-4). Still others, through the very works of creation and providence, come to know His eternal power and divine nature, but they do not honor Him as God or give thanks — their foolish hearts are darkened (Romans 1:20). Whatever truth people discover about God outside of Christ, they suppress it under unrighteousness.

For us to have a saving knowledge of God's attributes — a knowledge accompanied by comfort — three things are required.

1. That God has manifested the glory of all His attributes in a way that does us good.

2. That He will continue to exercise and pour out those attributes fully on our behalf.

3. That when so manifested and exercised, they are capable and powerful to bring us into the everlasting enjoyment of Himself — which is our blessedness. All three of these lie hidden in Christ,

and not the slightest glimpse of any of them can be obtained outside of Him.

The first is this: that God has actually manifested the glory of all His attributes in a way that does us good. What good does it do our souls to know that He is infinitely righteous, just, and holy, unchangeably true and faithful — if the only way we can see His justice and faithfulness upheld in our case is in our ruin and destruction? If from that knowledge we can only say that it is a righteous thing for Him to bring tribulation on us for our sins — what fruit did Adam draw from that thought in the garden? (Genesis 3). What sweetness is there in knowing He is patient and full of forbearance, if the glory of those attributes is being displayed in His enduring the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? Indeed, what benefit is it to hear Him proclaim Himself the Lord God, merciful and gracious, abounding in goodness and truth — and yet adding that He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished — thereby closing off the exercise of all His other attributes toward us because of our sin? Clearly, none at all. Under this bare view of God's attributes: His justice makes people flee and hide (Genesis 3; Isaiah 2:21); His patience makes them hard-hearted (Ecclesiastes 8:11); His holiness utterly discourages any thought of coming near Him (Joshua 24:19). What comfort is there in thinking about His immensity and omnipresence if we have no assurance of His gracious presence with us? (Psalm 139:11-12). This is what brings salvation — when we see that God has glorified all His attributes in a way that does us good. This He has done in Jesus Christ. In Christ He made His justice glorious by laying all our sins on Him — not sparing Him but giving Him up to death for us all — thereby exalting His justice and indignation against sin precisely

by freeing us from condemnation (Romans 3:25; Romans 8:33-34). In Christ He made His truthfulness glorious in the exact fulfillment of all His absolute threats and promises. The original threat of Genesis 2:17 — 'in the day you eat of it you shall surely die' — reinforced by the curse of Deuteronomy 27:26, is accomplished and fulfilled in Christ, and His faithfulness is turned to our benefit. By the grace of God He tasted death for us (Hebrews 2:9) and delivered those who were subject to death (verse 14); He fulfilled the curse by becoming a curse for us (Galatians 3:13). As for His promises, they are all Yes in Christ and through Him Amen, to the glory of God (2 Corinthians 1:20). God set Christ forth to declare His righteousness in the forgiveness of sin — He made a permanent way to exalt the glory of His pardoning mercy toward sinners. In Christ our souls must come to know Him, or live in darkness forever.

This is saving knowledge full of comfort — when we can see all the attributes of God made glorious and exalted in a way that does us good. This wisdom is hidden only in Jesus Christ. When He asked His Father to glorify His name (John 12:28) — to make glorious all His nature, His attributes, His will in the work of redemption — He was immediately answered from heaven: 'I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.'

Second: that God will continue to exercise and pour out those attributes fully on our behalf. Though He has made them all glorious in a way that can work toward our good, it does not automatically follow that He will apply them for our good. Therefore God has entrusted all His attributes to Christ, to be exercised on our behalf and for our benefit. Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God; He is the Lord our righteousness and is made for us by

God wisdom and righteousness, sanctification and redemption. Having glorified His Father in all His attributes, Christ now has the administration of them committed to Him, that He might be the author of salvation for those who believe. So if in God's righteousness, goodness, love, mercy, and all-sufficiency there is anything that can benefit us, the Lord Jesus is fully entrusted with dispensing it on our behalf. God is said to be in Christ reconciling the world to Himself (2 Corinthians 5:18). And He becomes the Lord our righteousness (Isaiah 45:24-25).

Third, it only remains to show that these attributes of God, so manifested and exercised, are powerful and able to bring us into the everlasting enjoyment of Him. To demonstrate this, the Lord sums up the entire covenant of grace in one promise: 'I will be your God.' In the covenant God becomes our God and we become His people, and thereby all His attributes become ours as well. Lest we should doubt when we see the seemingly impossible obstacles on every side against us, God wraps it all up in this declaration: 'I am God Almighty, all-sufficient' (Genesis 17:1). I am fully able to carry out all My undertakings and to be your exceeding great reward. I can remove all difficulties, answer all objections, pardon all sins, conquer all opposition — I am God all-sufficient. You know in whom this covenant and all its promises are ratified and in whose blood it is confirmed: in the Lord Christ alone. In Him alone is God an all-sufficient God to anyone, and an exceeding great reward. For this reason Christ Himself is said to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him (Hebrews 7:25). These three things are required for a saving acquaintance with any of God's attributes — and since all three are hidden only in Christ, from Him alone they are to be obtained.

This, then, is the first part of our demonstration that all true and sound wisdom and knowledge is stored up in the Lord Christ and from Him alone to be obtained: because our wisdom consists largely in the knowledge of God, His nature, and His attributes — and this lies entirely hidden in Christ and cannot possibly be obtained except through Him.

The knowledge of ourselves is the second part of our wisdom, and it consists in three things that our Savior sends His Spirit to convict the world of: sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8). To know ourselves in relation to these three is a central part of true and sound wisdom, for they all relate to the supernatural and eternal end for which we were made. None of these can we grasp except in Christ.

First, regarding sin. Every person by nature has some awareness and knowledge of sin — a conscience that tells them what is right and wrong, and that approves or disapproves of their actions in light of a coming judgment. But this is dim and relates mainly to more obvious sins. In short, it is what the apostle describes in Romans 1:32: they know that God's judgment is that those who do such things deserve death. If it is true that no nation is so uncivilized as to have no sense of a deity, then equally no nation lacks some sense of sin and of God's displeasure because of it. This explains why sacrifices, purification rites, and ceremonies of atonement were so widely practiced across the face of the earth. But this natural knowledge, as it stands, is very dim compared with the knowledge of sin that is available to us.

A fuller knowledge of sin is given by the law, which was added because of transgressions. It restores in a doctrinal way all the awareness of good and evil that was originally planted in human-

ity. The law is a mirror in which anyone who can look spiritually will see sin in all its ugliness and distortion. Look at the law in its purity, holiness, scope, and perfection — in its manner of delivery with dread, terror, thunder, and earthquakes — and it makes a remarkable revelation of sin from every angle. But even all of this is not enough to bring a person to a true and thorough conviction of sin. Not because the mirror is unclear, but because we do not have eyes by nature to look into it. Therefore Christ sends His Spirit to convict the world of sin (John 16:8) — this work of conviction is the distinctive work of Christ within us. So the discovery of sin may be said to come through Christ, and is part of the wisdom hidden in Him. But there are two further ways in which this wisdom appears as hidden in Him.

First, because there are some aspects of sin that shine out most clearly when Christ was made sin for us — more clearly than through any other means.

Second, because there is no knowledge of sin that leads to a spiritual and saving response except in Christ alone.

Regarding the first: there are four things about sin that shine clearly from the cross of Christ. 1. What sin deserves. 2. What it has done to human ability. 3. Its death. 4. The new end put to it.

What sin deserves shines clearly from the cross of Christ on two grounds: first, the person who suffered for it; and second, the penalty He underwent.

Regarding the person who suffered: 'God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son' (John 3:16). It was His only Son that God sent into the world to suffer for sin. He did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all (Romans 8:32). When a

slave is punished, it shows that a fault was committed — but perhaps not a great one. The punishment of a son suggests a serious offense; the punishment of an only son suggests the most serious offense imaginable. Sin was never seen to be more abominably sinful than when the weight of it lay on the shoulders of the Son of God. Having made His Son — the Son of His love, His only begotten — to be sin for us, God, to show His fury against it, laid His hand on Him and did not spare Him. If sin is charged to the beloved Son of His heart — even by His own voluntary taking of it — God will not spare Him any part of what that sin deserves. Is it not absolutely clear from the blood of the cross of Christ that sin deserves such punishment that it is entirely impossible for God to let any sin — even the smallest — go unpunished? If He would have done it for anyone, He would have done it for His only Son — but He did not spare Him.

Moreover, God took no delight at all in the blood, the tears, the cries, the unutterable torments and sufferings of the Son of His love. He required only that His law be fulfilled, His justice satisfied, and His wrath against sin appeased — and nothing less than all of this would accomplish it. If the debt of sin could have been paid at a lower cost, it would never have been set at the price of the blood of Christ. Here, then, soul — see the true weight of what sin deserves, more clearly than in all the threats and curses of the law. I thought from the law that my sin — poor creature that I am — deserved death; but that it would have this effect when charged to the Son of God — that I never once imagined.

Consider also what He suffered. For though He was so excellent a person, perhaps it was only a light affliction and trial He endured — especially given the strength He had to bear it. Yet what-

ever it was, it made this companion of the Lord of Hosts, this Lion of the tribe of Judah, this mighty One — the wisdom and power of God — tremble, sweat, cry out, pray, and wrestle with agonized supplications. Some Roman Catholic devotional writers tell us that one drop — the smallest drop of Christ's blood — was abundantly enough to redeem the entire world; but they are wrong, not understanding the true weight of sin's desert or the severity of God's justice. If one less drop than was shed, or one less pang than was laid on, would have accomplished it — those other drops would not have been shed and those other pangs would not have been laid on. God did not put the beloved of His soul through agony for nothing. But there is more than all this.

It pleased God to bruise Him, to put Him to grief, to make His soul an offering for sin, and to pour out His life unto death. God hid His face from Him, was far from the voice of His cry, until He cried out, 'My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?' He made Him sin and a curse for us, executed on Him the sentence of the law, brought Him into such agony that He sweated thick drops of blood, and His soul was heavy to the point of death. He who was the power of God and the wisdom of God staggered under the burden until the whole frame of nature seemed to reel at it. If you want to see the true weight of what sin deserves, measure it by the cross of Christ. Sin brought the Son of God — equal with God, God blessed forever — into the form of a servant. It pursued Him throughout His life with affliction and persecution, and finally brought Him under the hand of God — bruised Him, broke Him, killed the Lord of life. Here, then, is deep humility over sin — as we look on Him whom we have pierced.

The wisdom of understanding our inability due to sin is wrapped up in Christ. By our inability I mean two things.

1. Our inability to make any atonement with God for sin.

2. Our inability — because of sin — to meet God's mind and will in any of the obedience He requires.

Regarding the first — that our inability to make atonement is revealed only in Christ. People have made many inquiries after atonement and have tried many approaches to achieve it. People ask about it as in Micah 6:6-7: will any kind of sacrifice accomplish it — even those appointed by God, like burnt offerings and yearling calves; even the most costly, like thousands of rams and ten thousand rivers of oil; even the most extreme and unnatural, like giving one's own children to the fire? David settles the matter decisively in Psalm 49:7-8: none of the best or wealthiest of men can by any means redeem his brother or give to God a ransom for him, because the redemption of their souls is too costly and can never be enough. It cannot be done; no atonement can be made. Yet people kept on trying, kept attempting — heaping up sacrifices, some costly, some bloody and inhuman. The Jews to this day believe that God is appeased for sin by the sacrifices of bulls and goats; and the Socinians acknowledge no atonement other than human repentance and changed behavior. In the cross of Christ, all such claims are silenced.

First, God has made clear there that no sacrifices for sin — even those He Himself appointed — could ever make perfect those who offered them (Hebrews 10:11). Those sacrifices could never take away sin. Those services could never make worshipers perfect as to conscience (Hebrews 9:9). The Lord therefore rejects all sac-

rifices and offerings for that purpose (Hebrews 10:6-8). Christ takes their place, saying, 'Look, I have come,' and through Him we are justified from all things from which we could not be justified by the law (Acts 13:34). God in Christ has declared all sacrifices completely insufficient to make any atonement for sin.

Second, He has also stamped futility on every other effort ever undertaken for that purpose, by setting forth His only Son as a propitiation (Romans 3:24-26). This leaves no doubt that people have no ability in themselves to make any atonement. For if righteousness came through the law, then Christ died for nothing. What purpose would it serve for Him to be set forth as a propitiation if we ourselves were capable of that purpose? The apostle makes exactly this argument in Romans 5:6 and 5:8-9.

This wisdom, then, is also hidden in Christ. People may by other means see far enough to fill them with dread and terror, like those described in Isaiah 33:14. But such a view of sin as can lead a soul to any settled comfort — that is discovered only in this treasury of heaven, the Lord Jesus.

Our inability to meet God's mind and will in any of the obedience He requires — because of sin — is only to be discovered in Christ. Teaching someone that they cannot do what they know they ought to do, and for which they condemn themselves when they fail, is no easy task. People rise up with all their natural energy to resist a conviction of inability. Setting aside the proud claims of the philosophers, how many who call themselves Christians still cling in varying degrees to the belief that they have the power to fulfill the law. Human nature will not teach this inability — it is proud and self-confident, and one part of that pride is refusing to acknowledge incapacity at all. The law will not teach

it either, for though it shows us what we have done wrong, it does not reveal that we could not have done better. In fact, by requiring exact obedience, it takes for granted that such power exists in us. This truth lies hidden in the Lord Jesus (Romans 8:2-4): 'The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death.' 'For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God did: by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us.' First, sin is condemned as to its guilt and we are set free: the righteousness of the law, through His obedience, is fulfilled in us — we who could never fulfill it ourselves. Second, the obedience required of us is worked in us by His Spirit. Why would we need His perfect obedience credited to us, if we were capable of attaining any obedience of our own? Why would we need His Spirit of life to quicken us, if we were not dead in trespasses and sins?

Third, the death of sin — sin dying within us in some measure even while we are still alive. This is a third aspect of sin that it is our wisdom to understand, and it is hidden only in Christ. Sin dies in two ways. First, as to its outward expression in our bodies. Second, as to its root, principle, and power in our souls. The first can be learned to some degree outside of Christ — unbelieving people may have sin diminished in its outward expression. But there is a dying of sin as to its root — a daily weakening of its strength, power, and vitality — and this is to be found only in Christ. Sin in its own nature does not naturally die or weaken; it naturally takes greater hold and grows stronger in the person it inhabits, on into eternity. In believers, it is steadily dying and decaying until it is

completely abolished. Romans 6:3-7: 'Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection. Knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin.' He was crucified for us, and thereby sin is crucified in us. He died for us, and the body of sin is destroyed so that we should not serve sin. As He was raised from the dead so that death would no longer reign over Him, so also are we raised from sin so that it should no longer reign over us. This wisdom is hidden in Christ alone. To be truly acquainted with the principle of sin's dying, to feel power flowing from the cross of Christ for that purpose, to find sin being crucified in us as Christ was crucified for us — this is wisdom indeed, and it is found in Him alone.

Fourth, there is a glorious end to which sin is appointed and ordained — revealed in Christ — that others know nothing of. In its own nature sin tends only toward the dishonor of God and the ruin of the person in whom it dwells. The warnings and threats of God in the law reveal one other end: the display of God's punishing justice in giving sin its full and fitting recompense. But there the law stops, and with it all other light — revealing no other use or purpose for sin at all. In the Lord Jesus there is the revelation of another and more glorious end: the praise of God's glorious grace in the pardoning and forgiving of sin. God, having arranged in Christ that the very thing which tended only to His dishonor would in-

stead be turned to His infinite glory. This is the great desire He lifts up — to be known and trusted as a God who pardons iniquity, transgression, and sin.

Much of our wisdom consists in knowing ourselves in relation to our eternal condition. In our current state of fallen nature, there is nothing that concerns us more than sin. Without knowledge of it, we do not know ourselves. A true saving knowledge of sin is to be had only in the Lord Christ. In Him we see the weight of our iniquities and their corruption — a weight that could not be borne or atoned for except by His blood. In Him and His cross is revealed our complete inability either to make atonement for God's justice or to live up to His will. The death of sin is purchased by and discovered in the death of Christ, as is also the manifestation of the riches of God's grace in the pardoning of sin. A real and lived acquaintance with all of this — as it applies to ourselves — is our wisdom, and it is worth more than all the wisdom of the world.

Righteousness is the second thing the Spirit of Christ convicts the world of, and understanding it is central to our wisdom. All people are convinced of this: that God is a most righteous God. They know that it is God's judgment that those who commit such things deserve death (Romans 1:32). They know it is a righteous thing for Him to repay trouble to those who offend (2 Thessalonians 1:6). He is of purer eyes than to look on iniquity (Habakkuk 1:13). Therefore the great question of everyone who is convicted of their mortality and the judgment to come is: with what righteousness can they stand before this righteous God? They are gripped by fear about the outcome, as the apostle puts it in Hebrews 2:15 — through fear of death they are subject to bondage their whole lives.

For those pressing this inquiry, the law is what first and most naturally presents itself. The law has many strong arguments for why a soul should look there for righteousness before God. It was given by God Himself for that very end and purpose. It contains all the obedience God requires of any human being. It carries the promise of life: 'Do this and live'; 'the doers of the law are justified'; 'if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.' Given these arguments, no one who sincerely seeks righteousness fails at some point to turn to the law. Many do so every day who would not openly admit it. They set about correcting their lives, reforming their conduct, performing required duties, and thereby pursuing a righteousness based on the law. Many people continue on this path for a long time with much anxiety — sometimes hoping, more often fearing, their consciences never satisfied, righteousness never truly attained. After wearing themselves out perhaps for a long season, they finally arrive with dread, trembling, and disappointment at the apostle's conclusion: by the works of the law no flesh is justified. The apostle describes this outcome in Romans 9:31-32: Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, did not arrive at the law of righteousness, because they pursued it not by faith but as though it were by works. Their failure was not for lack of effort — they earnestly pursued the law of righteousness — but it simply could not succeed by its very nature. Righteousness cannot be obtained that way. For if those who rely on the law are heirs, then faith is useless and the promise is void — because the law only produces wrath (Romans 4:14-15). The law itself, as it now stands, cannot give life (Galatians 3:21). God Himself found fault with this way of attaining righteousness (Hebrews 8:7-8).

There are two realities that reveal to people the futility and hopelessness of seeking righteousness in this way.

First, they have already sinned — for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). They are well aware that even if they could from this point forward fulfill the whole law perfectly, there is already a debt and reckoning against them that they have no idea how to settle. If they look to the law for guidance on how to deal with that past account, it has nothing to say — no direction, no comfort — only a summons to prepare to die.

Second, even if all past debts were wiped away, they are completely unable to fulfill the law going forward. They might as easily move the earth with a finger as meet its demands for perfection. On both counts, they reach the conclusion that their effort is hopeless: by the works of the law no flesh will be justified.

Disappointed by the severity and unrelenting demands of the law, people generally turn to some other approach that seems to address both problems. This most often takes the form of some means of making atonement to satisfy God, combined with hopes for general mercy to cover the rest. Setting aside the approaches of the Gentiles and the many inventions of the Roman Catholics — it is common to all people who are convicted in conscience to seek righteousness partly by trying to make up for past sins and partly by hoping in a vague general mercy. The apostle calls this pursuing righteousness as if by the works of the law (Romans 9:32) — not directly, but by a mix of effort and expectation. He tells us how it turns out: being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, they did not submit to the righteousness of God (Romans 10:3). The root of this attempt to establish their own righteousness was ignorance of what God's

righteousness actually is. If they had understood what exact conformity to His will He requires, they would never have undertaken such a futile project. They do something, they hope for something; they plan to offset old faults with new obedience. This quiets their consciences for a time — but when the Spirit comes to convict them of righteousness, this approach collapses as well.

The matter eventually comes down to this: they see themselves under a twofold need.

First, as sinners who are liable to the law of God and its curse — so that unless that curse is fully satisfied and nothing from it can ever be charged against them, it is completely futile to seek to appear in God's presence.

Second, as creatures made for a supernatural and eternal end, and therefore obligated to fulfill the complete mind and will of God in the obedience He requires. Since it has already been shown that both of these are beyond their own ability, their wisdom is to find a righteousness that can fully meet both requirements.

Both are to be found only in the Lord Christ, who is our righteousness. This wisdom, and all its treasures, is hidden in Him.

First, He makes atonement for past sins, satisfying the debt of sin and securing its forgiveness. Romans 3:24-25: 'Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness in the forgiveness of sins which were committed.' In His blood we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Ephesians 1:7). This — this alone — is our righteousness as regards the first requirement: the removal of all the guilt of sin by which we have fallen short of God's glory. On

this basis we are assured that no one can ever bring a charge against us or condemn us (Romans 8:31-34). We are cleansed by the sacrifice of Christ so as to have no more troubled conscience about sin (Hebrews 10:2). This wisdom is hidden only in the Lord Jesus. In Him alone is there an atonement to be found.

Yet something more is required: it is not enough that we are not guilty. We must also be actually righteous. Not only must all sin be answered for, but all righteousness must be fulfilled. By having the guilt of sin removed, we are like persons who are innocent — but something more is needed to make us persons who have obeyed. That an innocent person goes to heaven merely on account of innocency — I find no basis for that. Adam was innocent when first created, but he still had to keep the commandments before he could enter into life; innocency gave him no claim to life. There is a further requirement: the whole law must be fulfilled and all the obedience God requires at our hands must be performed. The soul finds the answer only in the Lord Christ — for if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life? (Romans 5:10). His death reconciled us; His life saves us. The actual obedience He rendered to the entire law of God is the righteousness by which we are saved. 'That I may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith' (Philippians 3:9).

To summarize: the main part of our wisdom lies in finding a righteousness that will stand with us forever and endure the severe scrutiny of God Himself. All the wisdom of the world is nothing but foolishness when it comes to discovering this. The best human

wisdom can do is find the most miserable, burdensome, and frustrating ways of perishing eternally. All the treasures of this wisdom are hidden in Christ; He is made to us by God wisdom and righteousness (1 Corinthians 1:30).

We come now to the last topic I will touch on briefly: judgment — specifically the judgment that is to come. I will not dwell on how much this matters to us. It is what distinguishes human beings from the animals that perish. I will not explore the faint hints of it given in God's governance of the world through providence, nor the greater light of it in the threats and promises of the law. This wisdom is hidden in the Lord Jesus in two ways: first, as to the certainty of the judgment; second, as to the manner of it.

Its certainty is confirmed in and through Christ in two ways: first, by His death; and second, by His resurrection.

By His death: God, in punishing and condemning sin in the flesh of His own Son, has given powerful assurance that a righteous and universal judgment is coming. Why else would He lay such a burden on Him, unless He is certainly going to reckon one day with all people for all their works? The death of Christ is the most solemn preview of the final judgment.

By His resurrection: Acts 17:31 — God 'has given assurance to all by raising Him from the dead, having appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed.'

Finally, the manner of the judgment: it will be carried out by the One who loved us and gave Himself for us — the One who is Himself the righteousness He requires at our hands. And on the other side, it will be carried out by the One whose person, grace,

ways, worship, and servants have been scorned, despised, and rejected by the people of this world — which brings unspeakable comfort on one hand and terror on the other. So this wisdom also is hidden in Christ.

This completes the second part of our first demonstration. Knowledge of ourselves in relation to our eternal end is no small part of our wisdom. The things of greatest concern are sin, righteousness, and judgment. The wisdom of all three is hidden in the Lord Jesus alone.

The third part of our wisdom is walking with God. For two people to walk together, five things are required: 1. Agreement. 2. Acquaintance. 3. Strength. 4. Boldness. 5. Aiming at the same end. All of these, along with the wisdom of them, are hidden in the Lord Jesus.

First, agreement. The prophet tells us that two cannot walk together unless they are agreed (Amos 3:3). Until agreement is reached, there is no fellowship, no walking together. By nature — or while a person remains in their natural state — God and man are the greatest of enemies. God declares nothing to us but wrath, which is why we are called children of wrath — born liable to it (Ephesians 2:3). While we remain in that condition, the wrath of God rests on us (John 3:36). Everything God reveals of Himself to us in our natural state shows that He is profoundly offended, and therefore storing up wrath for the day of wrath and the revelation of His righteous judgment — that day when God and sinners meet is called the day of wrath (Romans 2:5-6). We are no less fully engaged in this enmity toward Him — in fact, we began it first and persist in it the longest. The apostle tells us that our very minds — the best part of us — are hostility against God (Romans 8:7-8), and

that we neither are, nor will, nor can be subject to Him. Whatever we do that appears otherwise is either hypocrisy or flattery — and in fact, minimizing this enmity is itself part of it. In this condition, the wisdom of walking with God is as far from the soul as anything can be. He is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all; we are darkness, and in us there is no light at all. He is life, a living God; we are dead — dead in trespasses and sins. He is holiness and glorious in it; we are completely defiled, an abominable thing. He is love; we are full of hatred, hating and being hated. Surely this is no foundation for agreement or for walking together. The foundation of this agreement is laid in Christ, hidden in Christ. He is our peace; He has made peace for us (Ephesians 2:14-15). He killed the enmity in His own body on the cross (verse 16).

First, He removes the cause of the enmity between God and us — sin and the curse of the law. He makes an end of sin by making atonement for iniquity (Daniel 9:24). He cancels the written record of debts against us (Colossians 2:14), redeeming us from the curse by becoming a curse for us (Galatians 3:13).

Second, He destroys the one who would keep the enmity alive and widen the breach. Through His death He destroyed the one who has the power of death — that is, the devil (Hebrews 2:14). He disarmed the rulers and authorities (Colossians 2:14).

Third, He made reconciliation for the sins of the people (Hebrews 2:17). Through His blood He made an atonement with God to turn away the wrath that was due to us, thus making peace. This is why God is said to be in Christ reconciling the world to Himself (2 Corinthians 5:19). Having reconciled Himself, He sets aside the enmity on His part and then works to put the enmity to death on our part as well, so that we may be reconciled.

Fourth, through our Lord Jesus Christ we receive this atonement (Romans 5:11) — accepting the peace He made and offered, laying down our enmity toward God, and so establishing agreement in His blood. Through Him we have access to the Father (Ephesians 2:18). Outside of Christ, God on His part is a consuming fire; and we are like completely dry tinder drawing ourselves up against that fire. Every approach we make to God outside of Christ works only to our ruin. In His blood alone do we have this agreement. Let none of us suppose that we have taken even one step in the ways of God, or that any duty has been accepted, or that anything is not lost to eternity — unless it has been done on the basis of this.

Second, acquaintance is also required for walking together. Two people may travel the same road with no hostility between them, but if they are complete strangers they will pass by each other without the slightest fellowship. It is not enough that the enmity between God and us has been removed — we must also be given a true acquaintance with Him. Our understandings are darkened and we are alienated from the life of God (Ephesians 4:18). This too is hidden in the Lord Christ and comes forth from Him. There are other means God has given to make Himself known and to create some acquaintance with Him — His Word and His works — as Acts 17:27 indicates, that people should seek the Lord and perhaps find Him. But the knowledge of God obtained through His works is very weak and imperfect. And the knowledge obtained through the written Word alone, without any further help, is not saving — given our blindness. The Word may be as bright as the sun, but if we have no eyes in our heads, what good does it do? No saving acquaintance with God that can guide us to walk with Him

can be obtained by these means alone. This too is hidden in the Lord Jesus and comes from Him. As 1 John 5:20 says: He has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true. All other light, without His giving us understanding, will not accomplish it. He is the true light that enlightens everyone who is enlightened. He opens our minds to understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:45). No one has ever known God except through what He has revealed (John 1:18). There is no acquaintance with God as love and full of kindness, patience, grace, and pardoning mercy — and that is the only knowledge of Him on which we can walk with Him — except in Christ alone.

Third, there must be a path in which we walk with God. In the beginning God gave us a path to walk with Him: the path of innocence and exact holiness under a covenant of works. But this path has been so choked with thorns and briers, so blocked by curses and wrath because of sin, that no living person can take one step in it. A new way must be found if we are ever to have communion with God. This too, for the reasons already given, is hidden in Christ. The Holy Spirit tells us that Christ has opened and consecrated for us a new and living way into the Most Holy Place (Hebrews 10:20). New, because the first old way was useless; living, because the other is dead. Therefore verse 22 says: 'Let us draw near.' Having a path to walk in, let us draw near. This way He has prepared is none other than Himself (John 14:6). To those who want to come to the Father and hold communion with Him, He says: 'I am the way, and no one comes to the Father except through Me.' He is the channel through which all communication passes between God and us. In Him we meet; in Him we walk. All the outflow of love, kindness, and mercy from God to us passes through

Him. All our response of love, delight, faith, and obedience back to God passes through Him. Every other path leads down to the chambers of death.

Fourth, suppose all of this is in place — agreement made, acquaintance given, a way provided — yet if we have no strength to walk in that way, what good does any of it do? In ourselves we have no strength (Romans 5:6). Even when set on the path, we either throw ourselves down or temptations knock us down, and we make no progress. The Lord Jesus tells us plainly: without Him we can do nothing (John 15:5). Nor can all the creatures in heaven and earth give us the slightest help. This aspect of wisdom is also hidden in Christ. All strength to walk with God comes from Him. 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,' says Paul in Philippians 4:13 — the same man who denies that we have any sufficiency in ourselves (2 Corinthians 3:5). We who can do nothing on our own can do all things in Jesus Christ — like giants. Therefore in Him we are more than conquerors over every obstacle in our way (Romans 8:37). From His fullness we receive grace upon grace (John 1:16). From Him we receive the Spirit of life and power, by which He carries us like eagles on swift and safe wings along the paths of walking with God. Any step taken in strength not immediately from Christ is a step toward hell. He first takes us by the arm and teaches us to walk until He leads us on to perfection.

Fifth, where should we find the boldness to walk with our God, who is a consuming fire? Was it not always assumed by His people of old that if they saw God they would die? When God appeared in awesome power on Mount Sinai, even Moses — their mediator — said, 'I am full of fear and trembling' (Hebrews 12:21). All the peo-

ple cried out, 'Do not let God speak with us, or we will die' (Exodus 20:19). How, then, are we to take on this boldness to walk with God? The apostle answers in Hebrews 10:19: it is by the blood of Jesus. So Ephesians 3:12: in Him we have boldness and confident access — not standing far off like the people at the giving of the law, but drawing near to God with confidence. The fear and terror of God entered through sin. Adam had no thought of hiding himself until he had sinned. The guilt of sin resting on the conscience — combined with the common understanding that God is a righteous judge of it — fills people with dread and horror at the very thought of His presence. The Lord Jesus, through the sacrifice and atonement He made, has removed this guilty conscience — that is, the dread of God's revenge because of sin. He has taken away the killing sword of the law, and on that basis gives us great boldness with God — revealing Him to us now not as a punishing judge but as a tender, merciful, and reconciled Father. Moreover, whereas we carry by nature a spirit of bondage that fills us with countless tormenting fears, He removes it and gives us the Spirit of adoption, by which we cry 'Abba, Father,' and conduct ourselves with the confidence and gracious boldness of children. Where the Spirit of God is, there is freedom (2 Corinthians 3:17) — freedom from all the dread and terror that the administration of the law brought with it. There is no sin God will judge more severely than boldness taken with Him outside of Christ; and there is no grace more acceptable to Him than the boldness He grants us in the blood of Jesus.

Sixth, one more thing to add: two cannot walk together unless they share the same purpose and aim at the same end. This too, in brief, is given to us in the Lord Jesus. The end God aims at is the

advancement of His own glory. No one can aim at this end except in the Lord Jesus. In summary: all the wisdom of walking with God is hidden in Christ and from Him alone to be obtained — as has been shown by working through each particular element.

And so I have concluded my first demonstration and shown that all true wisdom and knowledge is stored up in and dispensed by the Lord Jesus. This was shown by tracing through the chief elements of what our wisdom consists in. I have only one more argument to add, and I will be brief.

This truth will be further confirmed by examining the insufficiency and emptiness of anything else that might claim the title of wisdom.

There are two things in the world that carry this reputation. The first is learning and scholarship: skill and knowledge in the arts, sciences, languages, and the knowledge of history. The second is prudence and practical skill for conducting ourselves in relation to others in public life for the common good — which is by far the most admirable quality within the reach of human nature. Regarding both of these I will briefly show:

First, that they are completely insufficient even for achieving the particular goals they are designed for.

Second, that both of them together, even at their highest development, cannot reach the true and ultimate end of wisdom. Both lines of argument will ultimately place the crown on the head of Jesus Christ.

Start with the first, regarding scholarship specifically. Learning, even if all of it were concentrated in a single person, cannot achieve the particular goal for which it exists — which is

enough to stamp futility and frustration across its forehead.

The particular goal of learning — though many people miss it because their eyes are fixed on false ends that lead them off course — is nothing other than to remove some part of the curse that came upon us through sin. Learning is the product of the soul's struggle against the curse of sin. When Adam was first created, he was fully equipped with all the knowledge that has any meaningful bearing on the highest end of humanity — the end we now press toward — with the exception of things that did not yet exist and had no natural causes, such as what we now call languages and the subject matter of history. There was no narrowness, much less darkness, in his understanding that would require him to labor and strain to develop those general concepts of things that he simply had. His knowledge of nature is evident from the fact that he gave fitting names to all the creatures — most of the reasons for which are now lost to us — yet from Scripture's approval of his naming and the significance of what still remains clear, it is plain that he did it from a direct knowledge of their natures. Plato himself observed that the one who first gave names to things must have been the wisest of men — indeed, someone with more than human wisdom. If the most learned man alive — or the combined wisdom of all the world's scholars — were put to the test of giving names to all living creatures that accurately expressed their natures and qualities, they would quickly feel how much has been lost. Adam was made complete for his entire purpose: to rule the creation and live for God — both of which required knowledge of the one and the will of the other. When all of this was lost through sin — and the multiplication of languages was added as a further curse for a later rebellion — the whole project of learning became

an attempt to untangle the soul from the consequences of sin. Ignorance, darkness, and blindness fell on the mind; acquaintance with the works of God, both spiritual and natural, was lost; the barrier of foreign languages was introduced by the multiplication of tongues. Disordered passions and emotions, along with countless distorting biases, also came upon us. To remove all of this, to untangle the mind in its reasoning, to recover acquaintance with the works of God, to free the soul from the effects of the curse of divided languages — this is the goal and tendency of learning. This is the something it is aimed at. Anyone who pursues it for any other reason is chasing the crow with broken pottery and mud. Without dwelling on the futility, frustration, and countless miseries that attend this enterprise, I simply say this: learning is in itself completely inadequate to achieve its own goal — and that stamps futility across its forehead in letters that cannot be erased. I wish to note two things to make this plain.

1. The knowledge that learning aims to recover was originally given to humanity as a means of walking with God — for the supernatural end to which we were appointed. For after Adam was furnished with all his endowments, the law of life and death was given to him, so that he would understand the purpose for which he had received them. Therefore the knowledge he possessed was spiritual and holy, even his natural knowledge — in both its source and its end, it was spiritual.

2. The loss of it is part of the curse that came upon us for sin. Whatever we fall short of compared to Adam's original state of innocence — whether through loss of good or the addition of evil — is entirely the result of the curse for sin. Beyond this, the blind-

ness, ignorance, darkness, and deadness that Scripture everywhere ascribes to us in our natural state fully includes the very thing we are talking about.

Given these two points, it is perfectly clear that learning cannot on its own achieve the goal it aims at.

1. The light that learning does produce — which, God knows, is very little, weak, dim, imperfect, uncertain, and largely only enables people to argue with and contradict one another, to the embarrassment of reason itself — that light, such as it is, is not in the least made spiritual by learning, nor brought back into that order of living for God and with God in which it originally stood. This is entirely beyond learning's reach. Regarding this end, the apostle assures us that the utmost outcome men arrive at is darkness and folly (Romans 1:21-22). Who does not know the profound inquiries, subtle arguments, sharp reasoning, and remarkable discoveries of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and others? What did they actually achieve in the matter before us, for all their study and effort? They became fools, says the apostle. The one who by universal consent holds the crown of wisdom among them all — the man whose company was considered an inestimable privilege — died like a fool, sacrificing a rooster to Aesculapius. And this is plain: Jesus Christ alone is the true light who enlightens people (John 1:9), and there is no one who has any true light except what comes directly from Him. After all the learning in the world, if people have nothing more, they are still natural men who do not perceive the things of God. Their light is still only darkness — and how great is that darkness! It is the Lord Jesus alone who is anointed to open the eyes of the blind. People cannot make a concept spiritual, nor order their knowledge toward the glory of God. After all their efforts

they are still blind and in darkness — indeed, they are darkness itself, knowing nothing as they ought to know it. I know how people of such attainments are inclined to ask with contempt, 'Are we blind too?' — but God has shattered all their pride: 'Where is the wise man?' He asks; 'Where is the scholar?' (1 Corinthians 1:20). I will not add what Paul further warned us about regarding philosophy as liable to plunder souls, nor what Tertullian and some other ancient writers said about it — being quite confident that what they opposed was its abuse, not its proper use and value.

Second, the darkness and ignorance that learning strives to remove came upon us as a curse — and learning has no power whatsoever to lift a curse. The person who has reached the highest peak of scholarship, if he has nothing else — if he does not have Christ — is just as much under the curse of blindness, ignorance, and spiritual dullness as the most uneducated person in the world. The curse is only removed in the One who was made a curse for us. Everything that is a consequence of divine judgment is only removed through the One on whom all our sins were laid as punishment. In fact, the more abilities the mind acquires, the more it entrenches itself in the curse and strengthens its opposition to God. Everything it gains only helps it raise up more ambitious thoughts and arguments against the Lord Christ. So this kind of knowledge falls short of what it is designed for and cannot be the solid wisdom we are looking for.

There are other ways to point out the emptiness of this wisdom — from its complexity, difficulty, uncertainty, and failure to satisfy, and from its tendency to lead its followers into the very thing they

most claim to avoid: blindness and folly. My purpose here is only to lay it down at the feet of Jesus Christ and place the crown on His head.

The second form of the finest wisdom outside of Christ is also unable to achieve the goal for which it exists — namely, prudence in managing civil affairs. The immediate goal of this prudence is to keep the rational world within order and boundaries — to draw lines around human beings and keep them from overstepping their limits and destroying one another. All kinds of trouble arise from people overstepping: one person breaking in on the rights, interests, and relationships of another throws this world into conflict. The sum and aim of all earthly wisdom is to keep all things moving in their proper sphere — to hold everyone within the boundaries that are theirs.

It will not be hard to show that all civil prudence is completely unable to achieve this goal. The current state of affairs throughout the world — and that of previous ages — testifies to this abundantly. I will point out the futility of it in a few observations.

First, by the righteous judgment of God, who trims back the proud achievements of men, it regularly happens that those most gifted with this kind of ability use it for the exact opposite of its natural purpose. From whom do most of the world's upheavals come — the breaking of boundaries, the setting of all of civilization on fire? Is it not from such men as these? If men were not so clever, the world might perhaps be more peaceful. This appears to be a curse God has placed on worldly wisdom in most of those who possess it: that it gets turned directly against its own purpose.

Second, God has made it a consistent pattern — in the advancement of His own glory — to mix folly and madness into the wisdom and plans of the wisest people alive, so that in the depths of their scheming they advise things as ill-suited to their goals as anything a child or a fool might suggest, and as directly aimed at their own failure and ruin as anything that could be devised against them. He destroys the wisdom of the wise and brings to nothing the understanding of the intelligent (1 Corinthians 1:19). He describes this at length in Isaiah 19:11-14: drunkenness and staggering are the outcome of all their wisdom, because the Lord gives them a spirit of confusion. Likewise in Job 5:12-14: they meet with darkness in the daytime — when everything seems clear around them and one would wonder how anyone could go wrong, God darkens the way for such people. Psalm 33:10: He brings the counsel of the nations to nothing. In Isaiah 8:9-10 God seems to set them working and personally undertakes their disappointment — 'Go ahead with your plans,' says the Lord, 'and I will see to it that they come to nothing.' Psalm 2:3-4: when men are deep in their plots and schemes, God is said to hold them in derision — to laugh at them, watching the poor creatures diligently working out their own ruin. This has never been made more apparent than in the days in which we live. Scarcely has any supposedly wise person been brought to ruin except through their own folly; and the cleverest counsel of most has been no better than madness.

Third, this wisdom — which is meant to produce universal peace — has almost consistently brought the greatest personal unrest to those who most possess it. 'In much wisdom is much grief' (Ecclesiastes 1:18). The great men of the world carry the reputation for wisdom; truly it is found in very few of them. Most of what is

credited to their care, foresight, and management consists of ordinary events to which they contributed nothing at all. Where this wisdom has been most outstanding, it has lived so close to the border of atheism and been so accompanied by deceit and injustice that it has made its owners wicked and notorious.

No further examples are needed to show the inadequacy of this wisdom for achieving its own particular purpose. It is far from being true and solid wisdom, since failure is written plainly across its face.

This is the first reason why true wisdom cannot consist in either of these: because both fall short even of the immediate and particular goals they aim at.

Both of these together, even at their highest development, are unable to reach the true and ultimate goal of wisdom. It would be simple to demonstrate their inadequacy for wisdom's true end, but this has been so thoroughly done by the one who possessed the greatest portion of both of any man who ever lived — Solomon in Ecclesiastes — that I will not press the point further.

To draw to a close: if true and solid wisdom is nowhere to be found in either of these, if the pearl is not hidden in this field, if both are nothing but emptiness and disappointment, it is pointless to search for it in anything else below. These two are incomparably the finest things the natural world has to offer. Therefore, with one accord, let us place the crown of wisdom on the head of the Lord Jesus.

Let the reader see the purpose of this entire digression. Its aim is to draw our hearts to a more joyful welcome of and delight in the Lord Jesus. If all wisdom is stored up in Him and can only be ob-

tained by belonging to Him — and if everything beside Him and outside of Him that claims the title of wisdom is folly and emptiness — then let those who want to be truly wise learn where to rest their souls.

Part 2, Chapter 4: General Consequences of the Holy Spirit's Work — Consolation, Peace, Joy, Hope

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Communion with Christ in a conjugal relationship, regarding the consequential affections. His delight in His saints is considered first — Isaiah 62:5; Song of Solomon 3:11; Proverbs 8:31. As one instance of Christ's delight in believers: He reveals His whole heart to them (John 15:14-15), Himself (1 John 4:21), and His kingdom. He enables them to communicate their hearts to Him by giving them help, a way, and boldness in prayer — Romans 8:26-27. The saints' delight in Christ follows, as shown in Song of Solomon 2:7, 8:6, and 3:1-5. Their delight in His servants and ordinances of worship for His sake is also addressed.

The communion begun between Christ and the soul is then carried on through fitting consequential affections — affections suited to such a relationship. Christ, having given Himself to the soul, loves the soul; and the soul, having given itself to Christ, loves Him in return. Christ loves His own; He loves them to the end (John 13:1). The saints love Christ; they love the Lord Jesus Christ with sincere love (Ephesians 6:24).

The love with which Christ follows His saints consists in four things:

1. Delight. 2. Valuation. 3. Pity, or compassion. 4. Generosity.

The love of the saints toward Christ may likewise be grouped under four headings:

1. Delight. 2. Valuation. 3. Faithfulness. 4. Duty.

Two of these are the same on both sides, and two are distinct — as fits this relationship, in which the two parties do not stand on equal terms.

The first thing on Christ's part is delight. Delight is the overflow of love and joy — the rest and contentment of the mind in a good that is fitting and desired and now enjoyed. Christ takes great delight in His saints. 'As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you' (Isaiah 62:5). He calls the day of His betrothal the day of the gladness of His heart (Song of Solomon 3:11). The bridegroom's delight on the day of his betrothal is the highest expression of delight that can be put into words. This is what Christ's delight in us corresponds to, in keeping with the relationship He draws us into. His heart is glad in us, without sorrow. Every day of our lives is His wedding day. Zephaniah 3:17: 'The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who saves; He will rejoice over you with joy; He will quiet you by His love; He will exult over you with loud singing' — a full description of delight in all its aspects. The thought of communion with the saints was the joy of His heart from eternity. On the basis of the agreement between Him and His Father — that He should divide a portion with the strong and save a remnant as His inheritance — His soul rejoiced in anticipation of the pleasure and de-

light He would take in them when He actually brought them into communion with Himself. Proverbs 8:31: 'I was rejoicing in His inhabited world, delighting in the sons of men.' This is why He draws them so close to Himself in every relationship. As He is God, they are His temple. As He is a king, they are His subjects. As He is a head, they are His body. As He is the firstborn, He makes them His brothers. He is not ashamed to call them brothers.

From among many, I will select one example to show this: Christ reveals His secrets and His mind to His saints, and enables them to reveal the secrets of their hearts to Him. This is a clear demonstration of deep delight. It was Samson's misplaced affection for Delilah that led him to reveal his most important secret to her. He would not keep his heart hidden from her, even though it cost him his life. We open ourselves only to our closest friends. There is perhaps no greater evidence of delight in close fellowship than this: that one willingly reveals his heart to the one he has taken into intimacy.

He communicates His mind to His saints — and to them alone — His mind, the counsel of His love, the thoughts of His heart, the purposes of His heart for our eternal good. His mind encompasses the ways of His grace, the workings of His Spirit, the rule of His authority, and the obedience of His Gospel. All spiritual revelation comes through Christ. He is the true light who enlightens everyone who comes into the world (John 1:9). Through Him, the secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him, and He shows them His covenant (Psalm 25:14). John 15:14-15: 'You are My friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have

made known to you.' He makes known His entire mind to them — everything the Father entrusted to Him as Mediator to be revealed. He sends His Spirit to make His mind known to His saints and to lead them into all truth. 1 Corinthians 2:10-11: He has revealed these things to us by His Spirit, for we have received Him so that we might know the things freely given to us by God. The apostle therefore concludes: 'We have the mind of Christ' (verse 16), because He treats us as friends and tells us what is in His heart. There is nothing in the heart of Christ that concerns His friends that He does not reveal to them. All His love, His goodwill, the secrets of His covenant, the paths of obedience, the mystery of faith — all of it is told to them.

All of this stands in contrast to unbelievers, with whom He shares no such communion. They know nothing of the mind of Christ as they ought. The natural person does not receive the things of God (1 Corinthians 2:14). There is a vast difference between understanding the teaching of Scripture at the level of the written words and truly knowing the mind of Christ. The latter comes only through a special anointing from Christ (1 John 2:20).

The things that Christ reveals to those He delights in, through this communion, can be gathered under two headings:

1. Himself. 2. His kingdom.

First, Himself: 'He who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him' (John 14:21). He will know Me as I am, and such I will be to him — a Savior, a Redeemer, the chiefest among ten thousand. He will be acquainted with the true worth and value of the pearl of great price. Let others look on Him as having no beauty worth desiring — He will reveal

Himself and His excellencies to those in whom He delights, so that they will see Him as altogether lovely. He will veil Himself from all the world, but the saints with unveiled face will behold His beauty and His glory, and be transformed into that same image of glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Second, His kingdom: they will come to know the government of His Spirit in their hearts, and also His rule and the administration of His authority in His Word and among His churches.

This, then, is the first way He shows His delight in His saints — He shares His secrets with them. He gives them to know His person, His excellencies, His grace, His love, His kingdom, His will, the riches of His goodness, and the depths of His mercy — more and more — while the world neither sees nor knows any such thing.

Second, He enables His saints to communicate their minds and open their souls to Him, so that they may walk together as close friends. Christ knows the minds of all people. He knows what is in man and needs no one to testify about anyone (John 2:25). He searches hearts and examines desires (Revelation 2:23). But not everyone knows how to communicate their heart to Christ. The fact that Christ knows a person's mind is not itself a comfort — He knows the minds of everyone, whether they want Him to or not. But the ability to make one's own heart known to Christ — that is a comfort. This is why the prayers of the saints are incense and fragrance before God, while the prayers of others are an abomination to the Lord. Three things are required to enable a person to communicate their heart to the Lord Jesus.

First, help in the work — for we cannot do it on our own. The saints have this through the Spirit of Jesus (Romans 8:26-27): 'The Spirit helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.' All efforts to commune with God, without the provision of the Spirit of prayer and His active working in the heart, are worthless. And this opening of our hearts to the Lord Jesus is something in which He takes great delight. Hence His tender call to us in Song of Solomon 2:14: 'O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, let me see your form, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your form is lovely.' When the soul, for whatever reason, has withdrawn and hidden itself, He calls for this communication through prayer — and for that purpose He gives the help of the Spirit.

Second, a way to approach God with our desires. This too has been provided for us by Him. John 14:5-6: Thomas said to Jesus, 'Lord, we do not know where You are going; how do we know the way?' Jesus said to him, 'I am the way; no one comes to the Father except through Me.' The path we had to God at our creation is completely blocked by sin. The sword of the law, set on fire by sin, turns in every direction to stop every approach to communion with God. Jesus Christ has opened a new and living way for the saints through the veil — that is, through His flesh (Hebrews 10:20). Christ alone is the way to the throne of grace; no one comes to God except through Him. Through Him we have access in one Spirit to the Father (Ephesians 2:18). So the saints have two things for

opening their hearts at the throne of grace: help and a way — the help of the Spirit, without which they are nothing, and the way of Christ's mediation, without which God cannot be approached.

Third, boldness to come to God. The instinctive cry of sinners, once they feel the terror of the Lord, is: 'Who among us can live with the consuming fire?' (Isaiah 33:14). Shame and trembling before God are the natural outcomes of sin. But we now have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way He opened for us through the veil — that is, through His flesh. Having a high priest over the house of God, we may draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith (Hebrews 10:19-22). The glory and majesty of the Lord are such, and the infinite perfection of His holiness so great, that a clear sight of it will make the soul conclude that it cannot approach Him on its own. It is in Christ alone, and on the basis of His sacrifice and intercession, that we have any boldness to come to Him. These three provisions the saints have for communicating their hearts to the Lord Christ — all of which He has made available because He delights in them.

To make this briefly concrete, let us compare the spiritual opening of our hearts to Christ in this acceptable manner with the kind of prayer motivated only by conviction. The difference will be clearest starting from the first point — the help we have from the Spirit.

First, the Spirit of Christ reveals to us our own needs, so that we may bring them to Him. We do not know what to pray for as we ought (Romans 8:26). Nothing less than the teaching of the Spirit of God can make our souls truly aware of their own needs, burdens, and temptations. For a soul to know its own weaknesses and failures is a gift from heaven. The person who has this help has his

prayer more than half formed before he begins to pray. He discovers — not through a distressing conviction but through a holy sense of and weariness with sin — where he is spiritually dead, where he is dull and cold, where he is unbelieving, where he is tempted beyond his strength, and where the light of God's face is absent. Without this awareness given by the Holy Spirit, there is neither true desire nor true prayer.

Second, the words and expressions of such people fall far short of the laboring of their hearts. Therefore in their supplications the Spirit intercedes with sighs and groans that cannot be expressed in words. The person with this Spirit's help finds no words large enough to give voice to the desires of his heart. At the close of his best and most fervent prayers, such a person feels a double dissatisfaction. First, that his prayers are not a righteousness he can rest on — if God were to mark what is wrong in them, they could not stand the test. Second, that his heart has not been poured out in anything approaching the depth of the holy desires and longings conceived within it. The more he speaks, the more he finds he has left unspoken.

Third, the intercession of the saints, when assisted in this way, is according to the mind of God — that is, the Spirit guides them to ask for the very things God wants them to desire. There are several ways to know when we are praying according to the will of God. One way is: when we pray according to the promise. When our prayers are shaped by the promise, we are praying according to God's will. David in Psalm 119:49 says: 'Remember the word to Your servant, in which You have made me hope.' He prays and directs his desire by the word of promise in which he had placed his trust. Yet a person may ask for what is in the promise and still not

be praying according to the promise. They may pray for what the promise contains but not in the manner the promise intends. James says that some ask and do not receive because they ask wrongly — to spend on their own desires (James 4:3). Even when the right things are requested, if they are not sought in the right manner, we are asking wrongly.

Two things are required so that we may pray for the things in the promise as they are in the promise.

1. That we look on them as promised — and as promised in Christ; meaning, that all the ground we have for hoping to receive what we ask rests entirely on the mediation and purchase of Christ, in whom all the promises are Yes and Amen. This is what it means to ask the Father in Christ's name: God as the Father and source, and Christ as the One who obtained these blessings for us.

2. That we ask for them for the end the promise intends: not to spend on our own desires. When we ask for forgiveness of sin while secretly reserving the intention to continue in sin, we are asking for the most precious mercy of the covenant and planning to waste it on our own lusts. The apostle tells us what the end of the promise is (2 Corinthians 7:1): 'Having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.' When we ask for what is in the promise, in the manner the promise intends, and for the purpose the promise is given, our prayers are according to the will of God. And this is the first expression of Christ's conjugal love toward believers: He delights in them — and that He does is clear, as much from the example given as from countless other considerations.

In response to this, and to carry the communion forward, the saints take delight in Christ. He is their joy, their crown, their glory, their life, their food, their health, their strength, their desire, their righteousness, their salvation, their blessedness. Without Him they have nothing; in Him they find all things. 'God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of Christ' (Galatians 6:14). From the beginning of the world He has been the hope, expectation, desire, and delight of all believers. The promise of Him was all God gave to Adam in his unspeakable distress to relieve and comfort him — and it was enough (Genesis 3:15). Eve perhaps thought that the promised seed had been born in her firstborn when she said, 'I have acquired a man with the help of the Lord' — and this was the source of her joy (Genesis 4:1). When Lamech was given Noah as a figure of Christ and of the salvation to come through Him, he cried out: 'This one will comfort us in our work and in the painful toil of our hands because of the ground which the Lord has cursed' (Genesis 5:29). He rejoiced in the one who was to take away the curse by becoming a curse for us. When Abraham was at the height of his glory, returning from his victory over the kings who had attacked the kings of the valley of Sodom, God appeared to him with a glorious promise (Genesis 15:1): 'Do not fear, Abram; I am a shield to you; your very great reward.' What more could his soul desire? Yet he cried out — as Reuben later did over the loss of Joseph, 'the child is not' — 'O Lord God, what will You give me, since I am childless?' (verse 2). As if to say: You have promised that in my seed all the earth would be blessed — if I do not have that seed, what good will anything else do me? And so it is said that he rejoiced to see the day of Christ; he saw it and was glad (John 8:56). The thought of Christ's coming — which

he viewed from a distance of two thousand years — was the joy and delight of his heart. When Jacob was blessing his sons, his spirit lifted when he came to Judah, through whom he saw the Shiloh to come (Genesis 49:8-10); and a little later, weary from contemplating the future hardships of his descendants, he turned to this for his comfort — the great delight of his soul: 'I have waited for Your salvation, O Lord' — for the One who was to be the salvation of His people. But it would be endless to go through all the examples. Old Simeon sums it all up: Christ is God's salvation and Israel's glory (Luke 2:30-32) — and whatever was called glory in the old covenant was either Christ Himself or a type of Him. The glory of humanity is what people delight in. Hence He is called the desire of all nations (Haggai 2:7) — the One their souls love and delight in, long for and desire. So the saints' delight in Him is used to describe Him in terms of preeminence (Malachi 3:1): 'The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple, even the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight.' The One you seek, the One you delight in — that is a description of Christ: He is their delight and their desire, the One for whom they long. Let us fix on something in particular.

In the pattern of communion with Jesus Christ set out in the Song of Solomon, this delight is richly elaborated. The bride tells us that she sits down under his shadow with great delight (Song of Solomon 2:3). She shows that this delight is vigorous and active in several ways — ways in which we should labor to find our own hearts similarly inclined toward Him.

1. Through her intense care to hold onto His company and presence once she has found it (Song of Solomon 2:7): 'I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or by the hinds of

the field, that you do not arouse or awaken my beloved until she pleases.' Having obtained sweet communion with Christ — described in the preceding verses, which have been discussed earlier — she expresses here her delight in it and her desire for its continuation. Following through on the earlier imagery, she speaks as one would to a companion who is resting with someone they love: 'I charge you by all that is most dear to you, by everything most lovely and desirable you can think of — do not disturb him.' The heart of her desire is that nothing might happen — no sin, no provocation — that would cause Christ to withdraw from that state of rest and delight He seemed to take in her. 'Do not stir him up until he pleases' — that is, never; love itself is what she means, using an abstraction to express the depth of longing. When a believer's soul has obtained genuine sweet communion with Christ, that soul looks around watchfully, alert to every temptation and every way sin might intrude to disturb the enjoyment of its dear Lord and Savior, its rest and desire. How earnestly it charges itself not to omit anything, and not to do anything, that might interrupt the communion it has found. And because the usual way temptations come in — threatening to disturb the rest and delight Christ takes in the soul — is through appealing diversions from actual communion with Him, she desires earnestly that those she is with, those she keeps company with, would not through their proposals or allurements draw her soul into any frame in which Christ cannot delight or rest. A believer who has found Christ and holds Him close is like someone who has found great treasure or a pearl of great price. He looks around in every direction, afraid of anything that might take it from him. Riches make people watchful — and the real, felt possession of the One in whom all the riches and

treasures of God are stored will make people vigilant in holding onto Him. The highest line of communion is a line of the greatest spiritual watchfulness. Carelessness toward the communion with Christ one claims to enjoy is a plain sign of a false heart.

2. The bride shows her delight in Him through her deep restlessness in His absence and her longing for closer communion (Song of Solomon 8:6): 'Put me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, jealousy is as severe as Sheol; its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the Lord.' The image is drawn from the high priest of Israel, who in his representative work before God wore a breastplate over his heart, in which the names of the children of Israel were engraved like seals or signet rings, and he carried them as a memorial before the Lord (Exodus 28:29). He likewise bore their names on his shoulders or arms (verses 11-12) — both images representing the priesthood of Christ, who bears the names of all His people before His Father in the Most Holy Place (Hebrews 9:24). Now the seal on the heart speaks of intimate, inward, tender love and care — an impression and image left on the heart by the thing so loved. 'Put me as a seal on your heart,' says the bride — let me be constantly fixed in your most tender and affectionate love; let me always have a place in your heart; let there be a deep, indelible impression of love on your heart that will never be erased. The soul is never satisfied with thinking about Christ's love for it. 'Oh that it were more, that it were more — that I might be as a seal on His heart' is its language. The soul knows, on reflection, that Christ's love is beyond measure and cannot be increased; but it longs to press itself up toward some apprehension of it. And so she adds: 'put me as a seal on your arm' — the heart is the source, but it is hidden away; the

arm is the place of action and display. 'Let your love be made visible to me,' she says, 'in your tender and powerful care of me.' Two things are clear in this request: that Christ is continually mindful of the soul, always keeping her condition before His eyes, her name engraved on His arm (Isaiah 49:15-16), and that He exerts His power for her protection in keeping with the love of His heart; and also that the hidden love and care of His heart is made visible to the soul through His arm — through the fruits it produces. This is what she longs to be assured of — and without some sense of it, there is no rest to be found.

The reason she gives for this passionate longing is what most clearly reveals her delight in Him. 'Love is as strong as death, jealousy is as severe as Sheol' — or as relentless as the grave. This is the intent of the powerful imagery in this verse and the one following. I cannot contain the workings of my love for you; unless I can always have your company and fellowship, nothing satisfies my love. It is like the grave that always says, 'Give, give.' Death is not satisfied until it has its prey — if it does not get everything, it gets nothing; no matter what else happens, if death is denied its full desire, it has nothing at all. And it cannot be turned aside when its appointed time comes. No ransom will be accepted. So is my love: if I do not have you completely, I have nothing, and nothing in all the world can divert it — it cannot be turned away any more than death in its appointed hour. And I cannot bear my jealous fears; I am afraid you do not love me, that you have left me, because I know I do not deserve to be loved. These thoughts are as relentless as the grave. They give my soul no rest. If I do not find myself on your heart and arm, I am like one lying down on burning coals. This too shows a holy, consuming hunger for delight.

Third, she further shows this delight through her distress and distraction when He withdraws. We easily bear the absence of those whose presence gives us no delight. Song of Solomon 3:1-3: 'On my bed night after night I sought him whom my soul loves; I sought him but did not find him. I must arise now and go about the city; in the streets and in the squares I must seek him whom my soul loves. I sought him but did not find him. The watchmen who make the rounds in the city found me, and I said, "Have you seen him whom my soul loves?"' It is night now with the soul — a time of darkness and trouble. Whenever Christ is absent, it is night for a believer. He is the sun; when He sets, when His light is hidden, everything becomes dark. The absence of Christ will bring night and darkness into the middle of all other comforts. But is the bride content with this condition? She is in bed — a place of ease and rest. Yet a believer finds no rest in Christ's absence, even when nothing else is troubling them. Seeking Christ on the bed at night involves two things: searching one's own soul for the cause of His absence, and searching the promises for His presence.

First, the soul finds that Christ is not present in the way it was used to — warming, cherishing, reviving it with love, staying close, dining with it, filling its thoughts with Himself, dropping the sweetness of love into it. Instead, it finds other thoughts crowding in and troubling the heart, and when it looks for Christ He is not near in the familiar way. The soul immediately begins to ask why. It calls itself to account: what have I done, how have I been conducting myself, that things are not as they were — that Christ has withdrawn and is not drawing near as He used to? Here begins a careful, honest self-examination. The soul considers the love, tenderness, and kindness of the Lord Jesus and how much He de-

lights in staying with His saints — so His leaving is never without cause or provocation. 'How have I behaved,' asks the soul, 'that I have lost my beloved? Where have I been wandering after other loves?' When the fault is found, the soul overflows with grief and anger toward itself.

Second, having worked through some of this, the soul turns to the promises of the covenant in which Christ is graciously offered. It considers one promise, then another, searching for some taste of Him. But if — as often happens — the soul finds only bare words in the promise, if it comes to the promise as to the empty tomb of Christ and hears only, 'He has risen, He is not here' — this leaves the soul bewildered, not knowing what to do. It is like a man who owns a precious jewel, sets it aside, and then in a time of great need goes to find it — only to discover it is gone. He is filled with dismay. So it is with this pearl of the Gospel: after a man has given up everything to possess it and enjoyed it for a season, to find it missing when he most needs it must naturally leave him shaken. So it was with the bride: 'I sought him but did not find him.'

But what does she do now? Does she give up and stop searching? No — she says in verse 2: 'I will arise.' I will not give in so easily. I must have Christ or die. I will get up and pursue this with everything I have.

First, she resolves to take a fresh approach — a more active and vigorous pursuit. She will arise and make use of other means beyond private prayer, meditation, and searching the promises. This expresses resolution and a passionate, determined shaking off of the spiritual state in which she has lost her Beloved. 'I will arise' — I will not remain in this condition. I am ruined if I do. And dili-

gence: I will take another course; I will leave no way unattempted and no means untried that might restore communion with my beloved.

This is the condition of a soul that cannot find the familiar presence of Christ in its private, quieter pursuits. Dull in prayer, wandering in meditation, rarely thinking of Him! I will not accept this condition. Whatever way God has appointed, I will pursue it vigorously in His strength until this condition is changed and I find my Beloved.

Second, the path she takes is to go through the city. The city intended is the city of God — the church. Going through the broad and narrow streets represents the bride's diligent searching through all the paths and ordinances God has given. When the soul finds Christ absent from its private efforts, it makes vigorous use of the public ordinances of worship. In prayer, in preaching, in the administration of the sacraments, it looks for Christ. The great question believers bring to every ordinance is: where is Christ in this? As much of Him as they find, so much sweetness and refreshment they receive — no more and no less. Especially when they are in a state of withdrawal, they press into the ordinances with this urgency. They listen to every word and every prayer, watching for any light from Him, any life, any love that might appear to them. 'Oh that Christ would meet me in this sermon, and restore my poor heart to some sight of His love, some taste of His kindness.' The earnestness of a believer searching for Christ when he no longer senses the presence for grace or consolation that he knew before is beyond description. Much of that soul's condition is captured in

the repeated phrase 'I sought him, I sought him' — expressing a longing too intense to put fully into words. Having found nothing at home, the bride presses further.

But notice the outcome even of this: she sought him but did not find him. It sometimes turns out this way — all their efforts avail nothing; they seek and do not find. Let those who enjoy any degree of Christ's presence take care how they live. If they provoke Him to withdraw, if they lose Him, it may cost them many a bitter search before they find Him again. When a soul prays, meditates, searches the promises in private, attends every ordinance in public with earnestness and diligence — all to catch one glimpse of the face of Jesus Christ — and finds nothing — that is a grievous condition.

What comes next in this state? Verse 3: the watchmen found her. It is agreed that the watchmen of the city of God represent the ministers and officers of the church. It is a sobering observation that the Holy Spirit, in this book, sometimes describes the watchmen on troubling terms — plainly in chapter 5:7, they become persecutors. It was Luther's saying that religion is never more at risk than in the hands of the most reverend. Here, however, they are kind-hearted and, seeing the poor distressed soul, take notice of her condition.

It is the duty of faithful ministers to take notice of poor, troubled, spiritually desolate souls — not to hold back but to be ready to help. A soul genuinely pressed by the absence of Christ cannot conceal its love but must be asking after Him. 'Have you seen him whom my soul loves?' This is my condition. I have had sweet enjoyment of my blessed Jesus; now He has withdrawn from me. Can you help me? Can you guide me to my comfort? All this laboring in

His absence reveals clearly the soul's delight in His presence. Verses 4-5: 'Scarcely had I left them when I found him whom my soul loves; I held on to him and would not let him go until I had brought him to my mother's house.'

First, she tells us how she came to Him: she found Him. How this happened is not explained. It often works out this way in our communion with Christ: when private and public means both fail, and all the soul has left is silent waiting and humble walking, Christ appears — so that His appearing is clearly an act of grace alone. Let us never give up in this condition. When all other ways have run out, when neither bed nor ministers can help, let us wait a little longer — and we will see the salvation of God. Christ often reveals Himself directly, apart from the ordinances, to those who faithfully wait for Him within the ordinances. Let us wait as He has appointed, and let Him appear when He pleases. What she does when she finds Him is described next: she held on to Him and would not let Him go. Having come once more to an experience of sweet communion with Christ, the soul grips Him tightly by faith, refuses to let Him go in the intensity of love, strives to keep Him through the ordinances and in the house of her mother the church of God — and uses every means to confirm the love between Christ and herself. If I were to trace all the examples and testimonies in the Song of Solomon, I would need to work through most of that book, which is not my present purpose. Let the hearts of the saints who know these things draw the conclusion. What is it they long for? What is it that satisfies them most fully and gives sweet contentment to their spirits in every condition? What is it whose loss they dread and whose absence they cannot endure? Is it not this, their Beloved — and He alone?

The saints also show their delight in Christ by their delight in everything that belongs to Him in this world. This is a sign of true delight: for the sake of the one we love, we delight in everything that belongs to him. Christ's great interest in this world lies in His people and His ordinances — His household and their provision. In both of these the saints take great delight for His sake. Take one example: David in Psalm 16:3: 'As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight.' Christ says of His church that she is Hephzibah — 'my delight is in her' (Isaiah 62:4). Here David says of those same people: 'my delight is in them.' Just as Christ delights in His saints, so they delight in one another for His sake. 'Here,' says David, 'is all my delight.' Whatever enjoyment he found in others was nothing compared to the delight he took in them.

As for the ordinances, consider the same person: Psalms 42, 84, and 48 provide such rich and full testimony throughout that no further comment is needed on this point.

This is the first mutual expression of conjugal love in this communion between Christ and believers. He delights in them and they delight in Him. He delights in their flourishing and takes pleasure in it. They delight in His honor and glory and in His presence with them. For His sake they delight in His servants — those whom the world despises — as the most excellent in the world. And they delight in His ordinances as the wisdom of God, which the world regards as foolishness.

Part 2, Chapter 5: Observations on the Spirit — Contempt, Pretense, and the False Spirit Discovered

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Other consequential affections; first, on the part of Christ. He values His saints. Evidences of that valuation: first, His incarnation; second, His self-emptying (2 Corinthians 8:9; Philippians 2:6-7); third, His obedience as a servant; fourth, in His death, His valuation of them compared with others. Believers' esteem for Christ: first, they value Him above all other things and persons; second, above their own lives; third, above all spiritual excellencies. A summary of all this on Christ's part. A summary on the part of believers. The third conjugal affection on Christ's part, pity or compassion, and how it is shown. Suffering alongside and providing for — the fruits of compassion. Several ways Christ supports the saints under temptation. His compassion in their afflictions. Faithfulness — the third conjugal affection in the saints. The fourth on the part of Christ, generosity; on the part of the saints, duty.

Christ values His saints, values those who believe in Him. This is the second element of the conjugal love He bears toward them, having drawn them into the relationship we have been describing. I do not need to spend long demonstrating this. Heaven and earth are full of evidence for it. A few examples will be enough to bring the point to life.

Consider them, then: first, in absolute terms; second, relative to others — and you will see how highly He values them.

First, everything He ever did or does, everything He ever underwent or suffered as Mediator, was for their sake. These things were so great and so costly that if He had not valued them above anything that can be expressed, He would never have committed Himself to bearing them. A few examples.

First, for their sake He was made flesh: 'manifested in the flesh' (Hebrews 2:14). 'Since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same' (John 1:14; 1 Timothy 3:16). The height of this valuation is pressed further by the apostle in verse 16. 'For assuredly He did not give help to angels, but He gave help to the descendant of Abraham.' He had no such regard for angels. Whether you take the phrase to mean that He took our nature upon Him and not the nature of angels, or that He helped and rescued the seed of Abraham rather than fallen angels — it amounts to the same thing for our purposes. His choosing the seed of Abraham over angels, His placing greater value on them than on the others, is plainly expressed. And note: He came to help the seed of Abraham — that is, believers; His esteem and valuation extends to them alone.

Second, for their sake He became flesh in such a way that involved a self-emptying, a setting aside of His manifest glory, becoming poor for their sake (2 Corinthians 8:9). 'For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor.' Being rich in eternal glory with His Father (John 17:5), He became poor — for believers. The same person who was rich became poor. That the riches here can only mean those of deity is clear from its contrast with the poverty He took on as man. This is expressed more fully in Philippians 2:6-7: 'who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.' That 'the form of God' here refers to the essence of deity is established by several unavoidable considerations.

First, He was in that form equal with God — that is, with the Father. Nothing but God is equal to God, not even Christ as Mediator in His greatest glory — nothing finite is equal to that which is infinite.

Second, the form of God is set in contrast to the form of a servant, and that form of a servant is called the 'fashion of a man' in verse 8 — the fashion in which He was found when He gave Himself over to death, when as a man He poured out His blood and died. 'He took the form of a servant' is explained by the next words — an expression used to describe His incarnation (Romans 8:3): God sent Him, and He came in true flesh, in the likeness of sinful flesh. In doing this, it is said He humbled Himself — He emptied Himself, made Himself of no reputation. In the very act of taking on flesh, there was a condescension, a lowering of the person of the Son of God — it could not be otherwise. If God humbles

Himself even to observe the things that are in heaven and on earth (Psalm 113:6), then certainly it was an inconceivable condescension and abasement — not merely to observe, but to take our nature into personal union with Himself. And while nothing could possibly be removed from the essential glory of the deity, yet that person appearing in the fashion of a man and the form of a servant had His manifest glory eclipsed — He appeared to be something entirely other than what He in fact was and had been from eternity. Hence He prays that His Father would glorify Him with the glory He had with Him before the world existed (John 17:5) — referring to the manifest display of it. So while the divine nature was not diminished, the person was humbled.

Third, for their sake He so humbled and emptied Himself in taking flesh as to become in the world's eyes a servant — of no status or account — and a true and real servant to the Father. For their sake He humbled Himself and became obedient. Everything He did and suffered throughout His life falls under this description. It can all be gathered under three headings: first, fulfilling all righteousness; second, enduring all manner of persecution and hardship; third, doing all kinds of good to people. For their sake He embraced a life pointed to in Hebrews 5:7-8: a life of prayers, tears, fears, obedience, and suffering — and all of this with willingness and delight, calling His work His food and drink, and continually declaring that the law of this obedience was in His heart, that He was content to do the will of God. He who will one day avenge severely the least opposition raised against Him by others was content — for believers — to bear everything.

Fourth, He did not stop there — for the completion of everything that came before, He for their sake became obedient to death, even death on a cross. As He declares to His Father in John 17:19: 'For their sakes I sanctify Myself' — I dedicate and consecrate Myself as an offering, as a sacrifice to be slain. This was His aim through all that preceded: He was born and lived in order to die. He valued them above His own life. If we could fully grasp what was in this death He underwent for them, we would see at what price He set them. The curse of the law was in it; the wrath of God was in it; the loss of God's presence was in it. It was a dreadful cup that He tasted and drank to the dregs — so that they would never have to taste it. 'Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends' (John 15:13). Yet Romans 5:8 deepens it further: 'God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.' When He did this for us, we were sinners and enemies whom He would have been entirely just to destroy. Such a death, in such circumstances, with such an accompaniment of wrath and curse, shows as high a regard for us as the heart of Christ Himself was capable of.

To give up one's glory, one's riches, one's ease, one's life, one's sense of God's love — to face loss, shame, wrath, curse, and death for another — this is the evidence of the highest esteem. Christ certainly held His saints in the highest regard: rather than they should perish, rather than they should not be His and share in His glory, He was willing to give up everything He had for their sake (Ephesians 5:25-26).

There would be no end to the examples if I were to trace all the ways Christ has shown His regard for believers — in all their deliverances and afflictions, in what He has done, what He does

through His intercession, what He delivers them from, what He secures for them. All of it says one thing: they are the apple of His eye, His jewel, His crown, His diadem.

Second, in comparison with others: the entire world is nothing to Him compared with them. They are His garden; the rest of the world a wilderness. 'A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a rock garden locked, a spring sealed up' (Song of Solomon 4:12). 'For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I have given Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in your place. Since you are precious in My sight, since you are honored and I love you, I will give other men in your place and other peoples in exchange for your life' (Isaiah 43:3-4). He loves the church and sets the highest price upon her. He arranges the affairs of all nations according to what serves the good of His people. 'In all the siftings of the nations, the eyes of God are on the house of Israel — not a grain of them shall fall to the earth' (Amos 9:9). Look to heaven: angels are appointed to serve them (Hebrews 1:14). Look at the world: nations in general are either blessed for the saints' sake or judged on their account. There is not the humblest, weakest, or poorest believer on earth whom Christ does not value more than all the world besides. If our hearts were filled with these thoughts, they would be a great source of comfort.

In response, believers also value Jesus Christ — they esteem Him above all the world and everything in it. They say in their hearts continually, as David did: 'Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth' (Psalm 73:25). Neither heaven nor earth can offer them anything that comes anywhere close to Him.

First, they value Him above all other things and persons. Christ in a prison, Christ on a cross, is infinitely sweeter to their souls than a crown and throne without Him. So it was with Moses (Hebrews 11:26): he counted the reproach of Christ as greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt. The reproach of Christ is the worst that the wickedness of the world and the malice of Satan can bring upon His followers. The treasures of Egypt were the greatest in the world in those days. Moses despised the very best of the world for the very worst of the cross of Christ. Christ Himself has told believers that if they love anything more than Him — even father or mother — they are not worthy of Him. Holding everything else in contempt for the sake of Christ is the very first lesson of the Gospel.

Second, they value Him above their own lives. 'I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus' (Acts 20:24). Let life and everything else go, so long as I may serve Him — and when it is all over, enjoy Him and be made like Him. What Ignatius is reported to have said when being led to martyrdom is well known: 'Whatever may come upon me, only let me obtain Jesus Christ.' This is why the early believers rejoiced when they were flogged and disgraced for His sake (Acts 5:41; Hebrews 11). Everything is welcome that comes from Him or is endured for Him. The life they live and the death they must die seem small in the light of thoughts of Him who is the support of their life and the goal of their death. If it were not for the daily refreshment they receive through thoughts of Him, they could not endure life — it would be a burden to them — and thoughts of one day fully enjoying Him make them cry out with Paul, 'Oh, that we might be dis-

solved!' The accounts of the martyrs of old and of later believers who suffered as witnesses for Him — under persecution both civil and religious — the readiness of women and children to disregard life for His sake, and the way His name sweetened all torments, have made this truth plain to men and angels.

Third, they value Him above all spiritual excellencies and all other forms of righteousness. Philippians 3:7-8: 'But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him.' Having enumerated his privileges and excellencies as a Jew — all of a spiritual nature, and privileges which led his fellow countrymen to despise the entire Gentile world and regard themselves as the only people acceptable to God, resting on them for righteousness — the apostle tells us how he assesses them compared with the Lord Jesus: they are loss and rubbish. Things he had genuinely given up and suffered the loss of: for many years he had been zealous for the law, pursuing a righteousness as though by the works of it (Romans 9:31), serving God earnestly day and night to obtain the promise (Acts 26:7), living in good conscience from his youth (Acts 22), deeply zealous for God and His institutions — and all of it he willingly cast away. He regarded it as loss and rubbish — not only content to be without it, but for the purpose for which he had pursued it, he repudiated it all. When people have been deeply convicted of their duty, have labored many years to keep a clear conscience, have prayed and listened and done good and denied themselves and been zealous for God and worked with all their

strength to please Him and at length to enjoy Him — they would sooner give up the whole world, life and all, than give up what they have worked for. We all know how unwilling we are to let go of anything we have labored hard to build. How much more when the things are so excellent — our duty to God, our moral integrity, our hope of heaven — things we have strained our hearts toward. But when Christ once appears to the soul, when He is known in His excellency, all these things apart from Him have their paint stripped away, their beauty fades, their appeal vanishes. The soul not only becomes willing to let them all go but pushes them away as a defiled thing and cries out: 'Only in the Lord is there righteousness and strength' (Isaiah 45:24). Among countless testimonies, Proverbs 3:13-15 may be cited here: 'How blessed is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding. For her profit is better than the profit of silver and her gain better than fine gold. She is more precious than jewels; and nothing you desire compares with her.' The Holy Spirit is speaking of Jesus Christ, the wisdom of God, the eternal wisdom of the Father — as is clear from the description given in chapter 8. He and His ways are better than silver and gold, rubies, and everything desirable. In the Gospel He Himself compares Himself to the pearl in the field, which the merchant finds and then sells everything he has to purchase (Matthew 13:45-46). Everything gives way for Christ — all righteousness apart from Him, all religious approaches, all of it — for that one pearl. The glory of His deity, the excellency of His person, His irresistible desirableness, His unspeakable love, His wonderful undertaking, His inconceivable condescensions, His effective mediation, His complete righteousness — all lie open before their eyes, captivating their hearts, filling their affections, and pos-

sessing their souls. And this is the second mutual expression of conjugal love between Christ and believers — which, on Christ's part, can be summarized under two headings.

First, everything He gave up, everything He did, everything He suffered, everything He continues to do as Mediator — He gave up, did, suffered, and does, because of His love for and regard for believers. He gave up the greatest glory, bore the greatest misery, and does the greatest works the world has ever seen — because He loves His bride; because He values believers. What more can be said? How little do we fathom the depths of what is being said here? How inadequate we are to look into the mysterious depths of it! He so loves and so values His saints that, having committed from eternity to bring them to God, He rejoices in the thought of it — and pursues His design through heaven and hell, through life and death, through suffering and power, through misery and strength, and does not cease until He brings it to perfection.

Second, He values them so highly that He will not lose a single one of them to eternity — even if the whole world were to combine forces to snatch them from His hand. When in the days of His earthly life He foresaw what opposition and danger they would face, He cried out: 'Holy Father, keep them' (John 17:11) — let not one of them be lost. He tells us plainly in John 10:28 that no one will snatch His sheep out of His hand. While the world and outward afflictions and persecutions might be overcome, there was still the threat of sin from within, assisted by Satan. Just as He has provided against Satan's attacks with the promise that the gates of hell will not prevail against His church, so He has ensured that sin itself will not destroy them. Here indeed is the depth of His love: though His holy soul hates every sin — it is a burden, an abomina-

tion, a fresh wound to Him — and His poor bride is sinful, believers full of sins, failures, and weaknesses, He hides it all, covers it all, and bears with it all, rather than lose them. What a world of sinful foolishness our dear Lord Jesus bears with on this account. Infinite patience, infinite forbearance, infinite love, infinite grace, infinite mercy — all are set to work to this end, to match the high value He places on us.

On our part, this can also be summarized under two headings.

First, that when Christ is revealed to our souls, they rejoice to let go of everything in which they had delighted or placed their confidence — for Him and for His sake, so that they may have Him. Sin and appetite, pleasure and prosperity, self-made righteousness and self-performed duty — all of it shall go so that they may gain Christ.

Second, they are willing to part with everything else rather than with Him when they do have Him. The thought of parting with peace, health, freedom, relationships, wives, children is painful and heavy even to the best of the saints. But their souls cannot endure the thought of parting with Jesus Christ. Such a thought is as crushing as the grave. The worst fear they have in any season of spiritual darkness is that they will not have Jesus Christ. So long as they may have Him — here, hereafter, be made like Him, be always with Him, stand in His presence — they can part with everything else freely and gladly.

The third conjugal affection on Christ's part is pity and compassion. 'As a husband nourishes and cherishes his own flesh, so does Christ with the church' (Ephesians 5:29). Christ has a fellow-feeling with His saints in all their troubles, as a man has with his

own flesh. He does not deal with believers as the Samaritans treated the Jews — friendly toward them in prosperity but contemptuous in trouble. He is like a tender father who, though he may love all his children equally, gives the most care and personal attention to the one who is sick and weak. And more than any earthly father's pity, He Himself suffers alongside them and shares in all their troubles.

All the sufferings of the saints in this world — in which their head and husband exercises pity, tenderness, care, and compassion toward them — are of two kinds: 1. Temptations. 2. Afflictions.

First, temptations — under which I also include sin, toward which temptations tend — whether arising from their own weaknesses or from outside adversaries. The state of Christ's heart and His manner toward them in this condition is shown in Hebrews 4:15. 'We do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses.' The double negative emphatically affirms that we do have a high priest who can — and does — sympathize with our weaknesses. The word translated 'sympathize' falls far short of the original, which means to suffer together with. We have, says the apostle, a high priest who can and therefore does suffer with us and bear our weaknesses. In what sense He suffers with us is explained in the next words: for He was tempted as we are, yet without sin (verse 15). It is in our weaknesses and temptations — our spiritual frailty — that He has a compassionate sympathy and fellow-feeling with us. Whatever our weaknesses, insofar as they are our temptations, He suffers with us and feels for us. Hence at the last day He says, 'I was hungry,' and so on. There are two ways of expressing a fellow-feeling and suffering with another.

1. By grieving alongside them as a friend.

2. By providing gracious help — and both are characteristic of Christ.

First, He grieves and intercedes with us. Zechariah 1:12: 'Then the angel of the Lord said, "O Lord of hosts, how long will You have no compassion for Jerusalem?"' He speaks as one deeply moved by the state of poor Jerusalem. He has announced to the whole world that what is done to His people is done to Him (Zechariah 2:8) — to the apple of His eye.

Second, He abounds in gracious provision. Isaiah 40:11: 'Like a shepherd He will tend His flock; in His arm He will gather the lambs and carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing ewes.' Here both are present together: tender compassion and active care.

The whole portrait of Christ here is one of the greatest tenderness, compassion, and condescension that can be imagined. His people are shown in many conditions of weakness — some are lambs, some are nursing mothers, some are very tender, some are weighed down by temptations. To them all Christ is a shepherd who feeds His own sheep and leads them to pleasant pasture. If He sees a poor weak lamb, He does not push it along but takes it in His arms, where He both comforts and strengthens it. He leads them gently and tenderly. When He sees a poor soul weak, fragile, and ready to give way and perish, He lifts him up through some gracious word of promise, carries him, and holds him up when he cannot take one step forward. Hence His strong rebuke of the shepherds in Ezekiel 34:4: 'Those who are sickly you have not

strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up.' This is what our caring, tender Husband would have done.

Just as His sympathy and fellow-suffering with us is described in Hebrews 4:15, so in verse 16 it is added that He provides timely grace — help in the moment of need. A pardon delivered to a condemned man just as he is about to be executed is sweet and deeply welcome. Such is the help Christ gives. All His saints may take this as a certain rule, both in their temptations and afflictions: when they can no longer do without relief, they will receive it; and when they can bear no longer, they will be delivered (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Hebrews 2:18: 'Since He Himself was tempted in what He suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.' There is something in all our temptations that was not in Christ's temptations — there is something within us that sides with every temptation. With Christ it was not so (John 14:30). But this is so far from diminishing His compassion toward us that in every way it increases it. If He gives help because we are tempted, the harder our temptations are, the more ready He will be to help. He gives timely help in and through temptations to sin in several ways.

First, by keeping the soul, which is vulnerable to temptation, in a strong habitual resistance against the particular sin to which it is most exposed. This was the case with Joseph: Christ knew that Joseph's great trial would come in the form of sexual temptation from his master's wife, and He kept Joseph's heart in a firm and settled disposition against that sin. His immediate answer without a moment's hesitation shows this (Genesis 39:9). In other areas where Joseph was less deeply tried, his heart was not so fortified

by habitual grace — as shown by his swearing by the life of Pharaoh. This is one way Christ gives fitting help to His own through tenderness and compassion. The saints in the course of their lives, through the company they keep, the society they move in, and the work they are given, are exposed to great and fierce temptations — some in one form, some in another. Christ is exceptionally kind and gentle toward them in this, strengthening their hearts with abundant grace against the specific sins to which they are most exposed.

Second, Christ sometimes rescues the soul from the very edge of sin by a powerful surge of actual grace. This is what happened with David (1 Samuel 24:4-5). The temptation was on the verge of prevailing when a powerful surge of grace brought him back. To show His saints what they are — their own weakness and frailty — He sometimes allows them to reach the very edge of the cliff, and then causes them to hear a voice behind them saying, 'This is the way, walk in it,' and so draws them back to Himself.

Third, by removing the temptation itself when it grows so strong and violent that the poor soul does not know what to do. This is called 'delivering the godly out of temptation' (2 Peter 2:9). The person is snatched out of the snare while the snare itself is left behind. When the soul is completely worn out, has tried every means of help, and has not been able to find any relief — suddenly and unexpectedly the Lord Christ in His tenderness and compassion rebukes Satan, and the soul hears not another word from him about that temptation. Christ enters the storm and says: 'Peace, be still.'

Fourth, by pouring in fresh grace as temptations grow and intensify. This is what happened with Paul (2 Corinthians 12:9): 'My grace is sufficient for you.' The temptation grew severe; Paul pleaded earnestly for its removal; and he received only this assurance of the sufficiency of God's grace to sustain him, however much the temptation might increase.

5. By giving them wisdom to make a right, holy, and spiritually profitable use of temptations. James tells us to count it all joy when we fall into various trials (James 1:2) — which would be impossible unless a holy and spiritual benefit could be drawn from them, as he goes on to show. There are many ways that experienced Christians, with fitting help from Christ, can benefit from their temptations. Not the least of these is that through them we come to know ourselves. Hezekiah was left to himself in order to be tested, so that it might be known what was in his heart. Through temptation, some hidden, deeply-seated corruption is often brought to light that the soul was previously unaware of. As it was with Hazael regarding extreme sins, so it is with the saints in lesser things. They would never have believed there were such lusts and corruptions in them as temptation has uncovered. Some who were tempted to one sin have discovered another they had not suspected. People tempted to pride, worldliness, or moral looseness have been startled into discovering a neglect of many duties and much loss of communion with God, of which they had been completely unaware. All of this comes from the tender care of Jesus Christ, who provides fitting help — without which no one can possibly make use of a temptation or turn it to good. This is fitting help indeed: what would otherwise be a deadly wound to a soul, or to another person, becomes the lancing of a festered sore

— letting out the corruption that might otherwise have endangered life itself. As 1 Peter 1:6 says: 'In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials.'

6. When the soul is at any time, more or less, overcome by temptation, Christ in His tenderness relieves it with mercy and forgiveness — so that His people will not be crushed entirely under their burden (1 John 2:1-2). Through one or more of these ways the Lord Jesus shows His tender, husband-like compassion toward His saints in and through their temptations.

2. Christ is compassionate toward them in their afflictions; 'in all their affliction He was afflicted' (Isaiah 63:9). Indeed, it seems that all our afflictions — at least those of one kind, namely persecutions — are His in the first place and ours only by participation (Colossians 1:24). We fill up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ. Two things clearly show this compassion in Christ.

1. His interceding with His Father for their relief (Zechariah 1:12). Christ intercedes on our behalf not only in view of our sins but also our sufferings — and when the work our afflictions are meant to accomplish is done, we will receive the relief He has been interceding for. The Father always hears Him. Every deliverance from trouble, every recovery from sickness, every relief from pain, every rescue from any evil that had hold of us — each is given us on the intercession of Jesus Christ. Believers misunderstand their own situation when they look on their blessings as simply dispensed through ordinary providence. This may in fact explain why we value our mercies so little, are so little thankful for them, and bear so little fruit from them — we do not see how, through what means, and on what basis they are given. The people of God alive

in the world today are alive and undevoured solely on account of the intercession of the Lord Jesus. His compassion has been the source of all their deliverances. This is why He often restrains their sufferings and afflictions from reaching their full force. He is with them when they pass through fire and water (Isaiah 43:2-3).

2. In that He will, at the final settlement of all things, take terrible vengeance on the enemies of His people for the sufferings they have caused. He avenges His elect who cry out to Him — and He does so swiftly. The cause of Zion leads on the day of His vengeance (Isaiah 34:8). He sometimes looks on their distress and takes stock of the state of the world in relation to them (Zechariah 1:11). 'We have patrolled the earth,' His messengers report to Him, whom He had sent to survey the world and its condition during the affliction of His people, 'and behold, all the earth is peaceful and quiet.' This is typically the condition of the world in such seasons — it is at rest and ease, hearts abundantly satisfied, drinking wine freely and sending gifts to one another. Christ then looks to see who will step forward to help them (Isaiah 59:16-17), and finding no one engaging on their behalf or for the destruction of their adversaries, He takes it on Himself. He accomplishes this vengeance in two ways.

1. Temporally, upon persons, kingdoms, nations, and countries — a picture of which you have in Isaiah 63:1-6. As He did it to the old Roman world (Revelation 6:16) — and this also He does in two ways.

1. By selecting a prominent opponent and making him an example to all the world — as He did with Pharaoh: 'For this very purpose I raised you up' (Exodus 9:16). He continues to do so to this day: He lays His hand on prominent adversaries — filling one

with fury, another with folly, withering a third, or destroying them utterly and terribly. Like a provoked lion, He does not rest until He has His prey.

2. In general, through the bowls of His wrath that He will pour out in these latter days on the anti-Christian world and on all who have shared in their hatred and persecution. He will bring them to terrible ruin, and make such work of them in the end that everyone who hears of it will be stunned.

2. In eternal judgment He will plead the cause of His beloved against their adversaries (Matthew 25:41-44; 2 Thessalonians 1:6; Jude 15). From all of this it is clear that Christ abounds in pity and compassion toward His beloved. More instances could be given, but these things are plain and come readily to the mind.

Corresponding to this, I place in the saints a faithfulness to Christ in every condition and circumstance. The apostle made it his earnest effort that this might be the state of the church at Corinth.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 11:2-3: 'I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin. But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.' And so it is said of those who follow the Lamb on Mount Zion in Revelation 14:4: 'These are the ones who have not been defiled with women, for they have kept themselves chaste.' What defilement they were free from will be explained later.

This faithfulness consists in three things.

First, not taking anything else into their affections and confidence for the purposes for which they received Jesus Christ. This is where the Galatians failed in their conjugal loyalty to Christ: they had received Christ alone for life and justification, but being charmed and misled, they brought the righteousness of the law into that same place (Galatians 3:1). How Paul dealt with them over this is well known — how forcefully and tenderly he rebuked them, how severely he confronted them, how plainly he showed them their folly. The first element of faithful love in believers is this: having received Christ as their righteousness and salvation before God and as the source of all their supply, they will not receive any other thing into His place and in His stead. As for everything before we receive Christ — our own efforts and achievements — the apostle's attitude in Philippians 3:8-10 is plain: every effort, every advantage, every privilege he rejects with force as loss and rubbish, and focuses all his aims and desires on Christ alone and His righteousness. The works we do after receiving Christ are a different matter — they are genuinely acceptable to God; He is pleased that we should walk in them. But as to the end for which we receive Christ — Ephesians 2:8-10 — even the works done after believing are excluded when it comes to justification and acceptance with God. It will one day be clear that Christ is deeply opposed to arguments about the role of our own works and obedience in our acceptance before God. The faithfulness we owe Him requires a different disposition entirely. It is remarkable how hard it is to keep some professing believers genuinely faithful to Christ in this matter — but those who truly love Him are differently minded.

Above all else, then, the saints work to keep their hearts faithful and loyal to Jesus Christ in this. He has been made to them righteousness by God, and they will claim nothing else for that purpose. Sometimes they do not even know whether they have any interest in Him or not — He withdraws and is absent, and they remain in a kind of widowhood, refusing to be comforted because He is not present. When Christ is at any time absent from the soul, many other loves offer themselves to it, many things seek to draw its affections into resting on this or that for relief and support. But no matter how long it must go on mourning, it will lean on nothing but Christ. When the soul is in the wilderness, in its most desolate condition, it will remain there until Christ comes to take it up (Song of Solomon 8:5).

This is what a person who has communion with Christ does: he watches carefully over his own heart so that nothing creeps into his affections to bring him peace or standing before God except Christ alone. Whenever the question must be answered — 'With what shall I come before the Lord?' — he does not reach for this or that thing he has done, but immediately cries out: 'In the Lord Jesus I have righteousness. All my desire is to be found in Him, not having my own righteousness' (Philippians 3:9).

Second, faithfulness to Christ involves cherishing that Spirit, that holy Comforter, whom Christ sends to us to remain with us in His place. He tells us He sends the Spirit for that purpose (John 16:7); He gives Him to us to abide with us forever for all the purposes He is to fulfill toward us and within us. He gives the Spirit to dwell in us, to keep us and preserve us blameless for Himself. And so the saints maintain their conjugal faithfulness to Christ intact in

this: they work by every means not to grieve the Holy Spirit whom Christ has sent in His place to stay with them. The apostle calls them to this in Ephesians 4:30: 'Do not grieve the Holy Spirit.'

There are two main purposes for which Christ sends His Spirit to believers.

First, for their sanctification; second, for their consolation. All the particular acts of purifying, teaching, anointing, and the rest that are ascribed to the Spirit can be grouped under these two headings. And so there are two ways in which we may grieve Him: first, in relation to sanctification; second, in relation to consolation.

First, in relation to sanctification. The Spirit is the Spirit of holiness — holy in Himself and the author of holiness in us. He works holiness in us (Titus 3:5) and draws us toward it through those inner promptings of His that are not to be suppressed. This, above all, grieves the Spirit: when He is carrying forward in us a work infinitely for our benefit — and without which we cannot see God — that we should run against Him in paths of unholiness, pollution, and moral corruption. The context of Ephesians 4:28-31 makes this plain. What could grieve a loving and tender friend more than to be opposed and dismissed at the very moment he is most intent on our good? In this, then, believers make it their business to keep their hearts loyal and their affections faithful to Jesus Christ. They labor earnestly not to grieve the Holy Spirit through careless and inconsistent living. Therefore no anger, wrath, malice, or envy shall take up residence in their hearts — for all these are contrary to the holy, gentle spirit of Christ which He has given to dwell with them. They pay attention to His promptings, draw on His help,

and make use of His gifts. Nothing presses more heavily on their hearts than that they may live in a way worthy of the presence of this holy representative of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Second, as to consolation. This is the second great purpose for which Christ gives and sends His Spirit to us — which is why the Spirit is called, by way of special emphasis, the Comforter. For this end He seals us, anoints us, confirms us, and gives us peace and joy. There are two ways in which He may be grieved with respect to this purpose of His mission, and our faithfulness to Jesus Christ thereby broken.

First, by placing our comfort and joy in other things rather than being filled with joy in the Holy Spirit. When we make earthly comforts — anything at all besides what we receive through the Spirit of Christ — our joy and delight, we are being unfaithful to Christ. So it was with Demas, who loved the present world. When the ways of the Spirit of God feel burdensome and tiresome, and our delight and refreshment come instead from earthly things, we are being disloyal to Christ. Could His Spirit not say: Why do I continue to abide with these poor souls? I offer them joy inexpressible and glorious, and they refuse it for things that are perishing. Christ cannot endure this. Believers are therefore very careful not to place their joy and comfort in anything but what the Spirit provides. Their daily work is to have their hearts made dead to the world and the things of it. They aim to look on the world as a crucified, lifeless thing that has no form or beauty. If at any time they have been entangled by created things and lesser comforts and have lost their higher joys, they cry to Christ: 'O restore to us the joy of Your Spirit!'

Second, He is grieved when through spiritual darkness and unbelief we refuse or fail to receive those comforts He offers us and is abundantly willing for us to have. But I will have occasion to speak to this later when dealing with our communion with the Holy Spirit.

Third, faithfulness to Christ extends to His ordinances and the manner and substance of His worship. Christ, having taken His church as His bride into this relationship, shows the heart of what faithful love to Him looks like in their keeping His ordinances and worshiping according to His appointment. Any violation of this He calls adultery and unfaithfulness throughout Scripture. He is a jealous God, and He uses that title specifically in relation to His ordained worship. The whole departure of the Christian church into false worship is called spiritual fornication. For this reason, believers who are genuinely attentive to communion with Jesus Christ work to keep their hearts faithful to Him in His ordinances, institutions, and worship — and they do so in two ways.

First, they will receive nothing, practice nothing, and own nothing in His worship except what He has appointed. They know that from the beginning of the world He has never permitted, nor ever will permit, the will of any creature to be the measure of His honor or the governing principle of His worship — whether in substance or in form. One person offered a sharp and accurate explanation of the second commandment: it is not an image or likeness as such that is forbidden, but making one for ourselves — inventing our own ways of worship or means of honoring God that He has not appointed. Believers know what reception man-made worship receives from God. 'Who has required this from your hand?' and 'In vain do you worship Me, teaching as doctrines the tradi-

tions of men' — that is the best response it gets. I will say plainly what is on my heart and what I am prepared to defend against all objections: the principle that the church has authority to institute or appoint anything or any ceremony belonging to the worship of God — whether in substance or form — beyond the orderly observance of such circumstances as necessarily attend the ordinances Christ Himself has instituted, is the root cause of all the terrible superstition and idolatry, all the confusion, bloodshed, persecution, and war that have for so long spread across the Christian world. And I believe it is a major purpose of the book of Revelation to lay bare this truth. I have no doubt that the great controversy God has had with this nation for so many years, which He has pursued with such anger and indignation, was on this very account: that contrary to the bright Gospel light that shone among us, the preferences and inventions of men — under the names of order, decency, and church authority — were imposed on people in the ways and worship of God. And all that pretense of glory, beauty, dignity, and conformity was nothing more than what God describes in the church of Israel in Ezekiel 16:25 and following. This is why prayer in the Spirit was mocked, powerful Gospel preaching was despised, the Sabbath was undermined, and holiness was branded and persecuted — all so that Jesus Christ might be dethroned from His sole authority as lawgiver in His church. And so that a ceremonious, showy, outward display of worship — drawn from pagan, Jewish, and anti-Christian practices — might be put in its place, of which there is not one word, syllable, or letter in the entire book of God. This, then, is what those who hold communion with Christ are careful about: they will admit nothing and practice nothing in the worship of God — whether private or public — with-

out His warrant for it. Unless it comes in His name, with 'Thus says the Lord Jesus,' they will not listen even to an angel from heaven. They know the apostles themselves were to teach the saints only what Christ commanded them (Matthew 28:20). You know how many in this very nation, in the not-so-distant past — indeed how many thousands — left their homeland and went out into a vast and forbidding wilderness at the ends of the earth, to keep their souls faithful and pure toward their dear Lord Jesus in the matter of His worship and ordinances.

Second, they readily embrace, receive, and practice everything the Lord Christ has appointed. They inquire carefully into His mind and will, so that they may know it. They go to Him for direction and ask Him to lead them in ways they have not known. Psalm 119 is a model for this. How that devout soul breathes with longing for instruction in the ways, ordinances, statutes, and judgments of God! Whatever is of Christ, they willingly submit to, accept, and give themselves to in faithful, continuing practice. Whatever comes from any other source, they refuse.

Fourth, Christ shows and demonstrates His love to His saints through generosity — through the rich and plentiful provision He makes for them. 'It was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him' (Colossians 1:19), and 'of His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace' (John 1:16). I will simply note that Scripture consistently describes Christ doing everything for His saints in an abundant manner — richly and with open-handed generosity. Whatever He gives us — grace to help us, His presence to comfort us — He gives abundantly. Romans 5:20: 'Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.' Ephesians 3:20: He is able to do 'far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think.' Is it

pardoning mercy we receive from Him? He 'will abundantly pardon' (Isaiah 55:7) — He will multiply pardon upon pardon, so that grace and mercy overflow above all our sins and failures. Is it the Spirit He gives? He pours Him out on us richly and abundantly (Titus 3:6) — not only inviting us to drink of the waters of life freely, but giving the Spirit in such generous measure that rivers of living water flow from those who receive Him (John 7:38-39), and those who have drunk of Him will never thirst again. Song of Solomon 5:1: 'Drink and drink deeply, O beloved.' Is it grace we receive from Him? We receive abundance of grace (Romans 5:17); He 'lavishes on us' all wisdom and insight (Ephesians 1:8). If in anything we are limited, the limitation is in ourselves — Christ deals generously with us. The great failure of believers is that they do not draw on Christ's generosity as they should — that we do not every day take from Him mercy in abundance. The oil never stopped flowing until the vessels ran out; what we receive from Christ fails only when our faith fails to receive it.

Our response to Christ in return comes in the form of duty — and two things are required for this.

First, that we pursue and practice holiness in its full power as obedience rendered specifically to Jesus Christ — as obedience to Him. All gospel obedience is what Christ commands us (Matthew 28:20). 'You are My friends if you do what I command you' (John 15:14). We are required to live to Him who died for us (2 Corinthians 5:15) — to live to Him as our Lord and King in all holy obedience. This does not mean there are special commands or a distinct law of Jesus Christ by obeying which we are justified, as the Socinians imagine — for the Gospel requires nothing more than that we love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul,

which the law also required. But the Lord Jesus has brought us into a standing of acceptance with God in which our obedience is pleasing to Him, and since we are to honor Him as we honor the Father, we have a particular regard to Him in all our obedience. As Titus 2:14 puts it: He has 'purified for Himself a people for His own possession.' This is how believers frame their obedience — with their eyes on Jesus Christ.

First, as the author of their faith and obedience — the One for whose sake it is given to them to believe (Philippians 1:29), and who by His Spirit works that obedience in them. Hebrews 12:1-2: in the course of our obedience we always look to Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith.

Second, as the One in, through, and by whom we have acceptance with God in our obedience. They know all their duties are weak, imperfect, unable to stand in God's presence. Therefore they look to Christ as the One who carries the imperfection of their holy things — who adds the incense of His intercession to their prayers, removes all the flaws from their duties, and makes them acceptable to God.

Third, as the One who has reissued God's commands to them with the most compelling reasons for obedience. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15: 'The love of Christ controls us.'

Fourth, they regard Him as God equal with the Father, to whom all honor and obedience is owed (Revelation 5:14). This, then, is what the saints do in all their obedience — they have a special regard for their dear Lord Jesus. His love for them, His life lived for them, His death for them, all His kindness and mercies — these constrain them to live for Him.

Second, by laboring to abound in fruits of holiness. As He deals with us generously and gives to us abundantly, so He calls us to abound in all grateful and obedient response to Him. We are called to 'always abound in the work of the Lord' (1 Corinthians 15:58). The saints are never satisfied with whatever measure of obedience they have reached at any given time, but are constantly pressing forward to be more faithful and more fruitful for Christ.

And this is a brief glimpse of some of that communion we enjoy with Christ. It comes from one who has the least experience of it of all God's saints — and yet who has found in it something better than ten thousand worlds. Who desires to spend the remainder of the few and difficult days of this pilgrimage in pursuing it — in contemplating the excellencies, desirableness, love, and grace of our dear Lord Jesus, and in making returns of obedience according to His will. To whose soul, in the midst of the confusion of this troubled world and the stubborn rebellions of his own heart, this is the great comfort: that He who is coming will come and will not delay. The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come'; and let the one who reads say, 'Come'; even so, come, Lord Jesus.

Part 2, Chapter 6: Of Particular Communion with the Holy Spirit

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1. Communion with Christ in purchased grace: purchased grace considered in terms of its source and foundation. The first source of it, in the obedience of Christ: obedience properly ascribed to Christ, considered in two ways: what it was and what it consisted in. His obedience to the law in general; the law of the Mediator; His habitual righteousness and its necessity, as well as His obedience to the law of the Mediator. His actual obedience, or active righteousness. All of Christ's obedience performed as Mediator. His active obedience for us. This demonstrated at length from Galatians 4:4-5; Romans 5:19; Philippians 3:9; Zechariah 3:3-5. One objection addressed. Discussion of Christ's active righteousness concluded. The death of Christ and how it bears on our acceptance with God: as a price; what redemption is. As a sacrifice: atonement made by it; as a punishment: satisfaction accomplished by it. The intercession of Christ and how it bears on our acceptance with God.

We now turn to communion with Christ in purchased grace, as proposed earlier. 'That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to

His death' (Philippians 3:10).

By purchased grace I mean all the righteousness and grace which Christ has obtained, worked out for us, or in any way makes us partakers of — all that He bestows on us for our benefit through anything He has done, suffered, or continues to do as Mediator.

This may be considered in two ways.

1. In terms of its source and foundation. 2. In terms of its nature and what it consists in. 1. It has a threefold source, spring, or cause in Christ: 1. The obedience of His life. 2. The suffering of His death. 3. His ongoing intercession. All the actions of Christ as Mediator that lead to the communication of grace to us may be referred to these three headings, or to things that serve them or flow from them.

As for the nature of this grace in which we have communion with Christ — flowing from these sources and fountains — it may be referred to three categories.

1. The grace of justification, or acceptance with God, which brings a change in our standing and condition. 2. The grace of sanctification, or holiness before God, which brings a real change in us with respect to principle and practice. 3. The grace of privilege, which is mixed — as I will show, if I come to deal with it.

That we have communion with Christ in this purchased grace is clear from this single observation: there is almost nothing that Christ did which is a source of the grace we are speaking of, that Scripture does not describe us doing with Him. We are crucified with Him (Galatians 2:20). We are dead with Him (2 Timothy 2:11; Colossians 3:3) and buried with Him (Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12). We are made alive together with Him (Colossians 2:13) and

raised with Him (Colossians 3:1). God 'made us alive together with Christ and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places' (Ephesians 2:5-6). In Christ's actions, by virtue of the covenant between Him as Mediator and the Father, such a certain foundation was laid for the transfer of the fruits of those actions to those on whose behalf He performed them, that Scripture describes those who receive the fruits as having done the same things with Him. We may have occasion later to explore the life and power of that truth.

The first source and foundation of this grace in which we have communion with Christ is to be considered first — and that is the obedience of His life, about which two things must be explained:

1. What is meant by it, and what it consisted in.

2. What bearing it has on the grace we are speaking of.

Before addressing this, I will note one thing: in the order of procurement, the life of Christ necessarily precedes His death, so I will address it first. But in the order of application, the benefits of His death are applied to us prior — in the nature of things themselves — to those of His life, as will become clear from the condition we are in.

1. By the obedience of Christ's life I mean the complete conformity of the Lord Jesus Christ — as He was and is in His being Mediator — to the whole will of God, and His complete actual fulfillment of every law of God, doing all that God required in them. He could have been perfectly holy through obedience to the law of creation — the moral law — as the angels were; and no more than that could have been required of Him as a man walking with God. But He also submitted Himself to every law and ordinance intro-

duced because of sin — laws which He, on His own account, had no obligation to observe — because it was fitting for Him to 'fulfill all righteousness' (Matthew 3:15), as He said in connection with a newly instituted ceremony.

That obedience is properly ascribed to Jesus Christ as Mediator, Scripture clearly attests — both in name and substance. 'Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered' (Hebrews 5:8). He was obedient even in His sufferings, and it was this obedience that gave meaning to His death — 'He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death' (Philippians 2:8). In His death He made His soul an offering for sin (Isaiah 53:10), or His soul offered itself to death (verse 12). He not only consecrated Himself as an offering (John 17:19) but also offered Himself up (Hebrews 9:14) as a fragrant offering to God (Ephesians 5:2). For this reason, in the whole of His work, He is called the Father's servant (Isaiah 42:1, 19). He declared of Himself that He came into the world to do the will of God — the will of the One who sent Him — and showed His complete readiness for it (Hebrews 10:7). All of this demonstrates His obedience. But I do not think I need to labor the point that Christ in His mediatorial work, and as Mediator, was obedient and did what He did willingly and gladly in obedience to God.

Now this obedience of Christ may be considered in two ways:

1. In terms of its habitual root and foundation. 2. In terms of its actual expressions and duties.

First, the habitual righteousness of Christ as Mediator in His human nature was the absolute, complete, and exact conformity of Christ's soul to the will, mind, and law of God — His perfect inher-

ent righteousness as a settled disposition. He had this necessarily from the grace of the union of His two natures, which is why what was born of the virgin 'is that which is conceived of the Holy Spirit' and therefore 'holy' (Luke 1:35). Luke 2:52 shows that He had a complete fullness of grace in every respect. The apostle describes this in Hebrews 7:26: 'For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest — holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners.' For this reason He is called a lamb without spot or blemish (1 Peter 1:19). This habitual holiness of Christ was inconceivably greater than that of the angels. He who charges His angels with foolishness (Job 4:18) and puts no trust in His holy ones — in whose sight the heavens are not pure (Job 15:15) — always keeps Christ in His embrace and is always well pleased with Him (Matthew 3:17). The reason is that every other creature, however holy, receives the Spirit of God in limited measure, but the Spirit was not given to Christ by measure (John 3:34), because 'it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him' (Colossians 1:19). Every other creature is limited by the fact that it exists as a dependent, created being and so has the source of what is communicated to it outside itself. But the human nature of Christ subsists in the person of the Son of God, and therefore has the ground and source of its holiness in the closest possible union with that person.

Second, the actual obedience of Christ was His willing and joyful obediential performance of everything — every duty and every command — that God required by any law to which we were subject and liable; and moreover His obedience to the specific law of the Mediator. This has two parts:

First, everything required of us by any law, He performed and fulfilled. Whatever was required of us by the law of nature in our original state of innocence, whatever duty was added by morally positive or ceremonial institutions, whatever the righteous judicial laws required in obedience — He did it all. For this reason He is said to be 'born under the Law' (Galatians 4:4) — subject and liable to all its commands and precepts. Matthew 3:15: it was fitting for Him 'to fulfill all righteousness' — every kind of righteousness without exception, everything God required — as is clear from the application of that general principle to the baptism of John. I will not go through specific examples: fulfilling the law of nature toward God and His parents; keeping morally positive institutions like the Sabbath and other acts of worship; observing the ceremonial law in circumcision and all the rites of the Jewish church; obeying the judicial law by paying tax to governing authorities. On the one hand, He committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth. On the other hand, He fulfilled all righteousness — and on that basis the Father was always well pleased with Him. This was what He claimed of Himself: He came to do the will of God, and He did it.

Second, there was a specific law of the Mediator that applied to Him alone and contained all those acts and duties of His that are not for our imitation. The obedience He showed in dying was obedience to this particular law: 'I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father' (John 10:18). As Mediator He received this specific command from His Father — to lay down His life and take it up again — and He was obedient to it. This is why we say that He who is Mediator did some things simply as a man subject to God's

law in general — such as when He prayed for His persecutors (Luke 23:34). Other things He did specifically as Mediator — such as when He prayed for His elect only (John 17:9). When He prayed as Mediator, His Father always heard Him and answered Him (John 11:41).

This, then, is the obedience of Christ — the first thing proposed for consideration. The next thing is the bearing this obedience has on the grace of which we speak, in which we hold communion with Him — namely, our free acceptance with God. What that bearing is must follow in its proper order.

Regarding His habitual righteousness, I will simply consider it under two headings.

First, given that we needed a Mediator who was both God and man in one person — as it could not be otherwise — it was necessarily the case that He would be holy in this way. Although the one primary necessary result of the union of the two natures is the subsistence of the human nature in the person of the Son of God, it was also necessary that the One so united should be completely holy. This has been addressed earlier.

Second, the relationship this righteousness of Christ bears to the grace we receive from Him is simply this: it made Him fit to do all that He had to do for us. This is the apostle's meaning in Hebrews 7:26: 'such a high priest was fitting for us' — it was necessary that He be such a person, so that He could do what He had to do. Two reasons support this.

First, without being fully endowed with habitual grace, He could never have actually fulfilled the righteousness required of Him. It was through that habitual grace that He was able to do ev-

erything He did. This is why He Himself points to the presence of the Spirit with Him as the foundation of His going forth to His work (Isaiah 61:1).

Second, without habitual righteousness He could not have been a complete and perfect sacrifice. But having it, even if He had never rendered any extended active obedience to the law — had He suffered immediately after His incarnation as Adam sinned immediately after his creation — He would have been a fitting sacrifice and offering. Therefore His continuing obedience clearly has another purpose beyond qualifying Him as an offering.

As for Christ's obedience to the law of mediation, where it does not coincide with His passive obedience — it was what was required for the carrying out of His office. It is not imputed to us as if we had done it ourselves, though the fruits of it are. It is in the nature of His intercession — through which He provides the good things we need, at least in a way that supports His offering and intercession.

Regarding His actual fulfilling of the law — His doing all things required of us — there is some debate, and three different positions have been held.

First, that this active obedience of Christ has no further bearing on our justification and acceptance with God beyond being preparatory to His blood-shedding and sacrifice — which alone is the cause of our justification.

Second, that it may be considered in two ways. First, purely as obedience — in which sense it has no role other than described in the first position. Second, as it was carried out through suffering

and joined with suffering as part of His humiliation — in which sense it is part of what provides the basis for our justification.

Third, that this obedience of Christ, having been performed for us, is graciously reckoned by God to us — and on that basis we are accepted as righteous before Him. My intention is not to settle this debate in a controversial manner, but to provide an understanding of the whole that applies to the practice of godliness and to our comfort — which I will do in the observations that follow.

First, the obedience Christ rendered to the law in general is not limited to the specific law of the Mediator — even though He yielded it as Mediator. He became incarnate as Mediator (Hebrews 2:14; Galatians 4:4). Everything He subsequently did, He did as our Mediator. So 'as Mediator' can be taken in two senses: strictly, as relating solely to the law of the Mediator; or broadly, meaning that whatever Christ did as a man subject to any law, He did it as Mediator, because He did it as part of the duty that came with the office He undertook.

Second, whatever Christ did as Mediator, He did it for those whose Mediator He was — in whose place and for whose good He executed the office of Mediator before God. Romans 8:3-4: 'What the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us.' Because we were too weak to come to God and be freed from condemnation through the law, God sent Christ as Mediator to do and endure everything the law required of us, so that we might be accepted by God. Galatians 4:4

adds that He was sent forth in this way as one 'born under the Law' — subject to it, to render all the obedience it required. The Holy Spirit tells us that all of this was done for us (verse 5).

Third, the purpose of Christ's active obedience cannot be assigned merely to fitting Him for death and sacrifice. He answered all the types and was completely suited to be made an offering for sin by His union and habitual grace alone. Therefore, if the obedience Christ performed is not credited to us and done on our account, there is no adequate explanation for why He should have lived in the world for so long in perfect obedience to all of God's laws. Had He died sooner, there would still have been perfect innocence and holiness through His habitual grace, and infinite worth from the dignity of His person. Surely He did not yield that long course of obedience to every kind of law except for some great and specific purpose in relation to our salvation.

Fourth, if Christ's obedience had not been for us — in the sense we will see in a moment — it might simply have been required of Him in His life to obey the law of nature, which is the only law He could have been liable to as a man. An innocent man under a covenant of works, as He was, needs no other law — nor did God ever give any other law to such a person. (The law of creation is all that an innocent creature is liable to, together with whatever signs of that law God is pleased to add.) Even His submission to this law was voluntary — not only in a general sense, because He was born by His own choice and not by any natural process, but also because as Mediator — God and man in one person — He was not by the very institution of that law obligated to it, being in a sense exempted from and raised above it by the union of the two natures. When I say His submission was voluntary, I do not mean it was

purely at His discretion whether to obey it or not — given His undertaking to be Mediator, it was necessary. I mean that He willingly and freely submitted to it and thereby truly became subject to its commands. But beyond this, Jesus Christ rendered perfect obedience to all those laws that came upon us by reason of sin — including the ceremonial law, and even those specific institutions that symbolized the washing away of sin and repentance from sin, such as the baptism of John, which He had no personal need of. This therefore must have been for us.

Fifth, the obedience of Christ cannot be counted among His sufferings but is clearly distinct from them: in every proper sense, doing is one thing and suffering is another — they belong to different categories and cannot be the same thing.

Let us briefly gather what we have established from these considerations — and then I will indicate what flows from this first source of purchased grace and how it bears on it.

First, the obedience of Christ's life — as shown — means His willing submission to and complete, perfect fulfillment of every law of God to which any of God's people were obligated. It is true that nearly every act of Christ's obedience, from the blood of His circumcision to the blood of His cross, was accompanied by suffering — so that in that sense His whole life might be called a death. But looking at His willingness and obedience in it, this obedience is distinguished from His sufferings strictly so called, and is termed His active righteousness. This, then, is — as has been shown — that complete and absolutely perfect fulfilling of the whole law of God by Christ our Mediator: whereby He not only

committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth, but also most perfectly fulfilled all righteousness, as He declared it was fitting for Him to do.

Second, this obedience was performed by Christ not for Himself but for us — in our place. It is true that while He lived in the flesh, He was necessarily, perfectly, and completely holy. But the primary purpose of His fulfilling of holiness — which consists in His complete obedience throughout His life to every law of God — was no less for us than His suffering of death. The apostle tells us this in Galatians 4:4-5: 'God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem those who were under the Law.' He was both born of a woman and born under the Law — that is, subject and obedient to it, for us. The end both of the incarnation and of His obedience to the Law — which must be included in that phrase — was entirely to redeem us. In the two expressions 'born of a woman, born under the Law,' the apostle does not link incarnation and death alone while omitting the obedience of His life. And He was made under the Law in the same way that those were under the Law whom He came to redeem. Now we were under the Law not only as liable to its penalties, but as bound to all its duties. That this is what it means to be under the Law, the apostle confirms in Galatians 4:21: 'Tell me, you who want to be under the Law.' It was not the penalty of the Law they desired to be under, but its obedience. Remove the purpose and you destroy the means: if Christ was not incarnate or made under the Law for His own sake, then He did not render obedience for His own sake — it was all for us, for our benefit. Let us look ahead now and see what bearing this has on our acceptance with God.

3. This perfect and complete obedience of Christ to the Law is credited to us. Just as it is true that 'in the day you eat of it you shall die' — death is the penalty of sin, and so we cannot be freed from death except through the death of Christ (Hebrews 2:13-14) — so equally true is the other side: 'Do this and live.' Life cannot be obtained unless everything the Law requires is done. It remains true that 'if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments' (Matthew 19:17) — they must be kept either by us or by our surety. Nor is the objection some raise of any force — that if Christ rendered perfect obedience to the Law for us, then we are no longer bound to render obedience, in the same way that by His undergoing death as the Law's penalty we are freed from it. I answer: how did Christ undergo death — simply as something penal? And how then are we delivered from death — simply as something penal? And yet we must still die — indeed we must die as our last conflict with the effects of sin and as a passage to our Father. Very well then: Christ yielded perfect obedience to the Law — but how did He do it? Purely in keeping with its condition 'do this and live': He did it in the strength of the grace He had received; He did it as a means of obtaining life, to procure life by it according to the terms of the covenant. Are we then freed from this obedience? Yes — but in what sense? From doing it in our own strength; from doing it for the purpose of earning eternal life. It is futile for some to assert confidently that we must still work for life — that is equivalent to saying we are still under the old covenant, 'do this and live.' We are not freed from obedience as a manner of walking with God; but we are freed from it as a way of working our way to Him — more on this later.

'Through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men; through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous,' says the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:18-19). Through His obedience to the Law we are made righteous — it is credited to us as righteousness. It is false that only the passive obedience of Christ is intended here.

First, it is set in contrast to the disobedience of Adam, which was active. The righteousness is set against the transgression. The transgression was an active breaking of the Law — and the obedience set against it must be an active fulfilling of it. Furthermore, obedience taken by itself in its plain meaning denotes an action, or actions, conforming to the law. Christ came not to abolish the Law but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17) — that was the purpose of His coming, and He did it for us. He was given to us (Isaiah 9:6) and born for us (Luke 2:11). This was also within that will of the Father which He came to accomplish out of infinite love. 2. It is difficult to demonstrate that there is any such thing in proper speech as 'passive obedience' — obeying is doing, and passion or suffering cannot belong to it. I know it is commonly called passive obedience when someone obeys to the point of suffering — but strictly speaking, that is not correct.

Likewise, Philippians 3:9: 'and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.' The righteousness we receive is set in contrast to our own obedience to the Law — not as something of a different kind, but as something of the same kind, which excludes our obedience from the very end that Christ's obedience achieves. And

this is nothing other than Christ's obedience to the Law. He Himself thereby being made to us righteousness (1 Corinthians 1:30).

The result of Christ's death centers on reconciliation — that is, the destruction of the enmity between God and us, and the restoring of us to the condition of peace and friendship that Adam had before his fall (Romans 5:10). But is there nothing more to be done? Even though Adam faced no wrath before the fall, he still had to obey if he was to enjoy eternal life. Something more is therefore required for us beyond the ending of enmity and reconciliation, if after being reconciled we are to enjoy life. Being reconciled by His death, we are saved by the perfect obedience He rendered to the law of God throughout His life. Scripture makes distinct mention of reconciliation through the non-imputation of sin (Psalm 32:1; Luke 1:77; Romans 3:25; 2 Corinthians 5:19), and justification through the imputation of righteousness (Jeremiah 23:6; Romans 4:5; 1 Corinthians 1:30). Although these two are so closely connected that they are sometimes described in terms of each other, this does not prove they are identical — it proves their close union. And this latter, justification through imputed righteousness, we have through the life of Christ.

This is fully expressed in the symbolic picture of our justification before the Lord in Zechariah 3:3-5, where two things are shown to belong to our free acceptance before God.

1. The removal of the guilt of our sin — our filthy garments: this is accomplished by the death of Christ. The forgiveness of sin is its proper fruit. But something more is also required: a granting of righteousness, and with it a right to eternal life. This is pictured in Zechariah as fine, clean garments. The Holy Spirit expresses the

same idea in Isaiah 61:10, plainly calling it the garment of salvation and the robe of righteousness. This becomes ours only through the obedience of Christ, just as the other becomes ours through His death.

Objection: But if this is true, then we are as righteous as Christ Himself, since we are righteous with His righteousness.

Answer: First, there is a great difference, even if it were nothing more than this: this righteousness was inherent in Christ as properly His own, but it is only reckoned or imputed to us — freely given to us. We are made righteous with a righteousness that is not originally ours. Second, the truth is that Christ was not righteous with that righteousness for His own sake but for ours. So no comparison can properly be made. We can simply say this: we are righteous with His righteousness, which He accomplished for us, and that completely.

This, then, is the source of the purchased grace we are speaking of: the obedience of Christ. And this is how it applies to our acceptance with God. The guilt of sin and our liability to punishment on that account is removed and taken away by the death of Christ, as will be further explained. And since beyond the removal of sin we also need a complete righteousness on the basis of which we may be accepted by God, this obedience of Christ is, through the free grace of God, credited to us for that very purpose.

This is all I will press on this point for now. The view that only the passive righteousness of Christ is imputed to us in the non-imputation of sin, and that on the condition of our faith and new obedience — thereby elevating these into the place of the righteous-

ness of Christ — is a position I have no acquaintance with in my communion with the Lord Jesus. What may be argued on either side of this question must be considered elsewhere.

The second source of our communion with Christ in purchased grace is His death and sacrifice. He lived for us; He died for us. He was ours in all He did and in all He suffered.

I will be briefer in treating this, since I have dealt extensively with all its aspects elsewhere for another purpose.

The death of Christ, as a source of the purchased grace in which we hold communion with Him, is presented in Scripture under three aspects.

1. As a price. 2. As a sacrifice. 3. As a punishment.

In the first regard its proper effect is redemption; in the second, reconciliation or atonement; in the third, satisfaction. These are the great components of the purchased grace through which we first hold communion with Christ.

1. It is a price: "You were bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 6:20), "not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ" (1 Peter 1:17-18). His blood fulfills the role that payment serves in other transactions. He came to give His life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28), a ransom for all (1 Timothy 2:6). I have explained the proper force of this language in Scripture elsewhere.

The proper result of the death of Christ as a price or ransom is, as I said, redemption. Redemption is the deliverance of someone from bondage or captivity, along with all its accompanying miseries, through a price or ransom paid by the redeemer to the one who holds the captive.

1. In general, it is a deliverance. Christ is therefore called the Deliverer (Romans 11:26), giving Himself to deliver us (Galatians 1:4). He is Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come (1 Thessalonians 1:10).

2. It is the deliverance of someone from bondage or captivity. Without Him, we are all prisoners and captives: bound in prison (Isaiah 61:1), sitting in darkness in the prison house (Isaiah 42:7; Isaiah 49:9), prisoners in a waterless pit (Zechariah 9:11), captives of the mighty and plunder of the terrible (Isaiah 49:25), under a captivity that must itself be led captive (Psalm 68:18). This bondage holds us under the fear of death (Hebrews 2:14).

3. The one who committed us to this prison and bondage is God Himself. To Him we owe our debts (Matthew 6:12; Matthew 18:27-29); against Him are our offenses (Psalm 51:4). He is the judge and lawgiver (James 4:12); to sin is to rebel against Him. He has shut up all people under disobedience (Romans 11:32). He will cast both body and soul of the unrepentant into hell (Matthew 10:28). People are liable to His wrath (John 3:36) and lie under it by the sentence of the law, which is their prison.

4. The miseries that accompany this condition are beyond counting. Bondage to Satan, sin, and the world sums them up. From all of this we are delivered by the death of Christ as a price or ransom. "He has rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:13-14). He redeems us from all lawlessness (Titus 2:14), from our empty way of life (1 Peter 1:18-19) — from both the guilt and the power of our sin — purchasing for Himself a people who are His own, zealous

for good works (Titus 2:14). He died for the redemption of transgressions (Hebrews 9:15), and redeemed us also from the bondage of the world (Galatians 4:5).

4. And all this is accomplished by the payment of the price into the hand of God, by whose supreme authority we were held captive under the sentence of the law. The debt is owed to the great master (Matthew 18:23-24). The penalty — His curse and wrath — is what we are delivered from through it (Revelation 2:5).

The Holy Spirit frequently speaks of this: "Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness for the remission of sins" (Romans 3:24-25); likewise 1 Corinthians 6:20; 1 Peter 1:18; Matthew 20:28; 1 Timothy 2:6; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:13; and Galatians 3:13. This is the first aspect of the death of Christ as it bears on the procurement of the grace in which we hold communion with Him.

Second, it was also a sacrifice. A body was prepared for Him (Hebrews 10:5) in which He would accomplish what the symbolic offerings and burnt sacrifices of the law had foreshadowed. That body He offered (Hebrews 10:10) — that is, His whole human nature, since His soul was also made an offering for sin (Isaiah 53:10). This is why He is said to offer Himself (Ephesians 5:2; Hebrews 1:3; Hebrews 9:24). He gave Himself as a sacrifice to God, a fragrant offering. He did this willingly, as was fitting for one who would be the sacrifice. The law of this obedience was written in His heart (Psalm 40:8) — meaning He had a readiness, willingness, and desire for it.

The purpose of sacrifices such as His — which were bloody and for sin (Romans 4:3; Hebrews 2:17) — was atonement and reconciliation. This is consistently attributed to them: that they were to make atonement, in a manner suited to their nature. This is the aim of the death of Christ as a sacrifice: atonement and reconciliation with God. Sin had broken the friendship between God and us (Isaiah 63:10). His wrath was on us (John 3:36), and we are by nature liable to it (Ephesians 2:3). This is removed by the death of Christ as sacrifice (Daniel 9:24). "While we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son" (Romans 5:10), and through this we receive the atonement (verse 11). "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them" (2 Corinthians 5:19-21). So also Ephesians 2:12-16 and many other passages. This is the second aspect of the death of Christ, which I only mention here since I have dealt with it at length elsewhere.

Third, it was also a punishment — a punishment in our place. "He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him" (Isaiah 53:5). God caused all our iniquities — that is, the punishment due for them — to fall on Him (verse 6). He bore the sins of many (verse 12). "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross" (1 Peter 2:24). "He who knew no sin was made sin on our behalf" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Bearing punishment directly tends toward giving satisfaction to the one who was offended and who inflicted the punishment. Justice can require no more than a proportional punishment suited to the offense. This punishment was inflicted on our dear Lord Jesus when He voluntarily took our place and undertook to

be our Mediator. His substitution of Himself in our place, having been accepted by the righteous Judge, properly results in satisfaction.

This is the threefold aspect of the death of Christ as the chief source and fountain of the grace in which we have communion with Him. This, then, is the second source of purchased grace that we must keep before our eyes if we are to hold communion with Christ in it — His death and blood-shedding under this threefold description: a price, an offering, and a punishment.

But third, the Lord Christ goes even further. He does not leave us there. He died for our sins and rose again for our justification. He rose to carry on the complete work of purchased grace — that is, through His intercession, which is the third source of it. "He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25).

The intercession of Christ, in terms of its bearing on purchased grace, is considered in two ways.

First, as a continuation and carrying forward of His sacrifice, to bring about all its fruits and effects for us. This is called His "appearing in the presence of God for us" (Hebrews 9:24). Just as the high priest, having offered the great sacrifice for the atonement of sin, carried the blood into the Most Holy Place — where God's presence was represented — to complete the atonement he had made for himself and the people, so the Lord Christ, having offered Himself as a fragrant sacrifice to God and being sprinkled with His own blood, appears in God's presence to present before Him the covenant commitment: the redemption of sinners through His

blood, and the release of all the blessings purchased by it. His appearing there puts in His claim for these things on our behalf, and this appearance bears on purchased grace insofar as He thereby presents that claim.

Second, He procures the Holy Spirit for us, to effectively bestow all this purchased grace on us. That He would do this, and does do it for us, He has promised in John 14:16. This is purchased grace with respect to its source and fountain. I will not speak further about it here, since I must address it at length in the discussion of our communion with the Holy Spirit.

Part 2, Chapter 7: General Ways of the Saints Acting in Communion with the Holy Spirit

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The nature of purchased grace, considered under three headings. 1. Our acceptance with God — its two parts. The grace of sanctification and its several parts.

Having identified the fountain of purchased grace — in which believers hold communion with Christ — we can now consider the nature of that grace itself. As was said, it may be grouped under three headings:

1. The grace of acceptance with God. 2. The grace of sanctification from God. 3. The grace of privileges with and before God.

1. Acceptance with God. Apart from Christ, we are in a state of estrangement from God — accepted neither in our persons nor in our service. Sin creates a separation between God and us, and it is not my purpose here to trace out all that condition entails and involves. The first result of purchased grace is to restore us to a state of acceptance, and this is accomplished in two ways.

1. By removing what caused us to be rejected — the source of the enmity. 2. By giving us what makes us accepted. It was not enough merely to remove every cause of hostility so that we would no longer be under God's displeasure; we also had to be given what makes us the objects of His delight and pleasure — the very thing whose absence had kept us at a distance from God.

1. Purchased grace removes what caused our rejection. That is sin in its guilt, with everything that accompanies it. The first effect of purchased grace works to take away sin in its guilt, so that it no longer binds the soul to its wages, which is death.

How Christ accomplished this was shown at the close of the previous chapter. It is the fruit and effect of His death for us. The guilt of sin was the only cause of our separation and estrangement from God, as was stated. It exposed us to wrath, punishment, and the full displeasure of God. Because of it, we were held under the curse of the law and handed over to the power of Satan. That was the condition of our non-acceptance. By His death — bearing the curse, enduring the punishment due to us, and paying the ransom due for us — Christ delivers us from that condition. So Christ's death is the sole cause of our acceptance with God in this respect: every cause of hostility and rejection is removed by it. His sufferings are credited to us for exactly this purpose, for being made sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21), He is made righteousness for us (1 Corinthians 1:30).

But this alone does not complete our acceptance with God. The old hostility may be set aside without any new friendship being established. We may be no longer sinners and still not be righteous enough to have a right to the kingdom of heaven. Adam had no right to life simply because he was innocent — he still had to do

this and then live. He needed not only a negative righteousness — freedom from guilt — but also a positive righteousness: he had to fulfill all things.

So a second thing is required for our complete acceptance: not only the non-imputation of sin, but also the crediting of righteousness. This we receive in the obedience of Christ's life. This too was shown in the previous chapter. The obedience of Christ's life was offered on our behalf, is credited to us, and is our righteousness before God. By His obedience we are made righteous (Romans 5:19). The place of the obedience of faith in all this will be explained later.

These two things together complete our grace of acceptance. With sin removed and righteousness credited, we have peace with God and are continually accepted before Him. There is nothing left to charge us with. What once stood against us has been taken out of the way by Christ and nailed to His cross — legally and publicly canceled, so that it can never again be introduced as evidence against us. What court among men would accept evidence that has already been publicly canceled and put on display for all to see? That is what Christ has done with what was against us. And not only that — He also clothes us with what earns us God's favor. He makes us beautiful through His own beauty; He gives us white garments in which to stand before the Lord. This is the first part of purchased grace in which believers hold communion with Jesus Christ. It consists in the forgiveness of sins and the crediting of righteousness — arising from Christ's death as a ransom, a sacrifice, and a punishment, and from Christ's life spent in perfect obedience to the law. It is the great product of the Father's righteous-

ness, wisdom, love, and grace; the great and breathtaking fruit of the Son's love and condescension; the great disclosure of the Holy Spirit in revealing the mystery of the gospel.

The second is the grace of sanctification. Christ does not only make His people accepted — He also makes them acceptable. He does not only purchase love for His saints — He also makes them lovely. He came not by blood only, but by water and blood. He not only justifies His saints from the guilt of sin but also sanctifies and cleanses them from its pollution. The first comes from His life and death as a sacrifice of propitiation; the second comes from His death as a purchase and His life as an example (Hebrews 9:14; Ephesians 5:26-27). Two things stand out in this aspect of purchased grace: 1. The removal of defilement; 2. The giving of purity through actual grace.

On the first point, it is also threefold. 1. The habitual cleansing of our nature. We are by nature unclean and defiled — habitually so. 'Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?' (Job 14:4). 'That which is born of the flesh is flesh' (John 3:6). We are born in the pollution of our nature (Ezekiel 16) — completely defiled and corrupted. The grace of sanctification purchased by the blood of Christ removes this defilement of our nature. 'Such were some of you, but you were washed, but you were sanctified' (1 Corinthians 6:11). Likewise, Titus 3:3-5: He saved us through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit. How fully this original, habitual pollution is removed need not be debated here. What is certain is that the soul is made beautiful and lovely in the sight of God. Though the sin that defiles remains, its habitual defilement is taken away. But developing this further is not my aim here.

2. Taking away the pollution of all our actual sins. There is a defilement that accompanies every actual sin. 'You would plunge me into the pit, and my own clothes would abhor me' (Job 9:31). A stain, a spot, rust, a wrinkle, filth, and blood cling to every sin. But the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7). Beyond purging the defilement of our nature (Titus 2:14), He also removes the defilement of our persons caused by actual failures. By one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. By Himself He purged our sins before sitting down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Hebrews 1:3).

3. Even in our best duties there is defilement (Isaiah 64:6). Self, unbelief, and mere outward form creep into everything we do. We may well be ashamed of our finest performances. God has promised that the good works of His saints will follow them — but truly, if those works were measured by the strict rule as they come from us and weighed in the balances of the sanctuary, it might be best that they were buried forever. Yet the Lord Christ, as our great High Priest, first bears the iniquity — the guilt and the offense that in strict justice attaches to them (Exodus 28:37-38) — and then He washes away all their filth and impurity. He is like a refiner's fire, purging both the sons of Levi and their offerings — and adding fragrant incense to them so they may be accepted. Whatever in our works comes from the Spirit, from His own grace, that remains; whatever comes from self, the flesh, or unbelief — that is hay and stubble — He burns away, consumes, and takes away. So the saints' good works will meet them one day with a changed appearance that they will barely recognize. What seemed black, de-

formed, and defiled will appear beautiful and glorious. They will not be ashamed of them but will rejoice to see them following them.

All this cleansing of our nature, our persons, and our duties has its entire foundation in the death of Christ. This is why our washing and purifying, our cleansing and purging, is attributed to His blood and its sprinkling. The work is accomplished in its merit by the shedding of Christ's blood, and applied effectively by its sprinkling. The sprinkling of Christ's blood comes through the communication of the Holy Spirit, whom Christ promises to us as something He purchased on our behalf. The Spirit is the pure water with which we are sprinkled from all our sins — the Spirit of judgment and burning who takes away the filth and blood of the daughters of Zion. This is the first aspect of the grace of sanctification, which will be explored more fully later.

2. The second aspect is the bestowing of purity through actual grace. The blood of Christ in this purchased grace does not only remove defilement — it also grants purity. This too comes in a threefold progression.

1. It gives the Spirit of holiness to dwell in us. Christ is made our sanctification (1 Corinthians 1:30) by securing for us the Spirit of sanctification. Our renewal is the work of the Holy Spirit, who is poured out on us through Christ alone (Titus 3:6). The apostle emphasizes this especially in Romans 8: the primary and chief gift of sanctification we receive from Christ is the indwelling of the Spirit, and our following of His guidance. But everything that concerns the Spirit in any way must be reserved for what I have to say about our communion with Him.

2. He gives us habitual grace — a principle of grace set in opposition to the principle of sinful desire that is in us by nature. This is the grace that dwells in us and makes its home with us. It receives various names depending on which faculty of the soul it operates in or which object it is directed toward — but in reality it is a single new principle of life. In the understanding it is light; in the will it is obedience; in the affections it is love; in all of them together it is faith. It is also distinguished by its particular operations: when it moves the soul to rest on Christ, it is faith; when to delight in Him, it is love — yet it is always one and the same habit of grace. This is the second thing.

3. There is also actual influence for the carrying out of every spiritual duty. Even after believers possess both of the former gifts, Christ tells them that apart from Him they can do nothing (John 15:5). They remain in continual dependence on Him for fresh supplies of grace. They cannot live and operate indefinitely on what they already have — for every new act they need new grace. He must work in them both to will and to work according to His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13). These three things, briefly named, constitute the purchased grace of sanctification — as it pertains to the giving of purity and cleanness — in which we hold communion with Christ.

Third, this purchased grace also includes privileges to stand before God. These are of two kinds: 1. Primary. 2. Consequential. The primary privilege is adoption — the Spirit of adoption. The consequential privileges are all the blessings of the gospel that believers alone have a right to. But I will discuss this when I come to the final aspect of our communion with the Holy Spirit.

These are the things in which we hold communion with Christ regarding purchased grace in this life. Bring them to their perfection, and you have what we call everlasting glory: perfect acceptance, perfect holiness, perfect adoption and the inheritance of sons — that is glory.

Our next step is to what I am chiefly concerned with: the manner in which we hold communion with Christ in these things — and in the order already laid out.

1. How we hold communion with Him in the obedience of His life and the merit of His death, as it concerns our acceptance with God the Father.

2. How we hold communion with Christ in His blood, as it concerns the Spirit of sanctification, the habits of grace, and the acts of grace.

3. How we hold communion with Him regarding the privileges we enjoy. These will be treated in the chapters that follow.

Part 2, Chapter 8: How Saints Hold Communion with Christ in Acceptation

This chapter concerns how saints hold communion with Christ in their acceptance before God. It covers what is required on Christ's part — His intention and its declaration. It sets forth the sum of our acceptance with God and what is required on the part of believers. Several objections are raised and answered: why the elect are not accepted immediately upon Christ's undertaking and death; in what sense they are accepted; and how Christ became a public or representative person. The way our acceptance with God works on that basis is considered, along with a second objection. The necessity of our obedience is established from Ephesians 2:8-10, with its grounds, causes, and ends explained, along with its proper place in the new covenant. Finally, how saints in particular hold communion with Christ in this purchased grace is set forth: they approve of His righteousness and reject their own, and the exchange of sin and righteousness between Christ and believers is explained.

Communion with Christ in purchased grace — specifically our acceptance with God, which flows from the obedience of His life and the power of His death — is the first thing we examine. We now seek to understand what is required on Christ's part and what is required on ours, since both His activity and ours are necessary for genuine fellowship and communion.

On Christ's part, only two things are required. First, that what He did, He did not for Himself but for us. Second, that what He suffered, He suffered not for Himself but for us. That is, His intention — from eternity and throughout His time on earth — was that everything He did and suffered was for us and our benefit as to our acceptance with God. He continues to make use of what He did and suffered for that same purpose. This is abundantly clear.

What He did, He did for us and not for Himself. He was made under the law so that we might receive the adoption of sons (Galatians 4:4-5). He was made under the law — that is, placed under its demands and commands — but why? Not for Himself, but to redeem us. This is the aim of everything He did, of all His obedience. He declared this very intention in John 17:19: 'For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.' He sanctified Himself — meaning He dedicated and set Himself apart for all the work He had to do. He did not come to do His own will; He came to save the lost, to serve rather than to be served, and to give His life as a ransom. This was His testimony throughout His earthly life. From eternity He had thoughts of what He would do for us and delighted in them. When He came to be baptized, John said, 'I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?' (Matthew 3:14-15). But Christ replied, 'Permit it

at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness' — meaning He did it for those who have no righteousness at all, though they stand obligated to all of it.

In what He suffered, this is even clearer. Daniel 9:26: the Messiah will be cut off, but not for Himself. The apostle draws this as the key contrast between Christ and the Jewish high priests — when they made their solemn offerings, they first offered for themselves and then for the people. But Jesus Christ offered only for others. He had no sin and could make no sacrifice for sin He did not have; He sacrificed only for others. He tasted death for everyone (Hebrews 2:9). He gave His life a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28). The iniquity of us all was laid on Him (Isaiah 53:6). He bore our sins in His body on the cross (1 Peter 2:24). He loved His church and gave Himself for it (Ephesians 5:26; Galatians 2:20; Romans 4:25). This is abundantly clear: Christ in His suffering and sacrifice had His intention fixed entirely on the good of His elect and their acceptance with God — suffering for us, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.

To complete this communion on Christ's part, what He has done must be accompanied by the gospel's offer of the complete righteousness and acceptance with God that come from His perfect obedience and suffering. These offers come in two forms.

First, declaratory — through the conditional promises of the gospel. John 7:37; Matthew 11:28: 'He who believes will be saved; come to Me and you will have life.' Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to all who believe (Romans 10:4). Declaratory offers are precious; there is great kindness in them, and if they are rejected, they become the smell of death to those who perish. But the Lord Christ knows that the outward letter, however faithfully pro-

claimed, will not enable any of His people to receive His righteousness in the way needed to make them truly partakers of it. Therefore, second, an arrangement is established whereby whoever receives this offer of acceptance with God — based on what He has done and suffered — will indeed be so accepted. But Christ knows the state and condition of His people in this world: this offer alone is not enough. If He does not effectively clothe them with it, everything falls short.

He sends them His Holy Spirit to give them life (John 6:63), to cause the dead to hear His voice (John 5), and to work in them everything needed to make them partakers of His righteousness and accepted with God. This is how Christ deals with His own. He lives and dies with the intention of working out and completing righteousness for them. His entire aim — in both His life and His death — was that they would come to perfect acceptance before God. Then He offers that righteousness to them, declares its value and preciousness to their souls, stirs them up to desire and treasure it, and finally effectively bestows it on them — reckoning it to them as their own, so that by it, for it, and with it they are perfectly accepted before His Father.

For our acceptance with God, two things are required.

First, satisfaction must be made for our disobedience — for everything we had done that damaged the justice and honor of God — and God must be reconciled toward us. This could only happen by enduring the penalty of the law. As I have shown, this was accomplished by the death of Christ. God made Him sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21) and a curse (Galatians 3:13). On that basis we receive our acquittal and release from the guilt of sin, from the sentence of the law, and from the wrath of God (Romans 8:33-34). We

are justified, acquitted, and freed from condemnation — because it was Christ who died. He bore our sins in His body on the cross (1 Peter 2:24).

Second, the righteousness of the law must be fulfilled and the obedience required of us must be performed. This is accomplished by the life of Christ (Romans 5:18-19). Corresponding to our condition, our acceptance with God has two parts.

First, our acquittal from the guilt of sin — so that our disobedience is not charged against us. This we have through the death of Christ. Our sins were imputed to Him and will not be imputed to us (2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 4:25; Isaiah 53:12).

Second, the imputation of righteousness — so that we may be counted perfectly righteous before God. This we have through the life of Christ. His righteousness in yielding obedience to the law is credited to us. And so our acceptance with God is complete. Discharged from the guilt of our disobedience by the death of Christ, and credited with the righteousness of Christ's life, we have friendship and peace with God. This is the grace of acceptance with God, in which we hold communion with Jesus Christ.

It remains for me to show how believers hold distinct communion with Christ in this grace of acceptance — and how they keep that sense alive day by day, since its comfort and life must be renewed continually. Without this, life becomes a kind of hell; no peace, no joy can be ours except what rises from this source. Whatever grounded assurance we have of our acceptance with God — that He is at peace with us — our supply of peace, comfort, joy, and even holiness itself is proportioned to that assurance.

Before I come specifically to the practical side of our communion with the Lord Jesus in this matter, I need to address two significant objections. One concerns the first part of our acceptance with God; the other concerns the second part.

Objection 1: If the elect receive their acquittal, reconciliation, and freedom through the death, blood, and cross of Christ, why are they not all actually acquitted at the moment of Christ's death — or at least at birth — rather than living for a long time in this world under God's wrath as unbelievers, under the sentence and condemning power of the law? Why are they not immediately freed as soon as the price is paid and reconciliation is made for them?

Objection 2: If the obedience of Christ's life is credited to us as our righteousness before God, why do we need to yield any obedience ourselves? Is all our praying, working, watching, fasting, giving — and all the fruit of holiness in purity of heart and usefulness of life — pointless and to no purpose? And who then would need to care about being holy, humble, righteous, gentle, self-controlled, patient, good, peaceable, or abounding in good works in the world?

I will briefly address these two objections, then continue with the main purpose of explaining our communion with Christ.

In answer to Objection 1: Jesus Christ, in undertaking the work of our reconciliation with God — for which purpose He came into the world — and in accomplishing it by His death, was constituted and treated as a public representative person, standing in the place of those whose reconciliation to God He secured. Thus He is the Mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5) — one who undertook before God on our behalf, as the following words confirm:

'He gave Himself a ransom for all.' He is also the Guarantor of the new covenant (Hebrews 7:22), acting on behalf of those with whom that covenant was made. Therefore He is said to be given as a covenant to the people (Isaiah 42:6) and as a leader (Isaiah 49:8). He was the second Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45-47), serving as the source of righteousness for His spiritual offspring in every way that the first Adam was the source of sin for his natural offspring (Romans 5:15-19).

His status as a public representative person arose chiefly from three things. First, in general, from the covenant He entered into with His Father for this purpose. The terms of this covenant are set out at length in Isaiah 53, summarized in Psalm 40:7-8 and Hebrews 10:8-10. Through this covenant, the Father became His God — a covenant expression (Psalm 89:26; Hebrews 1:5; Psalm 22:1; Psalm 40:8; Psalm 45:7). The Father also appointed Him to this work (Isaiah 42:1; Isaiah 61:1; Isaiah 49:9; Malachi 3:1; Zechariah 13:7; John 3:16; 1 Timothy 1:15). Thus the counsel of peace was established between them both — the Father and the Son (Zechariah 6:13). And the Son rejoiced from eternity in the thought of this undertaking (Proverbs 8:21-30).

Second, through the Father's sovereign choice, appointment, and plan — giving and entrusting the elect to Jesus Christ in this covenant to be redeemed and reconciled to Himself. 'Yours they were, and You gave them to Me' (John 17:6). They were God's by eternal designation and election, and He gave them to Christ to be redeemed. For this reason, even before their calling or believing, He calls them His sheep (John 10:15-16), laying down His life for

them as such. Thus we are said to be chosen in Christ (Ephesians 1:4) — appointed to receive all the fruits of God's love through Christ, and entrusted to His care for that purpose.

Third, through His undertaking to suffer what was owed by them and to do what was required of them, so that they might be delivered, reconciled, and accepted with God. He undertook to present to the Father — without loss or failure — all that He had received from the Father on their behalf (John 17:2, 12; John 6:37-39). This was like Jacob, who was held accountable for the livestock he had received from Laban (Genesis 31:39-40).

Fourth, being given to Him, and He having undertaken on their behalf to do and suffer everything required on their part, He received — on their behalf and for them — all the promises of every mercy, grace, blessing, and privilege they were to receive on account of His undertaking. On this basis, eternal life is said to have been promised by God before the ages began (Titus 1:2) — that is, promised to the Son of God for us, given His undertaking on our behalf. And grace is also said to have been given to us before time began (2 Timothy 1:9) — that is, in Christ, our appointed head, mediator, and representative.

Fifth, Christ being thus a public person — a mediator, guarantor, and representative of His church — was, through the merit of His undertaking and by solemn declaration upon its completion, fully acquitted, absolved, publicly declared, and freed from everything that had been charged against Him on behalf of the elect. As to all the merit and efficacy of His work, He was immediately acquitted upon His faithfulness in His original engagement — so that all the saints of the Old Testament were saved by His blood no less than we are. As to solemn declaration, He was publicly acquitted

when, the chains of death having been broken, He was declared to be the Son of God with power through His resurrection from the dead (Romans 1:4). God said to Him, 'You are My Son; today I have begotten You' (Psalm 2:7; Acts 13:33). Christ expressed His confidence in this acquittal in Isaiah 50:6-9. And He was justified (1 Timothy 3:16). What I mean by this acquittal of Christ as a public person is this: God had placed Him under the law in the place of those who were under it (Galatians 4:4), subject to the punishment due for sin — making Him sin (2 Corinthians 5:21) — and so gave justice and law and all the consequences of the curse power over Him (Isaiah 53:6). When He had undergone everything required of Him (Isaiah 53:12), God broke the power and pangs of death, accepted Him, and was pleased with Him in the completion of His work (John 17:3-6). He declared Him free from the obligation that had rested on Him (Acts 13) and gave Him the promise of all the good things He had sought and His soul had desired. All the promises of God made to Christ and their fulfillment rest on this — as do all the encouragements given Him to ask and claim the things originally promised to Him (Psalm 2:8), which He did accordingly (John 17). Here lies the certain and stable foundation of our acquittal and acceptance with God. Christ standing in our place, acting as our guarantor, was acquitted and absolved — publicly declared to have paid the entire debt He had taken on and to have made full satisfaction for all the wrong we had done. A general pardon was thereby sealed for all of us, to be received personally by each one in the appointed way.

Christ having been acquitted as a public person, it became right — by the terms of the covenant, agreement, and arrangement between Him and the Father — that those in whose place He stood

should receive and have bestowed on them all the fruits of His death in reconciliation with God (Romans 5:8-11). Just as Christ received the general acquittal on behalf of them all, each one of them individually would enjoy it. This is shown throughout Scripture in those expressions that describe the exchange God designed in this matter, as in 2 Corinthians 5:21, Galatians 3:13, and 1 Peter 2:21-24.

Seventh, being thus acquitted in the covenant of the mediator — from which they are said to be circumcised with Him, to die with Him, to be buried with Him, to rise with Him, and to sit with Him in heavenly places — and it being right that they should be personally acquitted in the covenant of grace, it was determined by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that the way of their actual personal deliverance from the sentence and curse of the law would unfold through a manner and ordering that would bring praise to the glorious grace of God (Ephesians 1:5-7). God's purpose is that we receive adoption as His children. The means is through Jesus Christ. The specific way it is brought about is through the redemption found in His blood. The end is the praise of His glorious grace.

Eighth, until the appointed time of their actual deliverance — fixed for each person in his own generation — arrives, they remain personally under the curse of the law and are therefore legally subject to the wrath of God, from which they will certainly be delivered. They are personally subject to the law and its curse, but not at all with its original purpose of executing that curse against them. Rather, it serves as a means appointed to bring them to know Christ and to be accepted with God on His account. When this purpose is fulfilled, that whole obligation ceases — having

been allowed to rest on them in a design of love, since without it they could not be brought to a participation in Christ, to the praise of the glorious grace of God.

Ninth, the purpose of the whole arrangement of grace is to glorify the entire Trinity, and the order fixed for this is to ascend to the Father's love through the work of the Spirit and the blood of the Son. The outflow of divine love to us begins with the Father, is carried forward by the Son, and is applied by the Spirit — the Father designing, the Son purchasing, the Spirit effectually working. That is their order. Our participation begins with the Spirit's work, which brings us into actual possession of the blood of the Son, through which we receive acceptance with the Father.

This, then, is the order by which we are brought to acceptance with the Father, for the glory of God through Christ.

First, so that the Spirit may be glorified, He is given to us to make us alive, convert us, and work faith in us (Romans 8:11; Ephesians 1:19-20), according to all the promises of the covenant (Isaiah 44:3-5; Ezekiel 19:11; Ezekiel 36:26).

Second, when this has been worked in us — for the glory of the Son — we are at that same moment actually brought into the benefits of Christ's blood, according to the terms of the covenant. Indeed, this very work of the Spirit is itself a fruit and part of what Christ purchased, but we are speaking of how we experience this — and the communication of the Spirit comes first in that experience.

Third, to the glory of the Father, we are accepted by Him — justified, freed from guilt, pardoned, and at peace with God (Romans 5:1). Through Christ we have access to the Father by one Spirit (Ephesians 2:18). And so the Father, the Son, and the Holy

Spirit are all glorified in our justification and acceptance with God: the Father in His free love, the Son in His complete purchase, and the Holy Spirit in His effective working.

Tenth, all of this — in every part of it — is no less fully secured for us, and no less freely given for Christ's sake and on His account, as part of His purchase and merit, than if all of us had been taken directly to heaven the moment He died. This particular path of our deliverance and freedom was chosen so that the whole Trinity would be glorified through it. This is a sufficient answer to the first objection. Though our reconciliation with God was fully and completely secured by the death of Christ, and all the means by which it is accomplished are complete, we are still brought into actual enjoyment of it through the way and order described — for the praise of the glorious grace of God.

The second objection is this: if the righteousness and obedience of Christ to the law is credited to us, why do we need to yield any obedience ourselves? I will answer this as briefly as I can in the following observations.

First, placing our gospel obedience on the right footing — so that it is neither elevated to a role, condition, or purpose God did not give it, nor stripped of its reason, cause, motivation, or necessity — is a matter of great importance. Some make our obedience and works of faith the ground or cause of our justification. Some make it the condition on which Christ's righteousness is credited to us. Some make it the qualifying mark of the person who is justified. On the other hand, some remove all necessity of obedience and turn the grace of God into an excuse for sin. It is not my pur-

pose here to debate these differences. I will only say this: for this and other reasons, rightly understanding the place of our obedience is vital to how we walk with God.

Second, we in no way assign the same place, role, and use to Christ's obedience credited to us and to our own obedience rendered to God. If we did, they would truly be contradictory. That is why those who claim our obedience is the condition or cause of our justification all end up denying that Christ's obedience is credited to us. The righteousness of Christ is credited to us as that on account of which we are accepted and counted righteous before God — and we truly are righteous, though not inherently. We are as genuinely righteous with Christ's obedience credited to us as Adam was or could have been with a complete righteousness of his own doing. As Romans 5:18 says: through His obedience we are made righteous — truly made so and truly accepted — just as through Adam's disobedience we were truly made transgressors and counted as such. This is what the apostle desires to be found in, in contrast to his own righteousness (Philippians 3:9). But our own obedience is not the righteousness on the basis of which we are accepted and justified before God — even though it is pleasing to God that we abound in it. The apostle makes this distinction clearly in Ephesians 2:8-10: 'For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.' 'For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.' We are saved — or justified, which is the apostle's topic — by grace through faith, which receives Jesus Christ and His obedience. Not by works, so that no one may boast. But which works does the apostle mean? The

works of believers, as the very next words make clear: 'for we are His workmanship' — we believers, with our obedience and our works. Yet why are works still needed? Because we are His workmanship — there is still a need.

The apostle suggests two things in these words.

First, a reason why we cannot be saved by works: because we do not perform them in our own strength, which would be required if we were to be saved or justified by them. But this is not the case, says the apostle — for we are the workmanship of God. All our works are produced in us by the full and effective grace we did nothing to deserve.

Second, an affirmation of the necessity of good works, despite the fact that we are not saved by them. That is, God has ordained that we shall walk in them — which is a sufficient basis for our obedience, whatever its specific role may be.

What, then, are the true and proper gospel grounds, reasons, uses, and motivations for our obedience — by which its necessity can be demonstrated and our souls stirred to abound and bear fruit in it? They are so numerous, reaching so deep into the mystery of the gospel and the arrangement of grace, and spreading throughout the whole revelation of God's will, that to address them fully would require far more space than is available here. I will give only brief headings of what could be developed at greater length.

First, our complete obedience and good works are absolutely necessary by the sovereign will and appointment of God — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In general: this is the will of God — our sanctification and holiness (1 Thessalonians 4:3). God wills that we be holy, that we be obedient, that we do His will as the angels do in heaven. The fairness, necessity, benefit, and advantage of this basis for our obedience could be developed at length. But even if there were nothing else, this would be sufficient on its own — if it is the will of God, it is our duty.

The Father has ordained and appointed it; it is the will of the Father (Ephesians 2:10, where the Father is spoken of personally and Christ is mentioned as Mediator).

The Son has ordained and appointed it as Mediator. 'You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain' (John 15:16).

The Holy Spirit also appoints and calls believers to works of obedience and holiness, and to bring holiness to others. Specifically, in Acts 13:2, He appoints and designates people to the great work of obedience in preaching the gospel — and when people sin, they sin against Him.

Second, our holiness and obedience — our works of righteousness — are one prominent and special end of the unique working of the Father, Son, and Spirit in exalting God's glory in our salvation: of the electing love of the Father, the purchasing love of the Son, and the active love of the Spirit.

It is a special end of the Father's electing love. He chose us so that we should be holy and blameless (Ephesians 1:4; see also Isaiah 4:3-4). His aim and design in choosing us was that we should be holy and blameless before Him in love. This He will accomplish and bring to completion in those who are His. He chose

us for salvation through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and belief of the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:12). The Father designed this as the first and immediate end of His electing love, and He presents that love as a motivation for holiness (1 John 4:8-10).

It is also an end of the exceeding love of the Son, to which there are countless testimonies. 'Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed, and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds' (Titus 2:14). This was His aim and design in giving Himself for us. 'Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless' (Ephesians 5:25-27). See also 2 Corinthians 5:15 and Romans 6:5.

It is the very work of the love of the Holy Spirit. His entire work upon us, in us, and for us consists in preparing us for obedience, enabling us to walk in it, and bringing forth its fruits in us. He does this in contrast to any righteousness of our own, either before it or made up by it (Titus 3:5). The fruit of the Spirit in us is well known (Galatians 5:22).

So we have a twofold foundation for the necessity of our obedience and personal holiness. God has appointed it and requires it. And it is a clear and immediate end of the distinct working of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in our salvation. If God's sovereignty over us is to be honored, if His love for us is to be heeded, if the whole work of the ever-blessed Trinity for us and in us means anything at all — our obedience is necessary.

Third, it is necessary in regard to its end — whether you consider God, ourselves, or the world.

The end of our obedience with regard to God is His glory and honor (Malachi 1:6). He will claim His honor from even the most stubborn rebel in the world, but all that we give Him flows from our obedience. Glorifying God through our obedience is everything we are or can be.

It brings glory to the Father. 'Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven' (Matthew 5:16). When we walk in the light of faith, glory rises to the Father; the fruits of His love, His grace, and His kindness are visible in us, and God is glorified through us.

The Son is glorified by our obedience as well. It is God's will that all people honor the Son just as they honor the Father (John 5:23) — and this happens through believing in Him (John 14:1) and obeying Him. Therefore in John 17:10 He says He is glorified in believers, and He prays for increased grace and unity for them so that He may be more fully glorified, and so that all may know that He was sent by God as Mediator.

The Spirit is also glorified by our obedience. He is grieved by our disobedience (Ephesians 4:30), and so His glory is expressed in our bearing fruit. He dwells in us as in His temple, which must not be defiled. Holiness belongs to His dwelling place forever.

If what has been said is not enough to prove the necessity of our obedience, then we must assume we are speaking with people who have no regard for the sovereignty, love, or glory of God — Father, Son, or Holy Spirit. Let people say what they will — even if

our obedience were entirely disregarded, which is impossible since God is not unrighteous to forget our labor of love — yet here is a more than sufficient foundation and reason to yield more obedience to God than we will ever manage to give in this life. I am speaking here only of the gospel grounds of obedience, not of the natural and moral grounds, which are binding on all of humanity.

Second, with regard to ourselves, the end of our obedience is threefold: honor, peace, and usefulness.

Honor: it is through holiness that we are made like God and His image is renewed in us. This was our honor at creation; it lifted us above all other creatures on earth — we were made in the image of God. We lost this through sin and became like the animals that perish. We are restored to this honor of conformity to God, of bearing His image, only through holiness. 'Be holy, for I am holy,' God says (1 Peter 1:16). 'Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect' (Matthew 5:48) — a likeness and conformity to Him. Here the image of God is renewed: 'put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth' (Ephesians 4:23-24). This image was once paired with power and dominion — it is still everything that is beautiful and precious in the world, and it makes a person honorable and treasured in the sight of God, of angels, and of other people.

Peace: through holiness we have communion with God, and peace is found only in that communion. The wicked are like a restless sea that cannot be still, and 'there is no peace for the wicked,' says God (Isaiah 48:22). There is no peace, rest, or quietness in distance, separation, or estrangement from God. He is the rest of our souls; in the light of His face there is life and peace. If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one an-

other (1 John 1:7), and our fellowship is truly with the Father and with the Son Jesus Christ (verse 3). The person who walks in the light of renewed obedience has communion with God, and in His presence is fullness of joy forever. Without it there is nothing but darkness, wandering, and confusion.

Usefulness: a person without holiness is good for nothing. Ephraim, says the prophet, is an empty vine that bears fruit only for itself. And what is such a vine good for? Nothing, says another prophet — you cannot even make a peg from it to hang a vessel on. A barren tree is good for nothing but to be cut down and burned. However much men seem useful in serving God's providence in their generation, the world and the church could do without them, and in themselves they are good for nothing. Only the holy person is a genuine blessing to others.

Third, with regard to others in the world, obedience serves many purposes. It silences and shames some of God's enemies, both in this life and at the judgment. In this life: 'keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame' (1 Peter 3:16). By living with a clear conscience, believers put false accusers to shame — the malice and hatred of God's ways that drove people to speak evil against His followers is overcome by the holiness and righteousness of the saints. Those accusers are convicted and put to shame like a thief caught in the act, and are driven to acknowledge that God is among believers and that they themselves are wicked (John 17:23). At the final judgment: the saints will judge the world. Their good works, their righteousness, and their holiness will be displayed before all, and the justice of God's judg-

ments against the wicked will be made plain. 'See,' says Christ, 'these are the ones I acknowledge — those you despised and rejected — and see the works that follow them' (Matthew 25:42-43).

Obedience also serves the conversion of others. 'Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation' (1 Peter 2:12; see also Matthew 5:16). Even revilers, persecutors, and slanderers have been won over by the consistent holy lives of believers, and when their day of visitation came, they glorified God because of it (1 Peter 3:1-2).

Obedience also benefits everyone — partly by keeping God's judgments from others, as ten righteous men would have preserved Sodom (Genesis 18:32-33) — and partly through the real good that believers bring to those around them in their generation. Holiness makes a person genuinely good, useful to all, and others continually eat of the fruit of the Spirit that he produces.

Fourth, obedience is necessary in view of the state and condition of justified persons — whether you consider their standing of acceptance before God or their condition of sanctification.

They have been accepted and welcomed into friendship with a holy God — a God whose eyes are too pure to look on evil, who hates every unclean thing. Is it not necessary that those who are admitted into His presence, who walk before Him and rest in His embrace, should be holy? Should they not diligently cleanse themselves from all defilement of body and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord (2 Corinthians 7:1)?

In regard to sanctification: we have a new nature within us (2 Corinthians 5:17). This new nature is fed, cared for, nourished, and kept alive by the fruit of holiness. Why has God given us new hearts and new natures? Is it so that we should starve them, smother this new life found in us, or hand it over to the old nature to be destroyed?

Fifth, obedience is necessary in view of the proper place of holiness in the new covenant, and that place is twofold.

First, holiness is the means to the end. God has appointed holiness as the path — the way — to the eternal life that, in its source and nature, is His gift through Jesus Christ. Yet because God has ordained our obedience as the means of obtaining it, eternal life is a reward, and God in giving it is a rewarder. Though holiness is neither the cause, the basis, nor the condition of our justification, it is still the path God has appointed for us to walk in on the way to salvation. Therefore the one who has hope of eternal life purifies himself as God is pure — and no one will ever reach that end who does not walk that path, for without holiness no one will see God.

Second, holiness is a testimony and pledge of adoption — a sign and evidence of grace, that is, of acceptance with God. Third, it is the whole expression of our thankfulness. Not one of all these reasons for the absolute necessity of our obedience, good works, and personal righteousness could be fully explained without a much longer treatment than I have given here. The person who, given all these reasons, does not see universal holiness and obedience as absolutely necessary — unless they also want to elevate it into the place of Christ's obedience and righteousness — let him remain as he is.

With these objections removed, and having set out at the beginning of this chapter what Christ does on His part for our fellowship with Him in this purchased grace of acceptance with God, it remains to show what is required and done on our part to complete it. This consists of the following particulars.

First, the saints wholeheartedly approve of this righteousness as the only one that is completely sufficient to make them acceptable before God. This approval rests on five things.

First, a clear and full conviction of the need for a righteousness to appear before God. This is always on their minds; throughout their lives they take it for granted. Many people spend their days in hardness and stubbornness, never once asking what their condition will be when they enter eternity. Others waste their time and their souls, sowing empty hopes and preparing to reap a harvest of wrath. But this lies at the foundation of all the saints' communion with Christ: a deep, settled, unshakable conviction of the absolute and unavoidable need for a righteousness to stand before God. The holiness of God's nature, the righteousness of His government, the severity of His law, and the terror of His wrath are always before them. They have all been convicted of sin and have seen themselves on the verge of sinking under the judgment it deserves. They have all cried out: what must we do to be saved? With what shall we appear before God? And they have all concluded that it is useless to comfort themselves with hopes of escaping as they are by nature. If God is holy and righteous, too pure to look on evil, they must have a righteousness to stand before Him. They know what people will cry on that day who now carry themselves as if they thought otherwise (Isaiah 53:15; Micah 7:6-7).

Second, they weigh their own righteousness in the balance and find it lacking. This happens in two ways.

First, in general and on the whole matter, as they first set themselves before God. When people are convinced of the need for a righteousness, they grab at anything that presents itself — like someone about to go under in deep water, clutching at whatever is nearest to keep from drowning, which sometimes turns out to be a rotten branch that sinks with them. So the Jews did (Romans 9:31-32) — they grabbed hold of the law, and it did not help them. The law set them on establishing a righteousness of their own; this kept them busy and hopeful, but it kept them from submitting to the righteousness of God. Many perish here, never getting one step closer to God all their days. The saints renounce this approach. They have no confidence in the flesh; they know that everything they can do, everything the law can do — which is weakened by the flesh — will not save them. Consider the judgment Paul makes of all a person's own righteousness in Philippians 3:8-10. The saints carry this conviction daily, filling their minds with the settled awareness that on the basis of what they have done, can do, or ever will do, they cannot be accepted by God or justified before Him. This keeps their souls humble and full of a sense of their own unworthiness all their days.

Second, in particular: they daily examine all their specific actions and find them lacking in any completeness that could be accepted by God on its own. Such a believer says: if I had nothing to commend me to God but this prayer, this duty, this victory over a temptation — in all of which I myself see so many failures and so much imperfection — could I stand before Him with any boldness? Shall I stitch together a garment of righteousness from my best du-

ties? It is all like a filthy cloth (Isaiah 64:6). These thoughts accompany them in all their duties, even in their best and most sincere performances. Lord, what am I even at my best? How little of what I do truly matches Your holiness? O spare me — even for the best thing I have ever done in my life. When a person who lives on convictions gets some freedom in prayer or some victory over sin, he congratulates himself like Micah who had gotten a Levite as his priest — surely now things will go well. But the one who truly has communion with Christ, when he is at his highest point in sanctification and holiness, is clearest in seeing his own inadequacy, and he pushes away every thought that rises to settle his peace in or upon those duties. He says to his soul: do these things seem significant to you? You are dealing with an infinitely righteous God who sees through and through all the vanity that you barely know is there. If He dealt with you according to your best works, you would perish.

Third, they approve, value, and rejoice in this righteousness for their acceptance — the righteousness the Lord Jesus has worked out and provided for them. When it is revealed to them, they embrace it with all their hearts and find rest in it. 'Surely in the Lord I have righteousness and strength' (Isaiah 45:24). This is their voice when the righteousness of God in Christ becomes known to them: here is true righteousness, here my soul finds rest. Like the merchant in the parable (Matthew 13:45-46) who finds the pearl of great price — I had been searching everywhere, looking this way and that for help, but it was far off. I wore myself out pursuing what was not bread. Here is what truly makes me rich forever. When the righteousness of Christ for acceptance with God is first revealed to a weary soul that has sought rest and found none, that

person is surprised and overwhelmed, scarcely able to contain themselves. Such a person always approves this righteousness in his heart on five grounds.

First, as full of infinite wisdom. 'Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God,' says the apostle, to those who believe (1 Corinthians 1:24). They see infinite wisdom in this way of their acceptance with God. 'In what darkness, in what confusion, in what entanglements was my poor soul,' such a person says. How unable was I to see through the clouds and difficulties that surrounded me. I looked inward and found nothing but sin, horror, fear, and trembling. I looked upward and saw nothing but wrath, curses, and judgment. I knew that God was holy and righteous and that nothing unclean could stand before Him. I knew that I was poor, vile, unclean, and sinful — and I had no idea how to bring those two facts together in peace. But in the righteousness of Christ, a world of wisdom opens up, scattering all difficulties and darkness, and revealing a reconciliation of everything. 'Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!' (Romans 11:33; Colossians 2:3).

Second, they approve of this righteousness as full of grace. They know that sin had shut off every path of grace toward them — and since God aims above all at the display of His grace, they were completely cut off from it. Now to have a complete righteousness provided, while grace overflows in abundance, delights the soul — to have God dealing with their person in pure grace, and dealing with their sin in pure justice. God assures us throughout Scripture that this righteousness is of grace. It is by grace and not at all of works (Romans 11:6), as the apostle sets out at length in Ephesians 2:7-9. It is from the riches of grace and kindness that this right-

eousness has been provided. It is of sheer grace that it is given to us; it is not at all of works. Though it is in itself a righteousness of works, yet to us it comes as pure grace. As Titus 3:4-7 says: 'When the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.' The source of this whole arrangement is kindness and love — that is, grace (verse 4). Negatively, the way it comes to us is not through righteous works we have done; positively, it comes through the communication of the Holy Spirit (verse 5). The means of securing it is Jesus Christ (verse 6); the work itself is by grace (verse 7). Here nearly every word that could express the exceeding richness of God's grace, kindness, mercy, and goodness is brought in — His generosity and willingness to give of Himself; His mercy and readiness to help those He loves; His compassion and tenderness toward those who suffer; and His free, undeserved pardoning love — all of them working together in this. In giving the Holy Spirit, He poured Him out richly, like water poured freely from a vessel without pause or holding back. The saints of God in their communion with Christ greatly rejoice in this before Him — that the way of their acceptance with God is a way of grace, kindness, and mercy — so that they boast not in themselves but in the Lord and His goodness, crying out: how great is Your goodness, how great is Your bounty!

Third, they approve and rejoice in this righteousness as a way of great peace and security for their souls. They remember what their condition was while they were trying to set up a righteousness of their own, refusing to submit to the righteousness of Christ — how miserably they were tossed about by constantly shifting thoughts. At times they had hope; at other times they were full of fear. Sometimes they thought they were in a good condition, and soon found themselves at the very edge of hell, their consciences torn by sin and terror. But now, being justified by faith, they have peace with God (Romans 5:1). Everything is quiet and at rest. Not only has that storm passed, but they have arrived at the haven they were seeking. They have a lasting peace with God. Hence that description of Christ to a weary soul in Isaiah 32:2: 'a man will be like a hiding place from the wind and a shelter from the storm, like streams of water in a dry country, like the shade of a huge rock in a parched land.' Wind and storm and thirst and weariness — none of it troubles the soul that is in Christ. He has a hiding place and a shelter, streams of water and the shade of a great rock for his security. This is the great mystery of faith in our acceptance with God through Christ: while a believer finds in himself more than enough to tear his heart apart and fill him with fear, terror, and restlessness every day of his life, yet through Christ he is at perfect peace with God (Isaiah 26:3; Psalm 4:6-8). Therefore the souls of believers greatly magnify Jesus Christ — that they can look into the face of God with boldness, confidence, peace, joy, and assurance; that they can call Him Father, rest in His love, and go about their lives in quietness and without fear. They remember the bitterness and grief they have known, the tears and trembling of their souls like a

leaf in the wind whenever they thought of God — and to be brought now to settledness and security fills them with deep gratitude.

Fourth, they wholeheartedly approve of this righteousness because it is a way that greatly exalts and honors the Lord Jesus, whom their souls love. Once brought into an acquaintance with Jesus Christ, their hearts desire nothing more than that He be honored and glorified in every way and have first place in all things. What could more fully advance and honor Him in their hearts than to know that He has been made by God their wisdom and righteousness (1 Corinthians 1:30)? Not that He contributes this or that part of their acceptance with God — He is all; He is the whole. In everything concerning their acceptance with God, He is everything.

First, Christ is honored by God the Father. 'He emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father' (Philippians 2:7-10). On account of His suffering, and as the result of it, He was honored and exalted by God to an indescribable eminence, dignity, and authority, as God had promised Him for this reason (Isaiah 53:11-12; Acts 2:36; Acts 5:30-31). Therefore it is said that after He had made purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Hebrews 1:3).

Second, He is honored on this account by all the angels in heaven — because of this great work of bringing sinners to God. They not only bow down and long to look into the mystery of the cross (1 Peter 1:12), but continually worship and praise Him for it. 'Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing." And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever"' (Revelation 5:11-14). The reason given for this glorious ascription of honor and glory to Jesus Christ by all of heaven is that He was the Lamb who was slain — it is because of the work of our redemption and our being brought to God. It is no small refreshment and joy to the souls of the saints to know that all the angels of God — the whole host of heaven, who never sinned — yet continually rejoice and ascribe praise and honor to the Lord Jesus for bringing them into peace and favor with God.

Third, He is honored by His saints throughout the world. And indeed if they do not honor Him, who should? If they do not honor the Son as they honor the Father, they would be the most unworthy of all people. Hear what they say: 'To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood — and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father — to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen' (Revelation 1:5-6). And again: 'The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell

down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth"' (Revelation 5:8-10). The great solemn worship of the Christian church consists in this ascription of honor and glory to the Lord Jesus. Therefore they love Him, honor Him, and delight in Him — as Paul did (Philippians 3:8) and as the bride does in Song of Solomon 5:9-11.

Fifth, they wholeheartedly approve of this righteousness — this way of acceptance — as one that brings glory to God. When they were struggling under the guilt of sin, what troubled their souls most was that their deliverance seemed to conflict with the glory and honor of the great God — with His justice, faithfulness, and truth, all of which stood against sin. They could not see how to escape ruin without those attributes being dishonored. But now, through the revelation of this righteousness from faith to faith (Romans 1:17), they clearly see that all the perfections of God are greatly glorified in the pardon, justification, and acceptance of poor sinners, as was shown earlier.

This is the first way the saints hold daily communion with the Lord Jesus in this purchased grace of acceptance with God. They consider, approve of, and rejoice in the way, the means, and the reality of it itself.

Second, they make an actual exchange with the Lord Jesus — their sins for His righteousness. This also has several parts.

First, they continually keep alive in their hearts a sense of the guilt and evil of sin, even when they enjoy a comforting assurance of their personal acceptance with God. A sense of pardon removes the horror and fear, but it does not remove a proper awareness of the guilt of sin. The daily exercise of God's saints is to consider the great offensiveness of sin — their own sin, the sin of their nature and their lives — to see themselves as vile on that account, to measure it against the terror of the Lord, and to judge themselves continually. 'My sin is ever before me,' says David. They keep sin before them not to terrify and paralyze their souls, but to keep a right sense of its evil alive in their hearts.

Second, they gather up in their minds the sins for which they have not yet made a particular reckoning with God in Christ — or if they have begun to, they have not resolved the matter fully or come to clear and peaceful terms. Nothing is more dangerous than for a person to be able to digest his convictions — to have sin stare him in the face and speak some words of terror to him, and then to push it aside through distraction or delay without coming to a full reckoning about his state before God. The saints do not do this. They gather their sins, weigh them by the law, and honestly consider their weight and what they deserve. And then —

Third, they make this exchange I am describing with Jesus Christ.

First, they seriously consider — and by faith overcome all objections to the contrary — that Jesus Christ, by the will and appointment of the Father, has truly undergone the punishment due to the very sins they now bring before Him. Isaiah 53:6; 2

Corinthians 5:21. He has as certainly and truly satisfied the justice of God for those sins as if the sinner himself had at that very moment been cast into hell.

Second, they listen to the voice of Christ calling them to come to Him with their burden. 'Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden' — come with your burdens. Come, poor soul, with your guilt of sin. What should you do with it? 'This is Mine,' says Christ. 'This is the agreement I made with My Father — that I would come and take your sins and carry them away. They were assigned to Me. Give Me your burden, give Me all your sins. You do not know what to do with them; I know exactly how to deal with them, so that God will be glorified and your soul will be set free.'

Third, they lay their sins down at the cross of Christ, placing them on His shoulders. This is faith's great and bold venture on the grace, faithfulness, and truth of God. To stand at the cross and say: He was wounded for my sins and crushed for my transgressions, and the punishment that brought me peace fell on Him. He has been made sin for me. Here I hand over my sins to the One who is able to bear them and to answer for them. He calls me to be willing for Him to take them on, and I gladly consent. This is every day's work. I do not know how any peace with God can be maintained without it. If it is the soul's task to receive Christ as having been made sin for us, we must receive Him as the One who takes our sins upon Himself. Not as though He dies again or suffers again — but as the faith of the saints of old made present and visible what had not yet occurred (Hebrews 11:1), so faith now makes present what was accomplished and completed many generations ago. This is what it means to know Christ crucified.

Fourth, having by faith given their sins to Christ and seen God laying them all on Him, they draw near and receive from Him the righteousness He has worked out for them. This fulfills everything the apostle says in 2 Corinthians 5:21: 'He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.' They see Him offering Himself and His righteousness to be their righteousness before God. They take it, receive it, and complete this blessed exchange of faith. Wrath, the curse, condemnation, death, sin with all its guilt — He took it all and takes it all away. With Him they leave everything of that nature that belongs to them, and from Him they receive love, life, righteousness, and peace.

Objection: surely this approach can never be acceptable to Jesus Christ. What? Are we to come to Him daily with our filth, our guilt, our sins? Will He not — must He not — tell us to keep them to ourselves? Are we always to be giving sins and receiving righteousness?

Answer: there is nothing that Jesus Christ is more delighted with than for His saints to always hold communion with Him in this giving and receiving.

First, this greatly honors Him and gives Him the glory that is rightly His. Many cry 'Lord, Lord' and speak His name, but honor Him not at all. They take His work out of His hands and attribute it to other things. Their repentance, their duties, will carry their sins — they do not say this, but that is how they act. Whatever exchange they make, if any, is with themselves. All their reckoning about sin stays within their own souls. The whole purpose of Christ's coming into the world was to bear our iniquities and lay down His life as a ransom for our sins. The cup He had to drink

was filled with our sins and the punishment they deserved. What greater dishonor, then, can be done to the Lord Jesus than to attribute this work to something else — to think we can get rid of our sins by any other way or means? Christ is truly honored when we go to Him with our sins by faith and say: Lord, this is Your work; this is what You came into the world for; this is what You undertook to do. You call for my burden, which is too heavy for me to carry. Take it, blessed Redeemer. You offer Your righteousness — that is my portion. Christ is honored, His glory as Mediator is acknowledged, when we walk with Him in this communion.

Second, this deeply endears the souls of the saints to Him and moves them to place a fitting value on Him, His love, His righteousness, and His grace. When they find it and live in it daily, they cannot help but do so. Who would not love Him? 'I have been with the Lord Jesus,' the poor soul may say. 'I have left my sins and my burden with Him, and He has given me His righteousness, with which I am going boldly to God.' I was dead and am alive, because He died for me. I was cursed and am blessed, because He was made a curse for me. I was troubled, but now have peace, because the punishment that brought me peace fell on Him. I did not know what to do or where to take my sorrow, but through Him I have received joy that is inexpressible and full of glory. If I do not love Him, delight in Him, obey Him, live for Him, and die for Him, I am worse than the devils in hell. Christ's great purpose in the world is to hold the highest place in the hearts of His people — to have there, as He has in Himself, first place in everything; not to be pushed around among competing things, but to be all and in all. And so God's saints are prepared to esteem Him when they engage in this communion with Him.

Objection: if this is so, why do we need to repent or change our ways? We can simply go to Christ by faith, make this exchange, and then sin so that grace may abound.

Answer: I pass no judgment on any person, but I must say this — I do not understand how someone who raises this objection calmly and in earnest, and not under the pressure of temptation or some momentary darkness, can have any true acquaintance with Jesus Christ. But this I am certain of: this communion in itself produces effects that are the exact opposite of those assumed in the objection.

As for repentance: I take it that what is meant here is gospel repentance. This communion does take away, prevent, and drive out a legal, fear-driven repentance full of dread, alarm, terror, self-preservation, and horror before God. But gospel repentance — which consists in godly sorrow for sin and its abandonment, flowing from faith, love, and a hatred of sin on account of the Father, Son, and Spirit — that kind of repentance cannot possibly be hindered by this communion. The very foundation of this communion is a deep, serious, daily consideration of sin — its guilt, its ugliness, and its wickedness — and of our own wretchedness on that account. A sense of this must be kept alive in the heart of anyone who would enjoy this communion with Christ — without it, Christ has no value or worth to him. Is it possible for a person to daily fill his heart with thoughts of the vileness of sin in every way — by the law, by love, by grace, by the gospel, by life and death — and be filled with self-disgust on that account, and yet remain a stranger to godly sorrow? Here is the mistake: the very thing they suppose this communion destroys is what it is actually built on.

As for obedience: if Christ is glorified and honored by taking our sins, does it follow that the more we bring to Him, the more He will be glorified? One would not suppose anyone would raise this objection, but the Holy Spirit — who knows what is in the human heart — has raised it on their behalf, in their own name (Romans 6:1-3). The very same doctrine I have set out, when delivered in Romans 5:18-20, faces the same objection. For those who think it has any force, I refer them to the apostle's answer in that chapter, and also to what was already said about the necessity of our obedience even in light of the imputed righteousness of Christ.

But you may ask: how should we actually go about practicing this? What is the path to walk in?

Faith exercises itself in this communion especially in three ways.

First, through meditation. The heart goes over in its thoughts the matters discussed above — sometimes separately, sometimes together, sometimes dwelling mainly on one thing and sometimes on another. At one time the soul may be most occupied with its own sinfulness, filling itself with shame and self-disgust on that account. At another time it is filled with thoughts of the righteousness of Christ and with inexpressible, glorious joy. Especially at critical moments — when weighed down and burdened by carelessness or the eruption of some sin — the soul then goes through the whole work and brings things to a resolution with God, and takes up the peace that Christ has secured for it.

Second, by turning to and meditating on the promises of the gospel, which present all these things: the excellence, fullness, and suitability of Christ's righteousness; the rejection of all false right-

eousness; and the exchange accomplished in the love of God, which was described earlier.

Third, through prayer — it is in prayer that their souls carry out this work day by day. This is the communion all the saints hold with the Lord Jesus in their acceptance with God — which was the first thing proposed for consideration.

Part 2, Chapter 9: Communion with Christ in Holiness

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This chapter concerns communion with Christ in holiness. The several acts attributed to the Lord Christ in this regard are: 1. His intercession. 2. The sending of the Spirit. 3. The bestowing of habitual grace — what this is and what it consists of. This grace was purchased by Christ and is bestowed by Him. Also: actual grace. How the saints hold communion with Christ in these things, shown in several particulars.

We now come to consider our communion with the Lord Jesus in the grace of sanctification and purification, the various distinctions and aspects of which were discussed earlier. The same method as before must be followed, and we must show: first, what the Lord Christ does in this communion; and second, what is the duty of the saints in it. In brief: how we hold communion with Christ in holiness, just as we do in righteousness.

Several acts are attributed to the Lord Jesus in this regard:

First, His interceding with the Father — on the basis of His sacrifice — that the Holy Spirit would be given to His people. I begin here because I have already spoken of Christ's sacrifice itself. Otherwise everything ultimately flows back to that source and

foundation. It is the ground of every spiritual blessing, as will be shown further. The Spirit, as He comes to us as a Spirit of grace, holiness, and comfort, is part of what Christ purchased. He is in substance the great promise of the new covenant (Ezekiel 11:19): 'I will put a new spirit within you'; see also Ezekiel 36:27 and Jeremiah 32:39-40, and other passages to be addressed later. Christ is the Mediator and Guarantor of this new covenant (Hebrews 7:22): 'Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant.' A guarantee is needed for a covenant, not merely a will. He is the undertaker on behalf of both God and man — on man's behalf to render satisfaction; on God's behalf to deliver all the grace promised. As Hebrews 9:15 says: 'He is the Mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.' He both paid for sin and secured the promise. He obtained all the love and kindness that flow from the covenant, being Himself its original promise (Genesis 3:15). The whole was arranged and established (2 Samuel 23:5) so that all its blessings would flow from Him, depend on Him, and be secured by Him — that He might in all things have first place (Colossians 1:19), in accordance with the agreement made with Him (Isaiah 53:12). They are all purchased by His blood — and therefore the Spirit also, as promised in that covenant (2 Corinthians 1:20). All the fruit and purchase of His death is distributed from the Father through His intercession. He promises His disciples in John 14:16-18 that He will continue pursuing their good and intercede with the Father for the Spirit as the fruit of His purchase. He tells them He will not pray the Father to give them His love toward them, be-

cause the Father's eternal love is not the fruit but the source of His purchase; but the Spirit, who is a fruit of that purchase — that, He says, He will pray the Father for. And whatever Christ asks the Father as Mediator to bestow on us is part of His purchase, having been promised to Him upon His undertaking to do the Father's will. This is the first thing to consider regarding the Lord Jesus in the communication of the Spirit of sanctification and purification: He intercedes with His Father that the Spirit would be given to us as a fruit of His death and blood-shedding on our behalf. This is how the Spirit of holiness, as given to us, is connected to the mediation of Christ. Christ is the great foundation of the covenant of grace — eternally appointed and freely given to purchase all its blessings. Having received the promise of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33), He pours Him out on His own. Faith considers this, fixes on it, and dwells on it. Second, His prayer being granted — as the Father always hears Him — He actually sends His Spirit into the hearts of His saints, to dwell in them in His stead and to do in them and for them all that He Himself has to do. This too is what faith is to fix on in the Lord Christ — not only with regard to the initial giving of the Holy Spirit to our hearts, but also with regard to the ongoing supply of the Spirit, drawing out and stirring up more powerful operations of that indwelling Spirit. Thus, though in John 14:16 He says the Father will give them the Comforter — because the original and sovereign dispensation is in the Father's hands, and it is the Father who makes the Spirit available through Christ's intercession — yet since the Spirit is not given to us directly but (as it were) placed in Christ's hands for us, He also says that He Himself sends the Spirit (John 15:26): 'I will send the Helper to you from the Father.' He receives the Spirit from His

Father and actually sends Him to His saints. As He says in John 16:7, 'I will send Him'; and in verses 14-15 He shows how: the Spirit will take what belongs to Christ — the fruit of His life and death for holiness, properly His as Mediator — and give it to them. More will be said about this later. This then is the second thing the Lord Christ does, which faith is to fix on in Him: He sends His Holy Spirit into our hearts, who is the effective cause of all holiness and sanctification, giving life, light, and purity to the souls of His saints. How our union with Him, with all its dependent blessings, flows from this communication of the Spirit — who comes to abide and dwell in us — I have explained in detail elsewhere, where this whole subject is treated more fully. This is to be considered in Christ by faith in regard to the Spirit Himself.

There is also what we call habitual grace — the fruit of the Spirit, what is born of the Spirit (John 3:6). What the Holy Spirit produces in the heart or soul of a regenerate person — that which makes him regenerate — is spirit, in contrast to the flesh, or the in-born hostility toward God that is in us by nature. It is faith, love, joy, hope, and the rest of the gospel graces in their root or common principle. Two things must be observed about this.

First, though many individual graces are mentioned, they are not separate habits or qualities residing in us, nor are they distinct principles corresponding to each grace. There is only one habit or spiritual principle, expressing itself in various operations according to the different objects it moves toward. This is their common principle. The individual graces are named and distinguished according to their actual exercise in relation to their objects, rather than according to any distinct inherent qualities — for it is one root producing many branches.

Second, by this habit of grace I mean this: a new gracious spiritual life — a principle created and given to the soul — by which it is changed in all its faculties and affections, made fit and able to move toward every divine object proposed to it according to the will of God. For example: the mind can now perceive spiritual things in a spiritual way — in this, the grace is light and understanding. The whole soul embraces Christ as offered in the promises of the gospel for righteousness and salvation — this is faith, which, being the chief and primary expression of this principle, often gives its name to the whole. When the soul rests in God and in Christ with delight, desire, and satisfaction, it is called love. This principle equips all the faculties of our souls for spiritual and living operations suited to their nature. Now it differs:

First, it differs from the Spirit dwelling in the saints — for habitual grace is a created quality. The Spirit dwells in us as a free agent in a holy home. This grace as a quality resides in us as in its own proper subject, having no existence apart from it, and is capable of being increased or diminished across a wide range of degrees.

Second, it differs from actual grace, which is transient — habitual grace makes its home in the soul. Actual grace is a divine help that works in and through the soul in any specific spiritual act or duty, without pre-existing before that act or continuing after it — God working in us both to will and to do. But habitual grace is always present in us, enabling the soul to be a fitting source for all the holy and spiritual acts that actual grace calls it to perform.

Third, it is capable of increase and decrease, as was said. In some people it is more full and more effective than in others — and indeed in the same person, more at one time than another. This is

the source of those seasons of decline, decay, ruin, recovery, complaint, and rejoicing that Scripture mentions so often (Psalm 51; Hosea 14:4).

With these observations about the nature of habitual grace in place, let us now consider what we are to fix on in the Lord Jesus in regard to it — so that we may enter into our communion with Him in this grace.

First, as I said of the Spirit, so I say of habitual grace: it is part of Christ's purchase, and is to be seen as such. It is given to us for His sake, to believe in Him (Philippians 1:29). The Lord, on behalf of Christ and for His sake — because Christ purchased and secured it for us — bestows faith, and by the same principle all grace, upon us. We are blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Him (Ephesians 1:3) — in Him, that is, through His mediation on our behalf. His sacrifice and intercession lie at the foundation of this. If grace were not secured by them, no soul would ever receive it. All grace flows from this source. When we receive grace from Christ, we must always consider what it cost Him — failing to do so weakens faith in its proper working. His whole intercession is grounded in His sacrifice (1 John 2:1-2). What He purchased by His death — neither more nor less, as has been said repeatedly — He intercedes to have bestowed. And He prays that all His saints would have this grace (John 17:17). If we constantly viewed all grace as the fruit of Christ's purchase, it would bind our hearts to Him with great affection. Nor can we, in keeping with the gospel, ask or expect any grace apart from this consideration. To view something as the Son's purchase is no slight to the free grace of the Father — it was from that grace that He made the purchase. When we receive grace from God, we have no communion with

Christ — who is yet the treasury and storehouse of it — unless we view it as His purchase. He has obtained for us our full sanctification, spiritual life, humility, holiness, and faith.

Second, the Lord Christ actually communicates this grace to His saints and bestows it on them. 'For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace' (John 1:16).

First, the Father actually invests Him with all the grace He purchased by covenant and agreement — just as He received the promise of the Spirit — which is everything needed to bring His many sons to glory. 'It was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him' (Colossians 1:19) — He was invested with the fullness of grace His people need. He Himself calls this the authority to give eternal life to His elect (John 17:2) — an authority that is not only His ability but His right. On the basis of this — everything being delivered to Him by the Father — He issues His invitation to burdened sinners to come to Him for rest. 'All things have been handed over to Me by My Father' (Matthew 11:27) — 'Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest' (verse 28).

This is the Father's covenant with Him, and His promise to Him: that after His soul was made an offering for sin, He would see His offspring, and the will of the Lord would prosper in His hand (Isaiah 53:10). In the verses that follow, His pouring out His soul to death and bearing the sins of many is laid as the ground and procuring cause of two things: 1. Justification — 'by His knowledge He will justify many.' 2. Sanctification — in destroying the works of the devil (Isaiah 53:11-12). Thus our merciful high priest becomes the great possessor of all grace, so that He may distribute it to us according to His own pleasure, giving life to whom

He will. He has this fullness actually in Himself as our head, having received the Spirit without measure (John 3:34) — the Spirit being the bond of union between Him and us (1 Corinthians 6:17) — through which, as we hold to Him as the head, we are filled with His fullness (Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 2:19). He has it as a public representative person, entrusted with it on our behalf (Romans 5:14-17). The last Adam became a life-giving spirit (1 Corinthians 15:45). He is also a treasury of grace in the moral and covenantal sense — not only because it pleased the Father for all fullness to dwell in Him (Colossians 1:19), but also because His mediation, as has been shown, is the foundation of the entire dispensation of grace.

2. Being thus invested with this authority, this privilege, and this fullness, He arranges for the Spirit to take from this fullness and give it to us. 'He will take of Mine and disclose it to you' (John 16:15). The Spirit takes from the fullness that is in Christ and, in the name of the Lord Jesus, actually bestows it on those for whose sanctification He is sent. More will be said later about the manner and almighty power of the Spirit of grace by which He does this — that is, the actual giving of grace to Christ's own people.

3. As for actual grace — the enabling power by which the saints are fitted to perform specific duties according to the will of God — there is no need to say more about it here. What concerns our communion with the Lord Christ in actual grace follows the same lines as what was said before.

One more thing must be noted before I turn to the way we carry on communion with the Lord Jesus in all these things. These things may be considered in two ways.

1. In respect of their first bestowing on the soul. 2. In respect of their continuance and increase over time.

In the first sense — that is, the actual communication of the Spirit of grace to the soul, raising it from death to life — the saints have no active communion with Christ; they only passively receive that life-giving, quickening Spirit and power. They are like the dry bones in the prophet: the wind blows on them and they live. They are like Lazarus in the tomb: Christ calls and they come out, the call carrying life and power with it. This, therefore, is not what I am specifically addressing. What I am addressing is the second sense — the further working of the Spirit, and the increase of grace both habitual and actual, by which we grow more holy, more powerful in walking with God, more fruitful in obedience, and more effective against temptations. It is in this that the saints hold communion with the Lord Christ, and I will now explain how.

1. They continually fix their eyes on the Lord Jesus as the great Joseph who has control over all the storehouses of the kingdom of heaven entrusted to him — as the One in whom the Father was pleased to gather all things together (Ephesians 1:10), so that everything might be distributed from Him. All treasures, all fullness, the Spirit without measure — they are all in Him. This fullness in Him, this Joseph, they fix on in three particular ways.

First, they fix their eyes on Christ with regard to the preparation for this distribution — specifically, the cleansing and purifying power of His blood. It was a sacrifice not only of atonement as offered, but also of purification as poured out. 'For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered

Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God' (Hebrews 9:13-14). This blood fulfills all the typological institutions for physical cleansing and therefore has a spiritually purifying, cleansing, and sanctifying power in itself as offered and poured out. Therefore it is called 'a fountain opened for sin and for impurity' (Zechariah 13:1) — a fountain already prepared and effective in itself, before anyone comes to it. The saints see that in themselves they are still deeply defiled. Indeed, seeing the defilement of sin is a more spiritual insight than simply feeling the guilt of it, which follows from every conviction. On that account they cry in shame: unclean, unclean. Unclean in their nature, unclean in their persons, unclean in their conduct. Covered in the filth of their defilement; their hearts by nature a cesspool and their lives a rubbish heap. They know too that nothing unclean will enter the kingdom of God or have a place in the new Jerusalem; that God is too pure to look on evil. They cannot bear to look at themselves — and how dare they appear in His presence? Even if they scrubbed with lye and used an abundance of soap, their guilt would still remain (Jeremiah 2:22). For the removal of this they look first to the cleansing power of the blood of Christ, which is able to cleanse them from all their sin (1 John 1:7). This is the spring from which flows all the purifying power that will in the end remove all their stains, make them holy and blameless, and present them glorious to Himself (Ephesians 5:26-27). They dwell on this with thoughts of faith; they turn it over in their minds and hearts. Here faith finds new life and new strength when a sense of wretchedness has nearly crushed it. Here is a fountain opened — come near and see its beauty, purity, and power. Here is the foundation laid for the completion of the work

we long for. One moment of communion with Christ by faith here is more effective for cleansing the soul and increasing grace than every self-effort a person could make over a thousand lifetimes.

Second, they fix their eyes on the blood of Christ as the blood of sprinkling. Coming to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, they come 'to the sprinkled blood' (Hebrews 12:24). Simply seeing the blood of Christ as shed will not in itself take away pollution. There is not only the shedding of blood — without which there is no forgiveness (Hebrews 9:22) — but also the sprinkling of blood, without which there is no actual purification. The apostle describes this at length in Hebrews 9. When Moses had spoken every commandment to the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats with water, scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book and all the people, saying: 'This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded you.' He also sprinkled with blood the tabernacle and all the utensils of the ministry. 'And almost all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness'— therefore it was necessary that the copies of the heavenly things be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices (Hebrews 9:19-23). The apostle had earlier compared the blood of Christ to the blood of sacrifices as offered, in regard to what it secured and purchased. Now he compares it to blood as sprinkled, in regard to its application for purification and holiness. He explains how this sprinkling was done — by dipping hyssop in the blood of the sacrifice and dashing it upon the persons and things to be purified, as also in the institution of the Passover (Exodus 12). Hence David, feeling the pollution of sin, prays to be purged with hyssop (Psalm 51:7). The branch of hyssop in which the purifying blood was prepared

for sprinkling the unclean represents, for us, the free promises of Christ. The cleansing power of Christ's blood resides in the promises, as the blood of the sacrifice rested in the hyssop — ready to flow out to those who draw near to them. Therefore the apostle reasons from receiving the promises to complete holiness and purity: 'Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God' (2 Corinthians 7:1). This then is what the saints do: they fix their eyes on the blood of Christ as it dwells in the promises, ready to flow out upon the soul for its purification. From there cleansing power is communicated to them, and by the blood of Christ they are purged from all their sins (1 John 1:7).

3. They look to Him as, through His own Spirit, the sole dispenser of the Spirit and of all the grace of sanctification and holiness. They consider that through His intercession it has been granted to Him to make fully effective all the fruits of His purchase — for the sanctification, the cleansing, and the glorious transformation in holiness of all His people. They know this is actually accomplished by the Spirit, according to the countless promises given for that purpose. The Spirit is to sprinkle that blood upon their souls, to create the holiness in them that they long for, and to be Himself in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life. In this posture they look to Jesus; faith fixes itself here in expectation of His giving out the Spirit for all these ends; mingling the promises with faith and thereby becoming actual partakers of all this grace. This is their way, this their communion with Christ; this is the life of faith in regard to grace and holiness. Blessed is the soul exercised in this: 'He will be like a tree planted by the water, that extends its roots by a stream and will not fear when the heat

comes; but its leaves will be green, and it will not be anxious in a year of drought nor cease to yield fruit' (Jeremiah 17:8). Convicted people who do not know Christ, and have no share in the fellowship of His sufferings, try to spin holiness out of themselves — they try to work it up in their own strength. They begin with exhausting efforts and pursue it through vows, duties, resolutions, commitments, and endless toil. They keep this up for a time, but their hypocrisy usually ends in falling away. The saints of God, from the very beginning of their walk with Him, reckon on having a threefold need:

1. The Spirit of holiness to dwell in them. 2. A habit of holiness to be infused into them. 3. Actual assistance to work all their works in them.

And they know that if these are lacking, all their effort, strength, and striving will never produce one act of true holiness before the Lord. They know they have no sufficiency in themselves; that apart from Christ they can do nothing (John 15:5). Therefore they look to Him, who holds a fullness of all these in trust for them, and by faith they draw from Him the increase of what they need. This, then, is how the saints hold communion with Christ in their sanctification and holiness. From Him they receive the Spirit to dwell in them; from Him the new principle of life, which is the root of all their obedience; from Him they receive actual help for every duty they are called to. In waiting, in expectation, and in receiving these blessings on the grounds described — they spend their lives and time with Him. To look for help from any other source is futile. To spend your strength pursuing righteousness in any other way is futile, if this is missing. Fix your soul here! You will not have to wait long before you are supplied. This is the way

— the only way — to obtain the full and effective indwelling of the Spirit; to have our hearts purified, our consciences cleansed, our sins put to death, our graces increased, our souls made humble, holy, zealous, and believing; to become like Him; to have our lives fruitful and our deaths peaceful. Let us abide in this, fixing our eyes by faith on Christ, to attain the measure of conformity to Him that is appointed for us in this world — so that when we see Him as He is, we may be like Him.

Part 2, Chapter 10: Communion with Christ in Privileges

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This chapter concerns communion with Christ in privileges: adoption — its nature, its consequences, the specific privileges that come with it, including liberty, title, and boldness — along with affliction, and how the saints hold communion with Christ through all of these.

The third area in which we hold communion with Christ is the grace of privilege before God — the third category of purchased grace. The privileges we enjoy through Christ are great and countless. To treat them all in detail would be the work of a lifetime, not something that can be covered in a few pages. I will look at them only in their head, the spring and source from which they all arise and flow. That source is our adoption. 'Beloved, now we are children of God' (1 John 3:2). This is our great and foundational privilege. Where does it come from? It comes from the love of the Father (verse 1): 'See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God.' But by whom do we immediately receive this honor? To all who received Christ, He gave the right to become children of God (John 1:12). He was appointed to be the firstborn among many brothers (Romans 8:29),

and His calling us brothers (Hebrews 2:11) is what makes us children of God. The fact that God is our Father by being the Father of Christ, and that we are His children by being brothers of Christ — this is the head and sum of all the honor, privilege, right, and title we have. Let us consider the nature of the act by which we are placed in this status and given this title: our adoption.

Adoption is the authoritative transfer of a believer by Jesus Christ from the family of the world and Satan into the family of God, along with his investiture in all the privileges and advantages of that family.

A complete adoption of any person requires five things.

1. The person must actually belong, by his own natural right, to a different family than the one into which he is adopted. He must be a son of some family by birth, as all people are.

2. There must be a family to which he has no natural right, into which he is to be grafted. If a person enters a family by his own right — however distant that connection may originally have been — he is not adopted. If someone with a very remote family connection comes into an inheritance because all the closer heirs have died, he is still a natural son of that family line, however tenuous; he is not adopted. He cannot claim a right based on even the most remote possibility of succession.

3. There must be an authoritative, legal transfer of the person, carried out by those with the power to do it, from one family into another. It was not, under the old law, within the power of private individuals to adopt whoever they wished whenever they chose. It had to be done by the authority of the ruling power.

4. The adopted person must be freed from all obligations to the family from which he is being transferred — otherwise he cannot be useful or serve the family into which he is being grafted. A person cannot serve two masters, much less two fathers.

5. By virtue of his adoption, the person must be fully invested in all the rights, privileges, advantages, and claim to the entire inheritance of the family into which he is adopted — just as fully as if he had been born a son in that family.

All these requirements are met in the adoption of believers.

1. By their own natural right they belong to a different family than the one into which they are adopted. By nature they are children of wrath (Ephesians 2:3) — sons of wrath: belonging to the family whose inheritance is wrath, called the domain of darkness (Colossians 1:13). From that family God transfers them to the kingdom of His beloved Son. This is the family of the world and of Satan, to which believers by nature belong. Everything that family inherits — wrath, curse, death, hell — they have a claim to. They cannot free themselves from this family on their own: a strong armed man holds them in subjection. Their natural condition is a family condition, complete with all the features of family life: duties and obligations, rights and claims, relationships and expectations. They are members of the dark family of sin and Satan.

2. There is another family into which they are to be transferred, and to which they have no right or claim of their own. This is the family named after Christ — in heaven and on earth (Ephesians 3:15). The great family of God: God has a household for His children, some of whom He maintains by the riches of His grace and others He welcomes into the fullness of His glory. This is the

household of which the Lord Christ is the great steward — it having pleased the Father to bring all things together in Him, both in heaven and on earth (Ephesians 1:10). In this household all the sons and daughters of God dwell, freely drawing on the riches of His grace. To this family they have no right or title of their own; they are completely estranged from it (Ephesians 2:12) and can lay no claim to anything in it. God driving fallen Adam out of the garden and blocking every path of return with a flaming sword ready to cut off any attempt to return — this makes abundantly clear that Adam, and all in him, had forfeited every right of approach to God in any family relationship. Fallen, cursed human nature has not even the smallest right to anything that belongs to God — therefore:

They receive an authoritative transfer from one of these families to the other. It is not done in a quiet, informal way — it is done by authority. 'To all who received Him, He gave the right to become children of God' (John 1:12). Power, or authority. This investing them with the power, dignity, and right of the children of God is a formal act and has a legal character to it. It is called being 'qualified to share in the inheritance of the saints in light' (Colossians 1:12). It is a judicial elevation into membership in the family where God is the Father, Christ the elder Brother, all saints and angels brothers and fellow children, and the inheritance a crown that is immortal, incorruptible, and will never fade away.

This authoritative transfer of believers from one family to another consists of two parts.

1. An effective public declaration of that person's freedom from all obligations to the former family to which he belonged by nature. This declaration has a threefold audience.

1. Angels: it is declared to the angels that believers are sons of God. The angels are sons of God and members of the family into which the adopted person is being admitted — so it is fitting that they know who has been invested with the rights of that family, so they can carry out their duty toward them. It is therefore declared to them that believers have been freed from the family of sin and hell to become fellow sons and servants with them. This is done in two ways (Job 1:6; 38:7; Hebrews 12:22-24; Revelation 22:9).

1. Generally, through the teaching of the gospel (Ephesians 3:10): the manifold wisdom of God is made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places through the church.

This wisdom is made known to the angels through the church — either as the gospel is delivered to the church, or as the church is gathered through it. And what is this wisdom of God that is made known to the rulers and authorities? It is that 'the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body' (verse 6). The mystery of adopting sinners from the nations — taking them from their slavery in the family of the world so that they might have the right of inheritance as sons in the family of God — is this wisdom that is being made known. And how was it first made known? It was revealed by the Spirit to the prophets and apostles (verse 5).

2. In particular, through direct revelation. When any specific soul is freed from the family of this world, it is revealed to the angels. 'There is joy in the presence of the angels of God' — that is, among the angels and by them — 'over one sinner who repents' (Luke 15:10). The angels cannot on their own know with certainty whether a sinner's repentance is genuine. That is a work wrought in a place to which no one has a key but Jesus Christ; He reveals it to the angels when He places a particular person under their care

and charge. These things take place before the angels (Luke 12:8-9). Christ acknowledges the names of His brothers before the angels (Revelation 2:5). When He grants them admission into the family where the angels already are (Hebrews 12:22), He declares to the angels that these are sons, so that they may fulfill their duty toward them (Hebrews 1:14).

2. It is proclaimed in a judicial way to Satan, the great head of the family to which the adopted person had been in bondage. When the Lord Christ delivers a soul from under the power of that strong armed one, He binds him — restraining him from the exercise of the power and dominion he had previously held over that person. By this Satan knows that such a person has been removed from his family, and all his future attempts against that person are intrusions into the possession and inheritance of the Lord Christ.

3. To the conscience of the person adopted. The Spirit of Christ testifies to the heart and conscience of a believer that he has been freed from all ties to the family of Satan and has become a child of God (Romans 8:14-15), enabling him to cry, 'Abba, Father!' (Galatians 4:6). The particulars of this testimony of the Spirit, and of its releasing the soul from its old allegiance, I will address later. This completes the first part mentioned.

2. There is an authoritative grafting of a believer into the family of God, investing him with the full rights of sonship. As it concerns us, this involves several distinct acts.

1. The giving of a new name on a white stone (Revelation 2:17). Those who are adopted receive new names: they lay aside the names they had in their old families and take the names of the families into which they have been transferred. This new name is

'child of God' — that is the new name given in adoption, and no one knows what is in that name except the one who receives it. This new name is given and written on a white stone, which is the token of our admission into the household of God. It is a stone of judicial acquittal. Our adoption by the Spirit rests on our absolution through the blood of Jesus — and therefore the new name is on the white stone: privilege resting on discharge. The white stone releases the claim of the old family; the new name grants entrance to the other.

2. The enrolling of his name in the register of God's household, admitting him into fellowship there. This is called the 'writing of the house of Israel' (Ezekiel 13:9) — that is, the roll on which all the names of Israel, the family of God, are recorded. God has a register of His household; Christ knows His sheep by name. When God records His people, He notes that this person was born in Zion (Psalm 87:6). This is an extract from the Lamb's book of life.

3. Testifying to his conscience of his acceptance with God and enabling him to conduct himself as a child (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:5-6).

The last two requirements for adoption are that the adopted person be freed from all obligations to the family from which he was transferred, and invested with the rights and privileges of the family into which he has been transferred. Since these two together comprise the whole substance of adoption, in which the saints hold communion with Christ, I will address them together under four headings.

1. Liberty. 2. Title, or right. 3. Boldness. 4. Correction. These are the four gifts a person receives in relation to his new family through adoption, and it is in these that he holds communion with the Lord Jesus.

1. Liberty: The Spirit of the Lord who rested on the Lord Jesus anointed Him to proclaim freedom to the captives (Isaiah 61:1). And where the Spirit of the Lord is — that is, the Spirit of Christ given to us by Him because we are sons — there is freedom (2 Corinthians 3:17). All spiritual freedom comes from the Spirit of adoption. Whatever else is called freedom is merely license. As the apostle argues in Galatians 4:6-7: God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba, Father!' — therefore we are no longer servants, no longer in bondage, but have the freedom of sons. And this freedom has to do, first of all, with the family from which the adopted person was transferred; it is his release from all the obligations of that family.

Now in this sense, the freedom the saints have through adoption is freedom from what is real and from what is merely imposed. What is real concerns a twofold result of the law and sin together. The moral, unchangeable law of God, when it meets sin in a person, has produced — and continues to produce — two results:

1. The temporary institution of a new body of laws and ordinances, holding in bondage those to whom it was given (Colossians 2:14).

2. What I might call a natural pressing of those persons by the law's power and force against sin — which has these parts:

1. Its harshness and terror in commanding.

2. Its impossibility of fulfillment, and therefore its inability to accomplish its originally intended purpose.

3. The consequences of transgressing it, which fall under two headings: 1. Curse. 2. Death. I will be very brief about these, as they are commonly discussed and agreed upon by all.

What is merely claimed — not real bondage — is any supposed power of human authority to bind the conscience, which Christ has set free.

First, then, believers are freed from the instituted law of ordinances, which the apostles testified was a burden that neither we nor our ancestors in the faith were able to bear (Acts 15:10). Christ canceled the written code of ordinances that was against us — that stood opposed to us — and took it out of the way by nailing it to His cross (Colossians 2:14). On that basis, after a lengthy argument about the freedom we have from that law, the apostle concludes: 'It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery' (Galatians 5:1).

2. With regard to the moral law, the first thing we are freed from is its harshness and terror in commanding (Hebrews 12:18-22). We have not come to a mountain that can be touched — burning with fire, surrounded by darkness and storm, with the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made those who heard it beg that it would say nothing more. We have come to Mount Zion, and so on. From that way of administering the law — where it was issued with dread and terror and demanded obedience with harshness — we are free; we are not called to that condition.

2. Its impossibility of accomplishment, and therefore its inability to serve its original purpose because of sin. We are freed from the law as an instrument of righteousness, because — given the impossibility of our fulfilling it — it can no longer serve that purpose (Romans 8:2-3; Galatians 3:21-23). Since life cannot be obtained through the law, we are released from it for any such end — and this release comes through the righteousness of Christ (Romans 8:3).

3. From the consequences of its transgression.

1. Curse. There is a solemn curse, encompassing the whole wrath of God, attached to the law in regard to its transgression — and from this we are entirely free (Galatians 3:13). By being made a curse, Christ has delivered us from the curse.

2. Death (Hebrews 2:14-15), and with it from Satan (Hebrews 2:15; Colossians 1:13), and from sin (Romans 6:14; 1 Peter 1:18), and from the world (Galatians 1:4), along with all the entanglements, claims, and demands of all of them (Galatians 4:3-5; Colossians 2:20) — without freedom from which we could not live one day.

What is merely claimed by some — a bondage in which we were never actually held, but from which we are now notably set free by Christ — is the supposed power of human laws and regulations to bind the conscience in things God has not commanded (Colossians 2:20-22).

2. There is also a liberty within the family of God, not only a liberty from the family of Satan; sons are free: their obedience is a free obedience. They have the Spirit of the Lord, and where He is, there is freedom (2 Corinthians 3:18); as the Spirit of adoption He

stands in contrast to the spirit of bondage (Romans 8:15). This liberty of our Father's household — which we have as sons and daughters adopted by Christ through the Spirit — is a spiritual spaciousness of heart, by which the children of God freely, willingly, and genuinely go out to all holy obedience in Christ, without fear, terror, bondage, or constraint.

This is our liberty in our Father's household; what we are freed from has already been described.

There are people who outwardly serve in God's household like the Gibeonites — doing the work of His house as a dreary obligation throughout their lives. The principle on which they render obedience is a spirit of bondage driven by fear (Romans 8:15). The standard they work by is the law in its harshness and severity, demanding their compliance to the last measure, without mercy or relief. The goal they work toward is to flee the wrath to come, to quiet their conscience, and to seek righteousness through the works of the law. In this servile, painful, fruitless way they spend their days serving their own conviction.

The saints, through adoption, have a spaciousness of heart in all holy obedience. As David says, 'I will walk in a wide place, for I have sought Your precepts' (Psalm 119:4-5; see also Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:18; Romans 8:2, 21; Galatians 4:2; 5:1, 13; James 1:25; John 8:32-33, 36; Romans 6:18; 1 Peter 2:16). This son-like freedom of spirit in obedience consists of several things.

1. In the principles of all spiritual service, which are life and love: the first concerns the content of their obedience and gives them power; the second concerns the manner of their obedience

and gives them joy and sweetness in it. Life gives them power for the substance of obedience (Romans 8:3).

The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus frees them from the law of sin and death: it liberates them and carries them freely into all obedience. So they walk according to the Spirit (verse 1), which is the governing principle of their lives (Galatians 2:20). 'Christ lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God'— meaning: the obedience I render to God while in the flesh flows from a living principle, Christ living in me. All power for living to God comes from Christ in them, the Spirit of life, from Christ carrying them forward to it. The fruit of a dead root produces only dead growth; living acts flow from a living principle.

Here you can see the difference between the liberty that slaves assume and the liberty that properly belongs to children.

First, slaves take liberty from duty; children have liberty in duty. There is no greater mistake than to think that the liberty of sons in God's household consists in this — that they may perform duties or freely skip them, that they may serve in God's family if they feel like it and may choose not to. This is a liberty stolen by slaves, not a liberty given by the Spirit to sons.

The liberty of sons is the inward spiritual freedom of their hearts, naturally and genuinely flowing out to all the ways and worship of God. When they find themselves restricted and closed up in it, they wrestle with God for greater freedom and are never satisfied with a duty unless it is performed as in Christ — with free, genuine, and open hearts. The liberty servants have is from duty; the liberty given to sons is in duty.

Second, the liberty of slaves or servants comes from mistaken, self-deceiving conclusions. The liberty of sons comes from the power of the indwelling Spirit of grace — an inward, living principle.

Second, love — as to the manner of their obedience — gives them delight and joy. 'If you love Me, you will keep My commandments' (John 14:15). Love is the foundation of all their duties. On this basis our Savior sums up all obedience in love for God and neighbor, and Paul on the same grounds says that love is the fulfillment of the law (Romans 13:10). Where love is present in any duty, that duty is complete in Christ. How often does David with wonder express this principle of his walk with God: 'O how I love Your commandments!' This gives saints delight — the commandments of Christ are not burdensome to them. Jacob's hard service was not burdensome because of his love for Rachel; no duty is burdensome to a saint because of his love for Christ. They do everything from love, with delight and satisfaction. Therefore they long for more opportunities to walk with God and hunger for greater ability to do so. Love also gives joy in obedience. 'There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear' (1 John 4:18). When the soul is moved to obedience by love, it drives out the fear that is the mark of bondage on the spirit. When life and love are at work together, there is freedom, liberty, and spaciousness of heart — far removed from the constricted and enslaved state in which many spend all their days, who have never known the adoption of sons.

Second, the object of their obedience is presented to them as desirable, whereas to others it is terrifying. In all their approaches to God, they see Him as a Father. They call Him Father (Galatians 4:6) — not in a mere formality of words, but in the spirit of sons.

God in Christ is continually before them, not merely as one who deserves all the honor and obedience He requires, but as one who is to be greatly delighted in, as entirely sufficient to satisfy and fill all the desires of the soul. When others hide their talents, treating God as a hard master, the sons of God pour out their strength to the full, coming near to a gracious rewarder. They go from the principle of life and love to the embrace of a living and loving Father; they are simply returning to the fountain, to the ocean, the strength that flows from it.

Third, their motive for obedience is love. From a sense of love they are effectively moved by love to give themselves to Him who is love (2 Corinthians 5:15). What freedom this is — what spaciousness of spirit in those who walk by this rule! Darkness, fear, bondage, mere conviction, and the hope of earning righteousness accompany others in their walk. The sons, through the Spirit of adoption, have light and love with delight in all their walking with God. The world is a complete stranger to the disposition of children in their Father's house.

Fourth, the manner of their obedience is willingness. They offer themselves to God as those who are alive from the dead (Romans 6:13). They give themselves — yielding willingly, cheerfully, and freely. 'With my whole heart,' says David. They present themselves as a living sacrifice and a willing sacrifice (Romans 12:1).

Fifth, the rule of their walk with God is the law of liberty — stripped of all its terrifying, threatening, killing, condemning, and cursing power, and made by the blood of Jesus sweet, tender, useful, guiding, and helpful as a rule for walking in the life they have received — not a means of earning a life they do not have. This is

enough to show the liberty of obedience in God's household that His sons and daughters enjoy, and which the poor convicted Gibeonites do not know.

Second, the second thing the children of God have through adoption is title. They have title and right to all the privileges and advantages of the family into which they have been transferred. This is the distinguishing feature of true sons in any family. Sarah's argument for expelling Ishmael was that he was the son of the slave woman (Genesis 21:10) — not a genuine child of the family and therefore with no right of inheritance alongside Isaac. The apostle's argument is: we are no longer servants but sons; and if sons, then heirs (Romans 8:14-17). We have right and title — and since we were not born to it (for by nature we are children of wrath), we hold this right through our adoption.

The saints therefore have a double right and title. First, a direct right in regard to spiritual things. Second, a consequential right in regard to temporal things.

The first — the title of adopted sons to spiritual things — has two aspects with regard to its object.

First, a present place, name, and standing in the household of God and in all the privileges and provisions of that household.

Second, a future fullness of the great inheritance of glory — a kingdom purchased for the whole family of which they are members by Jesus Christ.

They have title to and a share in the whole administration of God's household here.

The supreme administration of God's household — held in the hand of the Lord Christ, in terms of the institution of the ordinances and the dispensing of the Spirit to make those ordinances alive and effective for their purpose — is the primary aspect of this administration. The saints are its primary objects; all of it is for them and exercised toward them. God has given Jesus Christ as head over all things to the church, which is His body (Ephesians 1:22-23). He has made Him head over all these spiritual things and entrusted the authoritative administration of them all to Him for the benefit of the church — that is, the family of God. It is for the benefit of the many sons He is bringing to glory that He does all these things (Hebrews 2:17). The purpose of the Lord Jesus in establishing gospel ordinances is the perfecting of the saints (Ephesians 4:8-12). All of it is for them, all of it is for the family. All gospel administrations and ordinances belong to them and are for them. Whatever benefit the world receives from the things of the gospel — and it does benefit in many ways — it owes that benefit to the children of this family. This, then, is the aim and intention of the Lord Christ in establishing all gospel ordinances and administrations: that they serve the household and family of God and all His children and servants within it.

It is true that the word is preached to all the world — to gather in the children of God's purpose who are scattered throughout the world, and to leave all others without excuse. But the primary aim of the Lord Christ in this is to gather in those heirs of salvation to enjoy the feast of good things He has prepared for them in His house.

They, and they alone, have right and title to gospel ordinances and the privileges of God's household as administered in His church according to His will. The church is the household of God (1 Timothy 3:15; Hebrews 3:6). In it He houses and maintains His whole family, ordering them according to His will. Who should have any right in God's household except His children? We do not grant rights in our own homes except to our own children — will God grant rights in His house to those who are not His children? Is it fitting to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs? None but children have any right or title to the privileges and advantages of the household of God.

First, consider the nature of that household: it is made up of people to whom only adopted children could possibly have any rightful place. It is composed of living stones (1 Peter 2:5) — a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession (verse 9). Saints and faithful believers in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1:1). Saints and faithful brothers (Colossians 1:2). A people, all of them righteous (Isaiah 60:21). The entire fabric of it is glorious (Isaiah 54:11-14). The road into the household is a highway of holiness on which the unclean will not walk (Isaiah 35:8). They are expressly the sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty — and only they (2 Corinthians 6:17-18). All others are excluded (Revelation 21:27). It is true that sometimes unsuitable people slip in unawares into the great household of God, so that it contains not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay (2 Timothy 2:20). But they only slip in, as Jude says (verse 4); they have no right or title to it.

Second, the privileges of the household are such that they will not suit or benefit any other. What use is it to give food to a dead man? Will he grow strong from it? The things of God's family and household are food for living souls. Only the children are alive; all others are dead in trespasses and sins. Look at any specific blessing the saints enjoy in God's family, and you will find it suited entirely to believers. Bestowed on the world, it would be a pearl in the snout of a pig.

It is only the sons of the family who hold this right. They have fellowship with one another, and that fellowship is with the Father and with the Son Jesus Christ. They proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. They are entrusted with all the ordinances of the household and their administration. And who shall deny them the enjoyment of this right or keep them from what Christ has purchased for them? The Lord will in the end give them hearts everywhere to act on this title and not to wander on the mountains, having forgotten their place of rest.

Second, they have a title to the future fullness of the inheritance purchased for this whole family by Jesus Christ. As the apostle argues: 'If children, then heirs also' (Romans 8:17). All of God's children are firstborn (Hebrews 12:23), and therefore heirs. For this reason the entire weight of glory prepared for them is called the inheritance — 'the inheritance of the saints in light' (Colossians 1:12). 'If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise' (Galatians 3:29) — heirs of the promise, that is, of everything promised to Abraham in and with Christ.

There are three things the children of God are said to be heirs of in this regard.

1. The promise — as in Galatians 3:29 and Hebrews 6:11, where God demonstrates to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are said to be heirs of the same promise (Hebrews 11:9). From the foundation of the world, God made a most excellent promise in Christ, containing deliverance from all evil and the guarantee of every good thing for them. It contains deliverance from all the evil that the guilt of sin and the dominion of Satan had brought on them, together with their investiture in every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Therefore the Holy Spirit calls it 'the promise of the eternal inheritance' (Hebrews 9:15). The adopted children of God are heirs to this first. Whatever is contained in the promise God made at the beginning to fallen humanity, and has since solemnly renewed and confirmed by oath — they are heirs of it, and their claim to that inheritance is accepted in the court of heaven.

2. They are heirs of righteousness (Hebrews 11:7). Noah became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith — which Peter calls being 'fellow heirs of the grace of life' (1 Peter 3:7). James brings both together: 'heirs of the kingdom which He promised' (James 2:5) — that is, the kingdom of grace and the righteousness of it. On this basis the apostle tells us that 'we have obtained an inheritance' (Ephesians 1:11), which he also places alongside the righteousness of faith (Acts 26:18). By this righteousness, grace, and inheritance is meant not only the righteousness we actually participate in here, but also the completion and fulfillment of that righteousness in glory, which is also secured —

Third, they are heirs of salvation (Hebrews 1:14) and 'heirs according to the hope of eternal life' (Titus 3:7), which Peter calls 'an inheritance incorruptible' (1 Peter 1:4) and Paul calls 'the reward of the inheritance' (Colossians 3:24) — that is, the final outcome of the inheritance of light and holiness which they already possess. So to summarize the whole of salvation in Christ: its foundation is the promises; its means are righteousness and holiness; its end is eternal glory. The sons of God have a right and title to everything in it, as fellow heirs with Christ.

This is the main substance of the right and title the saints hold through adoption. In sum: the Lord is their portion and inheritance, and they are the inheritance of the Lord. It is a generous portion they have received. The boundary lines have fallen for them in pleasant places.

2. Beyond this primary right, the adopted sons of God have a secondary, consequential right — a right to the things of this world, specifically to whatever portion of this world God is pleased to entrust them with. Christ is the heir of all things (Hebrews 1:2). All right and title to the things of creation was lost and forfeited through sin. The Lord by His sovereignty had originally granted all the things of this world for humanity's use, appointing the rest of His works in their various stations to serve man. Sin reversed this entire grant and arrangement: all things were released from their subjection to him. Yet that release — removing them from the purpose for which they were originally appointed — is itself part of the vanity and curse. It is a loss to any thing to be set aside from its originally appointed end. By this means the whole creation was untethered from any subordinate ruler, and humanity, having forfeited the entire title by which it held dominion over and posses-

sion of the created order, has not the slightest claim to any of it. But since the Lord intended to take a people for Himself from fallen humanity — appointing them as heirs of salvation — He did not immediately destroy the works of creation, but reserved them for their use during their pilgrimage. To this end He invested the full right and title to creation in the second Adam, which the first had forfeited, appointing Him heir of all things. And so His adopted ones, being fellow heirs with Christ, also receive a right and title to the things of creation.

To clarify what this right actually is, a few observations are needed.

1. Their right is not the same as Christ's right — which is sovereign and supreme, to do as He pleases with what is His. Their right is subordinate and comes with accountability for how they use the things to which they have right and title. Christ's right is the right of the Lord of the household; the saints' right is the right of servants.

2. The whole body of God's children has a right to the whole earth — which is the Lord's and everything in it — in two respects:

1. The sovereign Lord of the earth preserves it for their use and on their account; all others are effectively squatters, occupying a portion of the Lord's territory without His grant or permission.

2. Because Christ has promised to give them the kingdom and dominion over it, in the way His providence will arrange — meaning that the governance of the earth will be exercised for their benefit.

3. This right is a spiritual right that does not confer civil ownership, but only sanctifies the right and possessions that providence has already assigned. God has by His providence determined the civil boundaries of people's possessions (Acts 17:26), allowing the people of the world to enjoy a portion here — often a very full and abundant portion — and that for the sake of His children, so that those wild beasts who are made for destruction do not break loose and overrun the whole domain. Therefore:

4. No individual adopted person has any right by virtue of this adoption to any portion of earthly things beyond what God's providence has already given him through civil means. But:

5. What they do have through their adoption is this:

Whatever portion God is pleased to give them, they have a genuine right to it — as it is invested in Christ and freed from the curse and futility that sin brought on creation. Therefore they will never be called to account for claiming what is not rightfully theirs, as all other people will be — those who grasp hold of what God released from human dominion because of sin.

This right leads them to a sanctified use of what they enjoy — since the things themselves become pledges of the Father's love, washed in the blood of Christ, and invitations to live to His praise, who gives them all things richly to enjoy.

This is the second thing we have through our adoption. On this basis I would say of unbelievers: they have no true right to anything whatsoever that they possess.

They have no true and unquestionable right, I say, even to the temporal things they do possess. It is true they have a civil right in relation to other people, but they do not have a sanctified right in

relation to their own souls. They have a title that will hold up in human courts, but not a right that will stand in the court of God or in their own conscience. A day will come when it will be a bitter thing for them to give account of what they enjoyed. They will be called to account not only for the misuse of what they had — that they did not use it for the glory of the One to whom it belongs — but also for having taken hold of God's creation and kept it from those for whose sake alone it is being preserved from destruction. When the God of glory comes to any of them — either in their consciences here, or in the judgment to come — and speaks with the severity of a judge who has been wronged: 'I allowed you to enjoy grain and wine and oil, a large portion of My creation. You rolled in wealth and prosperity while the true heirs of these things lived poor and low and humble just next door. Now give an account: what did you do with these things? What did you lay out for the service and advancement of the gospel? What did you give to those who had nothing provided for them? What did you contribute to the poor saints? Did you have a ready hand and willing heart to lay everything down for My sake?' And when they are compelled to answer truthfully: 'Lord, we had a large portion in the world, but we counted it our own and thought we could do with it as we pleased. We ate the best and drank the sweetest, and left our wealth to our children. We spent some on our own pleasures, some on our friends, but honestly we cannot say we made friends through worldly wealth, or used it to advance the gospel or to serve Your poor saints. And now we must die' — and so forth. And when the Lord presses them further, questioning not only how they used these things but whether they had any title to them at all — telling them: 'The earth is Mine and everything in it. I made an original

grant of these things to humanity, but that was forfeited by sin. I restored it only for My saints. Why did you lay your grasping hands on what was not yours? Why did you force My creation to serve you and your desires, when I had released it from your dominion? I'll take back My grain, My wine, My wool — and leave you as naked as the day you were born, and repay you for your theft and unlawful possession of what was never yours.' What, I ask, will people do at such a time?

Boldness with God through Christ is another privilege of our adoption — but I have already spoken of this at length when treating the excellence of Christ in regard to our approach to God through Him, so I will not revisit it here.

Affliction too — as flowing from love, as leading to spiritual benefits, as conforming us to Christ, as sweetened by His presence — is a privilege of children (Hebrews 12:3-6), but I cannot dwell on these particulars here.

This, then, is the head and source of all the privileges Christ has purchased for us, in which we also hold fellowship with Him. Fellowship in name: as He is, so we are sons of God. Fellowship in title and right: we are heirs, co-heirs with Christ. Fellowship in likeness and conformity: we are predestined to be conformed to the firstborn of the family. Fellowship in honor: He is not ashamed to call us brothers. Fellowship in suffering: He learned obedience through what He suffered, and every son whom He receives is disciplined. Fellowship in His kingdom: we will reign with Him. Each of these I must address in its own place, and so I will not extend the discussion of them further here.

Part 3: Communion with the Holy Spirit

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End of Part Two.

Part 3, Chapter 1: Of Communion with the Holy Spirit

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The foundation of our communion with the Holy Spirit (John 16:1-7), opened in detail. The Comforter: who He is. The Holy Spirit's own will in His coming to us; also sent by Christ. The Spirit sent as a sanctifier and as a comforter. The circumstances of His mission examined. The foundation of His mission (John 15:26). His procession from the Father. Two aspects: personal, and official. What to consider regarding His procession as to office. The manner of His coming. He is given freely; sent, authoritatively. The sin against the Holy Spirit and why it is unpardonable. How we ask the Spirit from the Father. What it means to grieve the Spirit. Poured out. How the Holy Spirit is received. By faith: how faith acts in receiving the Holy Spirit. How His abiding with us is described. How we may lose our comfort while the Comforter continues to abide with us.

The foundation of all our communion with the Holy Spirit consists in His mission — His being sent as our Comforter by Jesus Christ. The whole arrangement and working of this needs to be laid out and understood first, so that we have a proper grasp of the truth we are seeking. The main promise of this, and the chief con-

siderations related to it — including the good received and the evil prevented — are given and declared in the opening of John 16, so I will examine the matter as presented there.

Our blessed Savior, about to leave the world, had told His disciples among other things what kind of reception they would generally find in it. He then explains why He told them these painful things, given how sorrowful and discouraged they already were at the mention of His departure. 'These things I have spoken to you so that you may be kept from stumbling' (verse 1). 'I have told you beforehand,' He says, 'about these things — the things that will come upon you, the things you must endure — so that you who (poor souls) had expected a very different state of affairs would not be caught off guard and stumble, turning against Me and My teaching and falling away.' 'You are forewarned now, and you know what to expect.' And indeed, He says in verse 2, having told them in general that they will be persecuted, He tells them plainly that there will be a unified opposition of all men against them, and that people of every kind will use all their power to destroy them. They will be expelled from the synagogue, and the time is coming when anyone who kills them will think he is doing God a service. The religious authorities will excommunicate them — put them out of the synagogues. And lest they hope for protection from civil authority against this violence, He warns them: those in power will kill them. And to make clear that they will act with full commitment and no restraint — they will believe they are serving God by killing you, which will cause them to act with relentless severity.

But this is a shaking prospect, the disciples might reply: will men kill us and think they are pleasing God by it? Yes they will, says the Savior — but so that you are not confused or troubled in

your conscience by their confidence, understand that it is their blind and desperate ignorance that drives their fury and conviction. 'These things they will do because they have not known the Father or Me' (verse 3).

So this was to be the disciples' condition — but why did the Savior tell them at this moment, only adding fear and confusion to their grief and sorrow? What benefit would they gain from it? Their blessed Master explains in verse 4: there are important reasons for telling them these things; mainly so that they would be prepared for them, and when they happened, would be supported by the evidence of His divine foreknowledge — that He had told them all this before it came to pass. 'But these things I have told you, so that when their hour comes, you may remember that I told you of them' (verse 4). But if this was so necessary, why had He not told them earlier? Why not from the beginning, when they were first called? Because, the Savior explains, there was no need of it then; while He was with them, they had protection and guidance close at hand. 'These things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you' (verse 4) — but now the situation has changed; He must leave them (verse 5). And as for them, they are so overwhelmed with grief that they are not even asking where He is going — though thinking about it would surely bring them comfort, since He is going to take possession of His glory and to continue the work of their salvation. Their hearts are so full of sorrow and dread that they do not even seek relief (verses 5-6). Whereupon He adds that remarkable declaration in verse 7: 'But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.'

This verse, being the particular foundation for what will be explained afterward, must be carefully examined — both its preface and its solemn declaration, along with the reason attached to it.

1. The opening word is a contrast — not disagreeing with anything He Himself had said, but countering their way of seeing it: 'I know you are troubled by all this — but nevertheless.'

2. 'I tell you the truth.' These words are very emphatic and announce that something important is about to be said. First: 'I tell you' — this that I am now about to say. I who love you, who care for you, who am about to lay down My life for you — these are My parting words, so that you would believe Me. I who am truth itself — I am telling you this. And:

'I tell you the truth': in your grieving and apprehensive hearts, you have many false ideas about things. You think that if I stayed with you, all these troubles could be avoided. But you do not know what is good for you, or what is best. I tell you the truth — this is the truth itself — and your hearts can rest in it. When believers are downcast and distressed at the sense of Christ's absence — whether that sense is accurate or not — it takes a great deal of compelling truth to bring them comfort.

This is the first part of the Savior's words — the preface to what He was about to say, a weighty and convincing declaration designed to free His disciples' minds from distorted thinking and prepare them to receive the great truth He was about to deliver.

2. The declaration itself follows: 'It is to your advantage that I go away.'

There are two things in these words: Christ's departure, and its benefit to His disciples. As for His departure, what is meant is well known: the withdrawal of His bodily presence from the earth after His resurrection, with the heavens receiving Him until the restoration of all things (Acts 3:21). For in respect of His deity and His loving care for them, He promised to be with them to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20). Of His departure He says: it benefits you; it is profitable, it is to your advantage, it will accomplish the end you are seeking — that is the sense of the word we translate 'expedient': it is to your profit and benefit. This is what the Savior declares — with the earnestness described — wishing to convince His sorrowful followers that His departure, which they so dreaded and were troubled to think about, would turn out to their benefit.

3. Although it might be expected that they would simply take His word for it — since truth itself had spoken — because the ground of this truth concerned them deeply, He makes it known to them as well. And so that they might see it is a weighty matter that gives certainty to that claim, He states it both negatively and positively: if I do not go away He will not come, but if I depart I will send Him. About Christ's going away I have spoken elsewhere. I will now treat of the Comforter — His coming and the sending of Him — since that is the matter at hand.

The Greek word translated 'Comforter' has several meanings, and many translators have chosen not to restrict it, retaining the original word 'Paraclete' — as does the Syriac as well. Some believe it was already a word in use among the Jews, which would explain why the Chaldee paraphrase uses it at Job 16:20. Among them it meant one who taught in such a way as to delight those being taught — that is, to be their Comforter. In Scripture it has two

prominent meanings: Advocate and Comforter. In the first sense, our Savior Himself is called by this title (1 John 2:2). Whether it is better rendered here as Advocate or Comforter may be debated.

Looking at the occasion that prompted the words — the disciples' sorrow and grief — it seems to call for 'Comforter': 'Sorrow has filled your hearts, but I will send you the Comforter.' Looking at the words that follow — which describe the Spirit's specific work for which He is now promised to come — they suggest He is an advocate to plead the cause of Christ before the world (verse 8). I choose to interpret the promise by the occasion that prompted it, which was the disciples' sorrow, and to keep the name 'Comforter.'

Who this Comforter is, the blessed Savior had already declared (John 15:26): He is the Spirit of truth — that is, the Holy Spirit, who reveals all truth to humanity. Two things are affirmed about this Comforter:

1. That He will come. 2. That Christ will send Him.

1. That He will come: the affirmation of His coming — on the condition of Christ's going away — is implicit in the negation of His coming if that condition is not fulfilled. 'If I do not go away He will not come; if I do go, He will come.' So there is not only the sending by Christ but also the Spirit's own will in His coming — He will come; His own will is expressed in His work.

2. 'I will send Him': the mystery of Christ's sending the Spirit, which also implies the Spirit's personal procession from the Son, is something the Savior taught His disciples gradually. In John 14:16 He says, 'I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper.' Further along in His discourse He takes them one step further (verse 26): 'But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the

Father will send in My name.' Then in John 15:26 He says, 'I will send Him to you from the Father.' And here He says simply, 'I will send Him.' The matter of Christ's sending the Holy Spirit — which implies His personal procession from the Son as well — was a deep mystery His disciples could not take in all at once, and so He led them into it step by step.

To sum it up: the presence of the Holy Spirit with believers as a Comforter, sent by Christ for the purposes He was promised for, is better and more beneficial for believers than any bodily presence of Christ could be, now that He has offered the one sacrifice for sin that He came to offer.

The Holy Spirit is promised in two distinct roles. 1. As a Spirit of sanctification to the elect — to convert them and make them believers. 2. As a Spirit of consolation to believers — to bring them the blessings secured by Christ's death and purchase. It is only in the second sense that He is spoken of here. Regarding His presence with us in this role and the purposes for which He is sent, observe:

1. The source and foundation of it. 2. The manner of His being given. 3. Our manner of receiving Him. 4. His abiding with us. 5. His working in us. 6. What the effects of His working in us are — and from all of this, how we hold communion with Him will become clear.

What Scripture says about each of these will be briefly considered.

First, for the source of the Spirit's coming: it is stated in John 15:26 — 'He proceeds from the Father.' This is the fountain of this whole arrangement. There is a twofold procession of the Spirit.

First, in respect of substance and personality.

Second, dispensatory — in respect of the work of grace. The first — in which sense the Spirit is the Spirit of both the Father and the Son, proceeding from both eternally, and in that procession receiving His substance and personal existence — is not what I am addressing here. That is a question of a different nature from what I now have in hand. It is, however, the first and most foundational basis of all our distinct communion with Him and our worship of Him. Staying only at that level, we can make no further progress than the bare resting of faith in the mystery revealed, and the worship owed to the Person solely because of His participation in the divine essence. I will not dwell on it here.

His dispensatory or economic procession mentioned in John 15:26 is His procession for carrying forward the work of grace. It is spoken of in reference to His being sent by Christ after the ascension: 'I will send Him who proceeds' — meaning, when I send Him. Just as God is said to arise from His place (Isaiah 26:21) — not because of any change in Him but because of the new work He would accomplish — so here the mention is in relation to a specific work: to testify of Christ. This cannot be attributed to the Spirit's eternal procession but to His actual work in history. As it is said of Christ: 'He came forth from God.' This outward relation of the Spirit to the Father and Son in terms of operation also demonstrates His inward relation in terms of personal procession.

Three things are important to consider in the foundation of this arrangement as it bears on our communion with the Holy Spirit.

First, that the will of the Spirit is present in the work. He Himself comes forth. Frequent mention is made of His being sent, given, and poured out. But lest anyone think He is merely an inferior, created spirit — a mere servant, as some have blasphemously said — or merely a power of God as others have imagined, personal characteristics are attributed to Him in this work, indicating His distinct personhood and freedom. He proceeds of His own accord and by His own will.

Second, the condescension of the Holy Spirit in this ordering of His work — to proceed from the Father and the Son in carrying out this work, taking on the role of Comforter just as the Son took on the role of Redeemer.

Third, the ultimate source of everything is revealed to be the Father — so that we may recognize His works as flowing from the electing love that Scripture everywhere ascribes to the Father. This is the order implied here. First, the purpose of the Father's love — the fountain of all. Then the asking of the Son (John 14:16), which includes His merit and purchase. From this follows the willing procession of the Holy Spirit. This also confirms the foundation of this whole discussion: our distinct communion with the Father in love, the Son in grace, and the Holy Spirit in consolation. This is the door and entrance into the fellowship of the Holy Spirit to which we are called. When by faith we fix on His gracious and willing coming, His infinite and unspeakable condescension, as the foundation of all the effects He works in us and all the privileges He brings us — our souls are drawn into direct, personal fellowship with Him, and our desires, affections, and gratitude are directed toward Him.

Second, the manner of His being given — the way He is communicated to us from this source — is also significant, and it is described in various ways to convey three things.

First, the freeness of it. He is said to be given: 'He will give you another Helper' (John 14:16). The most common way of describing the communication of the Spirit is that He is given and received as a gift. 'He will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him.' What comes as a gift is free; the Spirit of grace is given by grace. Not only is the Spirit of sanctification a free gift, but in the sense of consolation He is also a gift — He is promised to be given to believers. Hence the Spirit is said to be received through faith in the gospel, not through the law (Galatians 3:2) — that is, purely by grace, not through any effort of our own. All His workings are called free gifts. He is freely given and freely works. The varying degrees in which He is received by believers for the purposes of consolation — which are great, varied, and beyond expression — arise from the fact that we have Him by gift and donation. This is the basis on which we hold and enjoy Him: a basis of free gift. So He is to be looked to, asked for, and received. Faith rests on this in our communion with the Comforter. The harmony of His own will with the gift of Father and Son — the first pointing to the distinct operation of the Godhead in the person of the Holy Spirit, the second to the arrangement of the whole Trinity in the work of our salvation through Jesus Christ — causes the soul to rejoice in the Comforter: that He is willing to come, that He is willing to be given. And since all of it is will and gift, grace is greatly honored by it.

2. The authority of it; hence He is said to be sent. In John 14:26: 'The Father will send Him in My name'; and in John 15:26: 'I will send Him to you from the Father'; and in John 16:7: 'I will

send Him to you.' This sending of the Holy Spirit by the Father and the Son corresponds both to the order of the persons' subsistence in the blessed Trinity and to His procession from them both — and also to the order they voluntarily undertook for the accomplishment of the work of our salvation. In it there is, in a most particular way, the condescension of the Holy Spirit in His love toward us — submitting to the authoritative delegation of Father and Son in this matter. This implies not a difference or inequality of essence, but of office in this work. It is the office of the Holy Spirit to be our advocate and our comforter; in that respect — not absolutely — He is thus authoritatively sent by Father and Son. It is a well-known principle that inequality of office does not eliminate equality of nature. This subordination (if I may call it that) — or inequality with respect to office — in no way undermines the equality of nature He shares with the Father and Son, any more than the Son's being sent by the Father undermines His. Upon this authoritative mission of the Spirit depends the proper understanding of many gospel mysteries and the right ordering of our hearts in communion with Him.

Hence the sin against the Holy Spirit — whatever exactly it is, I will not discuss that now — is unpardonable, and has the character of rebellion attached to it that no other sin has. This is because He comes and acts not only in His own name, but in the name and authority of the Father and Son, from and by whom He is sent. Therefore to sin against Him is to sin against the full authority of God, against the love of the entire Trinity, and against the supreme condescension of each Person toward the work of our salvation. It is, I say, from the authoritative mission of the Spirit that the sin against Him is especially unpardonable. It is a sin against the gath-

ered love of the Father, Son, and Spirit all at once. From this consideration — were that our present subject — the true nature of the sin against the Holy Spirit could be explored. It must certainly involve contempt of some work of His as He acts in the name and authority of the whole Trinity, and that in their incomprehensible condescension toward the work of grace. But this belongs to a different discussion.

2. On this basis, we are to pray to the Father and the Son to give us the Spirit. 'Your heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him' (Luke 11:13). Now the Holy Spirit, being God, is no less to be called upon, prayed to, and invoked than the Father and the Son, as I have shown elsewhere. How then do we ask the Father for Him in all our prayers — since we also pray that the Spirit Himself would come to us, visit us, and abide with us? When we direct our prayers to Him personally, we address Him as essentially God over all, blessed forever. When we ask the Father and Son for Him, we do so as He comes to us under their mission and delegation. God having most fully revealed Himself through the order of this arrangement, we are — as Christians generally do — to address ourselves accordingly: not only praying to the person of the Holy Spirit directly, but also properly asking the Father and Son to send Him, in line with this arrangement.

3. This is also why Scripture lays such particular weight on our not grieving the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30) — because He comes to us in the name, with the love, and through the condescension of the entire blessed Trinity. To do what might grieve One who comes on such a commission, for such a purpose as will be mentioned later, is a great intensification of sin. He has every right to expect a warm welcome — both on His own account and on account of the work

He comes to do. But when it is added that He is sent by the Father and Son, bearing their love and grace, to communicate them to our souls, this should be of unspeakable value to believers. And this is the second thing expressed in the manner of His communication: He is sent by authority.

He is also said to be poured out or shed upon us: 'the Holy Spirit whom He poured out upon us richly' (Titus 3:6). This was the main way of expressing His communication in the Old Testament, when the mystery of the Father and Son, and the matter of commission and delegation, was not yet so clearly revealed. 'Until the Spirit is poured out upon us from on high, and the wilderness becomes a fertile field, and the fertile field is considered a forest' (Isaiah 32:15) — that is, until the Gentiles are called in and the Jews are set aside. And in Isaiah 44:3: 'I will pour out My Spirit on your offspring and My blessing on your descendants.' The well-known passage of Zechariah 12:10 is always before our minds. This expression, as is well known, is drawn from the analogy of the Spirit to water — in relation to all the uses of water, both in nature and in the types. I cannot dwell on each use in particular; the ideas of abundance and effectiveness are probably the primary ones.

Now this threefold description — giving, sending, and pouring out the Spirit — points to the three great characteristics of the covenant of grace.

1. That it is free: He is given. 2. That it is orderly, ordered in all things and sure — flowing from the Father's love, through the Son's purchase; and hence the varied expressions of the Father sending Him, and the Son sending Him from the Father, since He

is both the gift of the Father's love and the purchase of the Son's blood. 3. The efficacy of it, as was just observed — and this is the second thing to consider.

Third, our receiving of the Spirit. Our receiving Him as a Spirit of sanctification is entirely passive — like a vessel receiving water. He comes like the wind on Ezekiel's dry bones and makes them live. He enters dead hearts and quickens them by an act of His almighty power. But as the Spirit of consolation, it is different. In this sense, our Savior tells us that the world cannot receive Him (John 14:17): 'The world cannot receive Him, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.' That it is the Spirit of consolation promised here is clear from the end of the verse, where He is said to be in them when promised to them. He was already in them as a Spirit of life and sanctification when He was promised to them as a Spirit of comfort and consolation to abide with them for that purpose. The capacity denied to the world — along with the reason that they cannot receive the Spirit because they do not know Him — is attributed to believers: they can receive Him because they know Him. So there is an active capacity to be exercised in receiving Him for consolation, though not in receiving Him for regeneration and sanctification. This active capacity is faith. 'Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?' (Galatians 3:2). Hence believing is given as the qualification for all our receiving of the Holy Spirit (John 7:39). Believers receive the Spirit, and they receive Him by faith. There are three specific acts of faith through which it goes out in receiving the Spirit.

First, faith considers the Spirit in the arrangement described above — as promised. It is faith alone that benefits from the promises (Hebrews 4:2). He is called 'the promised Holy Spirit' (Ephesians 1:13) — the Spirit promised in the covenant. 'We receive the promise of the Spirit through faith' (Galatians 3:14). So receiving the Spirit through faith means receiving Him as promised. Faith looks to the promise of God and of Jesus Christ to send the Spirit for all the purposes He is desired. And so faith depends and waits, resting on the promise, until it receives Him.

Second, by prayer. He is given as a Spirit of supplication so that we may ask Him as a Spirit of consolation (Luke 11:13). This asking of the Spirit of God in the name of Christ — whether directly and personally or by asking for some fruit and effect of His presence — is the chief work of faith in this world.

Third, faith cherishes Him by paying attention to His movements and building on His workings according to His will and purpose. This is all I will say about our receiving of the Spirit, who is sent by Jesus Christ. We receive Him by faith, looking on Him as purchased by Jesus Christ and promised by the Father — and on that basis we seek Him from God and do receive Him.

Fourth, the next important thing to consider is His abiding with us. Scripture expresses this in two ways. First, in general as to the fact itself: He will abide with us. Second, in particular as to the manner of His abiding: by inhabiting or indwelling. The Spirit, as noted, is considered either as a Spirit of sanctification or as a Spirit of consolation. He is said to dwell in us chiefly — or perhaps solely — as a Spirit of sanctification, as is evident from the work He does as the indwelling Spirit: He gives life and makes holy (Romans 8:11). The manner of His indwelling — as in a temple which He

thereby makes holy (2 Corinthians 6) — and His permanent residence there clearly relate to sanctification only. Yet the general idea of His abiding is attributed to Him as Comforter in John 14:16: 'He will abide with you forever.' The difficulty in this promise is this: whereas the Spirit of sanctification dwells in us permanently — making it impossible for us to utterly lose our holiness — why is it that, if the Comforter abides with us forever, we can still completely lose our comfort?

First, He is promised to abide with the disciples forever, in contrast to Christ's bodily presence with them. Christ in the flesh had been with them for a little while and was now leaving. He had been their Comforter directly and personally for a season, but was now departing. They might fear that another comforter would likewise visit them for only a short time, leaving their condition worse than before. Not so, says the Savior: this is the final arrangement. There will be no further change. When I am gone, the Comforter will do all the remaining work; there is no other to be looked for. I promise Him to you, and He will not leave you but will always abide with you.

Second, the Comforter may always abide with us while not always comforting us. He who is the Comforter may abide even when He is not actively performing that work. For other ends and purposes He is always with us — chiefly to sanctify and make us holy. This was David's situation in Psalm 51:11-12: 'Do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.' The Holy Spirit of sanctification was still with David, but he prayed, 'Restore to me the joy of Your salvation' — that is, the Spirit of consolation, which had been withdrawn while the other dimension of His presence continued.

Third, the Comforter may abide as Comforter even when He is not actively bringing comfort to the soul. As to the essence of holiness, He cannot dwell in us without also making us holy — for the temple of God is holy. But as to His comforting work, all His activity in that regard follows His sovereign will — so He may abide and yet not actually bring us comfort.

Fourth, the Spirit often works on our behalf and offers consolation to us when we are not receiving it. The well is nearby and we do not see it; we refuse to be comforted. The Spirit as sanctifier comes with power to overcome an unbelieving heart. The Spirit as Comforter comes with gentleness to be received by a believing heart. He speaks and we do not believe it is His voice; He offers the things of consolation and we do not take them. 'My soul refused to be comforted,' says David.

Fifth, I deny that the Holy Spirit ever absolutely and completely abandons a believing soul, leaving it without any consolation. A person may be darkened, clouded over, and refusing comfort — actually feeling and finding none. But at his root he has a foundation of consolation that will in due time be drawn forth. Therefore when God promises to heal sinners and restore comfort to them (Isaiah 57:18), it is not because they had none at all, but because they did not have as much as they needed. The Spirit, being sent and given, abides with the souls of believers and does not leave them — though He manifests Himself in His workings in varying ways.

Part 3, Chapter 2: The Actings of the Holy Spirit — He Works Effectually, Distributes, Gives

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Having described where the Holy Spirit comes from and how He is given to us as a Spirit of consolation, I now turn to what He does in us and toward us, having been so given and received. There are two main areas to consider. First, the manner and kind of His working in us, expressed in various ways. Second, the particular products of His working in our souls, in which we hold communion with Him.

First, He is said to work effectually: 'One and the same Spirit works all these things' (1 Corinthians 12:11). That is spoken there with respect to His distributing gifts, but the same manner applies to His communication of graces and privileges. He does it by working — which, especially considered with the words that follow ('distributing to each one individually just as He wills,' for to act according to one's own will is the defining property of a person) confirms both His distinct personhood and His deity. What is said here of the Spirit given to us is the same as what verse 6 attributes to God Himself: 'There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons.' What we receive from Him, we

receive through His powerful, direct working. It is not merely a matter of His presenting us with this or that argument, persuading us through moral motives and inducements alone, leaving us to make the best use of them. He Himself effectively produces within us whatever grace or consolation He communicates.

Second, in the same verse with regard to the manner of His working: He distributes to each one as He wills. This distribution implies choice, judgment, and freedom — beyond mere operation. One who distributes variously does so with discernment, judgment, and freedom of will. This describes how the Spirit proceeds in His dispensations. To one He gives one thing prominently, to another something else; to one in one degree, to another in a different degree. By this sovereignty the saints are kept in constant dependence on Him. He distributes as He wills — who should not be content with their portion? What claim can anyone make to what He distributes as He wills?

Third, He is said to give whatever He bestows. 'They spoke with other tongues as the Spirit was giving them utterance' — He gave it (Acts 2:4), that is, freely. Whatever He bestows on us is of His gift. It is therefore to be observed that in the arrangement of our salvation, the actions of no one Person in the Trinity undermine the freedom and liberty of another. The love of the Father in sending the Son is free, and His sending does not in any way diminish the liberty and love of the Son, who also lays down His life freely. The satisfaction and purchase made by the Son does not in any way undermine the freedom of the Father's grace in pardoning and accepting us on that basis. The sending of the Spirit by Father and Son does not diminish His freedom in His workings — He

gives freely what He gives. The reason is that the will of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is essentially one, so that in the action of any one of them the counsel of all is present, and each acts freely in it.

This is the general description of the manner and kind of the Spirit's working in us and toward us, once He is given. Power, discernment, and freedom are clearly conveyed in the expressions examined. This is not describing any specific work He does toward us, but the manner in which He produces the effects that will be discussed.

What remains for establishing the foundation of our communion with the Holy Spirit are the effects He produces — being sent and working in the manner described. I will take them up not in any systematic order but as I find them scattered through Scripture, simply moving from the more general to the more specific.

As I have noted before: I am speaking of the Spirit primarily, if not exclusively, as Comforter and not as sanctifier. Therefore the great work of the Spirit in us — in the constant and ongoing supply of new light, power, and vitality as we receive grace from Him — which belongs under the heading of sanctification, must be set aside here.

Nor will I address what the Comforter does through believers toward others — testifying of Christ and convicting the world (John 15:26; 16:8-9), in which role He is properly their Advocate. I will address only those things He does as Comforter in and toward those on whom He is bestowed.

Part 3, Chapter 3: The Things of Our Communion with the Holy Spirit

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This chapter concerns the things in which we hold communion with the Holy Spirit. He brings to mind the things Christ spoke (John 14:26). How He does this. The Spirit glorifies Christ in the hearts of believers (John 16:14) and pours out God's love in them. What the witness of the Spirit is (Romans 8:16). The sealing of the Spirit (Ephesians 1:13). How the Spirit is an earnest — on God's part and on the saints' part. The difference between the earnest of the Spirit and tasting the powers of the age to come. The anointing of the Spirit (Isaiah 11:2-3). The various ways the Holy Spirit teaches. How the Spirit is a Spirit of adoption and a Spirit of prayer.

The things I referred to in the previous chapters as effects of the Holy Spirit in us and toward us are the substance of our communion with Him — the specific ways in which we hold fellowship with Him as our Comforter. These are now set out for consideration.

1. The first and most general is from John 14:26. 'But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.' There are two parts to this promise.

1. Teaching. 2. Bringing to remembrance.

His teaching I will address later when I come to treat of His anointing us.

His bringing to remembrance the things Christ spoke is the first general promise of Him as Comforter. He will call all these things to your mind — and this too may be understood in two ways:

1. Simply with regard to the content of the things spoken. In this sense, the Savior here promises His apostles that the Holy Spirit would by direct influence bring to their minds what He had said, so that through His inspiration they would be able to write and preach those things for the good and benefit of His church. As Peter tells us: 'Men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God' (2 Peter 1:21) — that is, in writing Scripture. They were carried along by Him, lifted beyond themselves to speak His words and what He placed in them. The apostles had forgotten much of what Christ had said, or might forget; and what they did retain through natural memory was not a sufficient basis for writing what they remembered as a rule of faith for the church. For the word of prophecy does not come from any human impulse; it does not arise from any person's own conception, understanding, or memory. Therefore Christ promises that the Holy Spirit would do this work so that they could infallibly deliver what He had given them. Hence that expression in Luke chapter 1 —

Luke's preface is best understood as saying he had obtained complete and sure knowledge of these things from above — pointing to the source and ground of his ability to give them out infallibly as a rule of faith for the church, rather than indicating when the events themselves took place, which the word itself does not easily allow.

2. With regard to the comfort of what Christ had spoken — which seems to be a major part of the intent of this promise. He had been speaking to them things suited to bring them comfort: precious promises of the supply they would have from Him in this life, of the Father's love, of the glory He was preparing for them — the sense and comfort of which is beyond words, and the joy arising from them full of glory. But He says: I know how incapable you are of making these things work for your own consolation; therefore the Spirit will bring them back to your minds with their full power and effect, for the very purpose for which I spoke them. This is one reason why it was better for believers that Christ's bodily presence be replaced by the presence of the Spirit. While He was with them, how little effect did His heavenly promises have on their hearts? When the Spirit came, how full of joy did He make everything for them? What was the Spirit's specific work — belonging to Him by virtue of His office, so that He too might be glorified — was reserved for Him. And this is His work to the end of the world: to bring the promises of Christ to our minds and hearts, giving us the comfort, joy, and sweetness of them — far beyond what the disciples found in those same words when Christ spoke them in person. Their full influence was restrained at that time so that the Spirit's dispensation might be glorified, as the next words of this promise confirm (verse 27): 'Peace I leave with you; My

peace I give to you.' The Comforter being sent to bring what Christ said to remembrance, the result is peace and freedom from troubled hearts. All the peace, relief, comfort, joy, and strength we receive at any time from any work, promise, or act of Christ — it all belongs to this ministry of the Comforter. It is futile to apply our natural ability to remembering and meditating on Christ's promises; daily experience proves it is not enough. But when the Comforter undertakes the work, it is accomplished. How we hold distinct communion with Him in this — through faith and obedience, in the consolation received through the promises He brings to mind — will be addressed later. This much is established in general: our Savior Jesus Christ leaving even the power of the promises He personally gave His apostles in their great distress — in regard to consolation — to the Holy Spirit shows us the immediate source of all the spiritual comfort we have in this world, and the fellowship we hold with the Holy Spirit in it.

In this, as in all the effects that follow, the manner of the Spirit's working must always be kept in mind — His power, His will, and His goodness in it. He does this:

1. Powerfully, or effectually. 2. Voluntarily. 3. Freely.

First, powerfully. This is why comfort drawn from the words and promises of Christ sometimes breaks through all opposition into the saddest and darkest condition imaginable. It comes and makes people sing in a prison cell, rejoice in flames, glory in suffering. It enters dungeons and places of torture, through temptations and the worst distress imaginable. Where does this come from? The Spirit works with power; His power is in it. He will work, and no one will stop Him. If He chooses to bring Christ's promises to our remembrance for our consolation, neither Satan

nor man, sin nor world, nor death itself will interrupt our comfort. The saints who hold communion with the Holy Spirit know this for their benefit. Sometimes the sky over them is dark and the ground beneath them shakes; public and personal disasters appear so full of dread and darkness that they are ready to give up. And then comes their great relief — their spirits are restored. Their consolation does not depend on any outward circumstance or on the state of their own hearts, but on the powerful and effective working of the Holy Spirit, to whom by faith they yield themselves.

Second, voluntarily — distributing to each one as He wills. This is why this work is done in such great variety, both in the same person at different times and in different people. For the same person: sometimes full of joy in great distress, full of consolation, every promise bringing sweetness when pressures are heavy. At another time, in a comparatively minor trial, searching the promises for comfort and finding them distant. The reason is that the Spirit distributes as He wills. So also with different people: to some every promise is full of life and comfort; others taste little all their days. Faith especially takes this to heart in the whole matter of consolation — it depends on the sovereign will of the Holy Spirit and is not tied to fixed rules or predictable patterns. Therefore faith exercises itself in waiting on Him for the fulfillment of His good pleasure in His own time.

Third, freely. Much of the variety in the Spirit's dispensing of consolation through promises depends on this freedom of His working. This is why comfort sometimes comes unexpectedly, when the heart has every reason in the world to anticipate distress and sorrow. Sometimes it is the very first means of restoring a soul that had wandered, and who might justly have expected to be en-

tirely cast off. These observations carry through to all the other effects and fruits of the Comforter. In this first general effect — the Holy Spirit's work toward us — we hold communion and fellowship with Him. The life and soul of all our comforts are stored up in Christ's promises. They are the fountainhead of all our consolation. Who does not know how powerless they can be in the bare letter, even when we have done our best to think about them and meditate on them — and yet how unexpectedly they sometimes break in on the soul with a conquering, endearing life and energy? Here faith deals distinctly with the Holy Spirit. It examines the promises; looks up to Him; waits for Him; notices His movements; and in the word it rests upon, acknowledges Him in His working. No sooner does the soul begin to feel the life of a promise warming its heart — bringing relief, nurturing it, sustaining it, freeing it from fear and trouble — than it may and should recognize that the Holy Spirit is there. This will add to its joy and lead it into fellowship with Him.

Second, the next general work appears to be that of John 16:14: 'He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you.' The work of the Spirit is to glorify Christ. By this we can see how far from being the Comforter is any spirit that sets itself up in Christ's place — that says it is everything, and that as for the One who suffered in Jerusalem, we need not concern ourselves with Him. That is not the Comforter; the Comforter's work is to glorify Christ, the One who sent Him. This is a clear mark of a false spirit: whatever its claims may be, if it does not glorify the Christ who was now speaking to His apostles — and many such spirits have gone out into the world. What will this Spirit do to glorify Christ? He will take of what is Mine. What those things are is stated in the

following verse: 'All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you.' Our Savior is not speaking of the essence and essential attributes of the Father and Son, but of the grace communicated to us by them. Christ calls these 'His things,' since they are the fruit of His purchase and mediation. On this basis He says all the Father's things are His — that is, the things the Father in His eternal love has provided to be given out through the blood of His Son, all the fruits of election. These the Comforter will receive — meaning they will be committed to Him to dispense for our good. It follows: He will show and declare and make them known to you. This is how He is a Comforter. He reveals to the souls of believers the good things of the covenant of grace that the Father has provided and the Son purchased. He shows us mercy, grace, forgiveness, righteousness, and acceptance with God. He makes us know that these are Christ's things, secured for us by Him. He shows them to us for our comfort and assurance. He effectively declares these things to the souls of believers, making them know them as originally the Father's things, prepared from eternity in His love and goodwill; purchased by Christ and stored up in the covenant of grace for their use. At that point Christ is magnified and glorified in their hearts; they know what a Savior and Redeemer He is. Whenever a soul glorifies and honors Christ through a sense and discovery of the eternal redemption He purchased for it, that is a specific effect of the Holy Spirit as Comforter. 'No one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit' (1 Corinthians 12:3).

3. He pours out the love of God in our hearts (Romans 5:5). The context makes completely clear that this is God's love toward us, not our love toward God. Now the love of God is either the love

of His purpose — His purpose to do us good — or the love of His acceptance and approval of us. Both of these are frequently called the love of God in Scripture, as I have shown. How can these be poured out in our hearts? Not in themselves, but in a sense of them, in a spiritual awareness of them. The same word used for the Spirit being given to us (Titus 3:6) — God pours Him out abundantly — is used here: He pours out the love of God in our hearts. Setting aside the figure, the point is this: the Comforter gives the soul a sweet and abundant awareness and assurance of God's love toward it — one that captivates, delights, and satisfies the soul. This is His work, and He does it with power. To give a poor, sinful soul a comforting persuasion — affecting it throughout, in all its faculties and affections — that God in Jesus Christ loves it, delights in it, is pleased with it, and has thoughts of tenderness and kindness toward it: to give a soul an overflowing sense of this is a mercy beyond words.

We have this in a distinctive way through the Holy Spirit; it is His specific work. As all His works are works of love and kindness, so this work of communicating a sense of the Father's love weaves itself into everything else He does. In this we hold distinct communion with the Spirit Himself; and through Him we have communion with the Father in His love, which is thus poured out in our hearts. So we rejoice in and glorify not only the Holy Spirit who does this work, but also the One whose love it is. The same is true in relation to the Son, in His taking what is His and showing it to us, as was described. All the foretaste of heaven we have in this world is contained in this — and the manner of our fellowship with the Holy Spirit in this respect lines up with what was said before.

4. Another effect is described in Romans 8:16: 'The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God.' You know what family we belong to by nature: children of Satan, and of the curse, children of wrath. By the Spirit we are brought into a different standing and adopted as children of God, since by receiving the Spirit of our Father we become children of our Father. This is why He is called the Spirit of adoption in verse 15. Now sometimes the soul — because it still has within it something of the old principle it had in its former condition — is brought to question whether it is a child of God, and on a matter of such supreme importance, it presents its claim with all the evidence it has to establish its title. The Spirit comes and bears witness in this situation. The picture is drawn from legal proceedings in cases involving titles and evidence. The judge is seated; the person concerned lays out his claim, produces his evidence, and pleads it; his opponents are doing everything in their power to invalidate his evidence and overturn his plea. In the middle of the hearing, a person of known and unimpeachable integrity comes into the court and gives clear and full testimony on behalf of the claimant — silencing all his opponents and filling the man with joy and relief. So it is in this case. The soul, under the pressure of its own conscience, stands before the law of God. There it presents its plea: that it is a child of God, that it belongs to God's family, and to support this claim it brings forward all its evidence — everything by which faith gives it a stake in God. Satan meanwhile opposes with all his strength; sin and the law assist him. Many flaws are found in the evidence; the truth of everything is challenged; the soul hangs in suspense about the outcome. In the middle of this contest, the Comforter comes — and by a word of promise, or by some other means, overpowers the heart

with a comforting assurance, sweeping away all objections, that the plea is sound and that the person is indeed a child of God. Therefore it is said of Him: when our spirits are pleading their right and title, He comes and bears witness on our side — and at the same time enabling us to act in the manner of a child, with a filial spirit, which is called crying 'Abba, Father!' (Galatians 4:6). Always remember the manner of the Spirit's working described earlier: He does it with power, freely, and according to His will. Therefore sometimes the dispute drags on for a long time; the case is being pleaded for years. The law seems sometimes to be winning; sin and Satan appear to rejoice. The poor soul is filled with dread about its inheritance. Perhaps its own witness from faith, sanctification, and past experience keeps the plea alive with some life and comfort — but the work is not done and the victory is not fully won until the Spirit, who works freely and effectively when and how He wills, adds His testimony as well. Clothing His power in a word of promise, He commands the attention of all parties and brings the dispute to an end.

In this He gives us holy communion with Himself. The soul recognizes His voice when He speaks — it does not sound like a human voice. There is something too great in it to be the effect of a created power. When the Lord Jesus Christ stilled the raging sea and wind with a single word, all who were with Him knew that divine power was at work (Matthew 8:26). And when the Holy Spirit with a single word stills the turmoil and storms that have been raised in the soul — bringing immediate calm and peace — the soul recognizes His divine power and rejoices in His presence.

5. He seals us. 'You were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise' (Ephesians 1:13); 'do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption' (Ephesians 4:30). I am not entirely certain about the precise intent of this figure, but I will briefly share what I believe Scripture means by it. In a seal two things are considered:

1. The nature of it. 2. The use of it.

The nature of sealing consists in the imparting of the image or character of the seal to the thing sealed. In this sense, the effective communication of God's image to us is our sealing. By genuinely communicating to believers the image of God in righteousness and true holiness, the Spirit seals us. To have this impression of the Holy Spirit as evidence to the soul that it is accepted by God is to be sealed by the Spirit. In this sense our Savior is said to be sealed by God (John 6:27) — from the stamp of God's power, wisdom, and majesty upon Him in the carrying out of His office.

The purposes of sealing are twofold. First, to confirm or ratify a grant or conveyance put in writing — in such cases people set their seals to validate and confirm their grants, and once this is done they are irrevocable. Second, to confirm testimony given about the truth of any matter. This was the Jewish practice: when someone had given true witness to something and the judges accepted it, they set their seal to it to confirm it as valid. Hence it is said that whoever receives the testimony of Christ sets his seal that God is true (John 3:33). The promise is the great grant and conveyance of life and salvation in Christ to the souls of believers. So that we may have full assurance of the truth and permanence of the promise, God gives us the Spirit to satisfy our hearts of it — and therefore He is said to seal us, assuring our hearts of those promises and

their dependability. However, though many commentators take this approach, I do not see how it fits the actual meaning of the word: it says not that the promise is sealed but that we are sealed — and when we seal a deed to someone, we say the deed is sealed, not the person.

Second, to mark out, distinguish, and keep safe. This is the purpose of sealing: people set their seals on what they claim and wish to preserve for themselves. Clearly in this sense the servants of God are said to be sealed (Revelation 7:4) — marked with God's mark as His own. This sealing corresponds to the setting of a mark in Ezekiel 9. Believers are sealed when they are marked for God, as heirs of the purchased inheritance, to be preserved until the day of redemption. If this is the intended meaning of sealing, it denotes not an experience of assurance in the heart but a security granted to the person.

If asked which of these is the primary meaning of our being sealed by the Holy Spirit, I answer: the first, without excluding the second. We are sealed until the day of redemption when, from the stamp, image, and character of the Spirit upon our souls, we are given a fresh sense of God's love and a comforting assurance of our acceptance with Him.

In this way the Holy Spirit communicates to us His own likeness, which is also the image of the Father and the Son. 'We all are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit' (2 Corinthians 3:18). In this He draws us into fellowship with Himself. Our likeness to Him gives us confidence in approaching Him. We look for His work; we pray for His

fruit. When any expression of grace — any discovery of the image of Christ planted in us — gives us a sense of being set apart and marked out for God, we hold communion with Him in that.

Sixth, He is an earnest to us. 'He who also gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge' (2 Corinthians 1:22). 'Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge' (2 Corinthians 5:5). 'You were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance' (Ephesians 1:13-14). In the first two passages we are said to have the pledge of the Spirit; in the last, the Spirit is said to be our pledge. The Spirit is our earnest or pledge, as the last passage states. Understanding what is meant by 'the Spirit' here, and what is meant by an 'earnest,' will shed light on this privilege we receive from the Comforter.

As to which gift of the Spirit is meant by this earnest: it is the Spirit Himself, personally considered, who is said to be this earnest. 'It is God who has given the pledge of the Spirit in our hearts' (2 Corinthians 1:22) — an expression that directly parallels Galatians 4:6: 'God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts.' That is the person of the Spirit, for nothing else can be called the Spirit of His Son. And Ephesians 1:14: He has given the Spirit — the one promised — who is that earnest. The promised Spirit Himself is this earnest. In giving us this Spirit, He gives us this pledge.

An earnest — the Greek word is neither originally Greek nor Latin, but comes from the Hebrew word meaning 'pledge,' which, as some scholars believe, entered the Greek language through Phoenician merchants, being a commercial term. The Latin borrowed from it: arrha and arrabo. Some render it in Latin as pignus,

meaning a pledge, but that cannot be what is intended here. A pledge is something a person gives into another's keeping to assure him that he will deliver or pay something else — like what we would call a deposit. What is intended here is a part of the very thing that is coming — a portion of it — in keeping with the commercial use of the word from which the image is drawn. Therefore it is well rendered in English as an 'earnest': a portion of the price of something, or a part of any grant, given in advance to assure the recipient that at the appointed time he will receive the whole that was promised.

For something to function as an earnest, two things are required. First, it must be part of the whole — of the same kind and nature as what is to come — as when we give some money as a deposit toward paying a larger amount. Second, it must be a confirmation of a promise and agreement — first the whole is promised, then the earnest is given to guarantee that the promise will be kept.

The Spirit is this earnest. God gives us the promise of eternal life. To confirm it to us, He gives us His Spirit as the first installment of the promise, to secure us of the whole. Hence He is said to be the earnest of the inheritance that is promised and purchased. We may consider how He is an earnest on the part of God who gives Him, and on the part of believers who receive Him.

First, He is an earnest on God's part in that God gives Him as a choice portion of the inheritance itself — of the same kind as the whole, as an earnest should be. The full inheritance promised is the fullness of the Spirit in the enjoyment of God. When the Spirit who is given to us in this world has perfectly removed all sin and sorrow and made us fully able to enjoy the glory of God in His

presence, that is the full inheritance promised. So the Spirit given to us now, for enabling us to enjoy God in some measure while we are here, is the earnest of the whole.

Second, God does this to assure and secure us of the inheritance. Having given us so many guarantees outside ourselves — His word, promises, covenant, oath, and the revelation of His faithfulness and unchangeableness through all of them — He is also pleased to graciously give us one within us (Isaiah 59:21; Hebrews 6:17-18). What more could be done? He has given us the Holy Spirit — in Him the firstfruits of glory, the supreme pledge of His love, the earnest of all.

Second, on the believers' part, He is an earnest in that He gives them an awareness of God's love and their acceptance with Him. He makes known to them their standing in His sight: that He is their Father and will treat them as children, and therefore the inheritance will be theirs. He sends His Spirit into our hearts, crying "Abba, Father" (Galatians 4:6). And what do believers conclude from this (verse 7)? That we are no longer servants but sons, and if sons, then heirs of God. The same apostle says in Romans 8:17: "If children, then heirs — heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ." From the Spirit's assurance that we are children, the conclusion follows: then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ. We therefore have both a right to the inheritance and an assurance of it. This is what we gain from the Spirit as earnest: He persuades us of our sonship and acceptance with God our Father. And 1 John 3:24 says: "By this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us." The Spirit makes us aware of it — not that

we always have this awareness clearly, but the argument is solid and valid in itself: we have the Spirit, therefore He dwells in us and we in Him.

The Spirit, being given as an earnest, acquaints believers with their inheritance (1 Corinthians 2:9-10). As an earnest, being part of the whole, gives knowledge of what the whole will be, so does the Spirit.

So the Spirit is in every respect a complete earnest: given by God, received by us, as the beginning of our inheritance and the assurance of its future fullness. As much as we have of the Spirit, so much we have of heaven in present enjoyment, and so much evidence of its future fullness. Under this understanding of Him in the arrangement of grace, believers receive Him and rejoice in Him. Every gracious, self-evidencing act of His in their hearts they receive with joy as a drop from heaven, longing for the ocean of it.

It remains only to briefly note the difference between believers receiving the Spirit as an earnest of the full inheritance and hypocrites tasting the powers of the age to come (Hebrews 6:5). At first glance, tasting the powers of the age to come seems to be the same as receiving the earnest of the inheritance.

But first, there is no real basis for thinking that "the powers of the age to come" in that passage refers to the joys of heaven. They are nowhere described in such terms, and the phrase does not suitably express the glory that will be revealed, in which we will share. Without doubt the phrase, addressed to Hebrews in their own manner of speaking, refers to the powerful ministry of the ordinances and arrangements of the gospel era — the great and effective things of the age to come. But:

2. Even if by "the powers of the age to come" we granted that the glory of heaven is meant, there is a great difference between briefly tasting something yourself and receiving an enduring pledge of it from God. To get a passing taste of heavenly things and to have those things assured to you by God out of His love are very different things. A hypocrite may for a time have his thoughts lifted to great joy and satisfaction when contemplating the blessings of God's kingdom, considering those things in themselves. But the Spirit as earnest gives us a pledge of those blessings as things provided specifically for us in the love of God and the purchase of His Son Jesus Christ. This by the way.

7. The Spirit anoints believers. "Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God" (2 Corinthians 1:21). "You have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know" (1 John 2:20; and verse 27). I will not trace this expression back to its full origin and background — I have done that elsewhere. The use of anointings in the Jewish church, the meaning and purpose of the types associated with them, and the offices to which people were consecrated by anointing form the background of this expression. Closer to it is the anointing of Jesus Christ Himself, from which He is called the Messiah and the Christ. The whole carrying out of His mediatorial office is called His anointing (Daniel 9), as it relates to His being equipped for it. Christ is said to be "anointed with the oil of gladness above His companions" (Hebrews 1:9), which corresponds to John 3:34: God gives Him the Spirit without measure. We who have the Spirit in measure are anointed with the oil of gladness. Christ has the fullness of the Spirit, from which our measure is drawn, so He is anointed above us, that in all things He might have first place. How Christ was anointed with the Spirit for

His threefold office of King, Priest, and Prophet, and how through an anointing with the same Spirit who dwells both in Him and in us we come to share in those offices and are made kings, priests, and prophets to God — all this is known and would require a long discussion to treat fully. My purpose here is only to communicate the matters at hand.

I will therefore focus on one passage where the gifts of the Spirit in Christ's anointing are listed — gifts in which, in our measure from Him and with Him through this anointing, we are made partakers: Isaiah 11:2-3. "The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and strength, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord." Many of Christ's endowments from the Spirit, with which He was abundantly anointed, are listed here. Chief among them are wisdom, counsel, and understanding — on account of which all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are said to be in Him (Colossians 2:3). Though this is only part of Christ's equipment for carrying out His office, it is what is particularly emphasized when our anointing for the same purpose is mentioned. As we see in 1 John 2:22 and 27, the work of this anointing is to teach us. The Spirit in it is a Spirit of wisdom and understanding, of counsel, knowledge, and sharp perception in the fear of the Lord. So was the great promise of the Comforter: that He would teach us (John 14:26) and guide us into all truth (John 16:13). This teaching us the mind and will of God, in the manner in which the Comforter teaches us, is an important part of our anointing by Him — and the only aspect I will single out here. Allow me to say there is a threefold teaching by the Spirit.

1. A teaching by the Spirit of conviction and illumination: in this way the Spirit teaches the world — that is, many within it — through the preaching of the word, as He is promised to do (John 16:8).

2. A teaching by the Spirit of sanctification: opening blind eyes, giving a renewed understanding, shining into our hearts to give us the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, enabling us to receive spiritual things in a spiritual light (1 Corinthians 2:8) — giving a saving knowledge of the mystery of the gospel. This, in various degrees, is common to all believers.

3. A teaching by the Spirit of consolation: making the discoveries of God's mind and will — known through the light of the Spirit of sanctification — sweet, useful, and joyful to the soul. Here the oil of the Spirit is called the oil of gladness, because it brings joy and delight with it. And the name of Christ revealed through it is like fragrant perfume poured out, causing souls to run after Him with joy and delight (Song of Solomon 1:2). Daily experience shows that many people have little taste, sweetness, or satisfaction in their souls for truths they genuinely know and believe. But when we are taught by this anointing — how sweet is everything we know of God! As we see in the passage from 1 John where this anointing's teaching is mentioned, it has to do specifically with the Spirit teaching us the love of God in Christ, the shining of His face — which, as David says, "puts gladness in my heart" (Psalm 4:6-7).

This is what we receive through the Spirit: He teaches us the love of God in Christ. He makes every gospel truth like fine wine to our souls, and its good things like a rich feast. He gives us joy and gladness of heart in everything we know of God, which is the great safeguard that keeps the soul close to truth. The apostle speaks of

our teaching by this anointing as the means by which we are preserved from being led astray. Indeed, to know any truth with a sense of its power, sweetness, joy, and delight is the great protection of the soul's faithfulness in holding and keeping it. Those who find no more sweetness in truth than in error will readily exchange one for the other. I must ask the reader's patience for passing so briefly over these great matters of the gospel — my present aim is to list them rather than fully develop them. This one work of the Holy Spirit, if fully pursued, would require a longer treatment than I can give to the whole subject at hand. All the privileges we enjoy, all the dignity and honor we are invested with, our whole dedication to God, our nobility and royalty, our share in all the advantages of the church, our approaches to God in worship, our separation from the world, the name by which we are called, the freedom we enjoy — all of these flow from this source and are all branches of this work of the Holy Spirit. I have mentioned only our teaching by this anointing: a teaching that brings joy and gladness with it by giving the heart a living sense of the truths it learns. When we find any of the good truths of the gospel coming home to our souls with life, energy, and power — filling our hearts with gladness, transforming us into the image and likeness of that truth — the Holy Spirit is then at His work, pouring out His oil.

We also receive adoption through the Spirit, which is why He is called the Spirit of adoption. This means either that He is given to adopted ones to assure them of their adoption and to produce in their hearts a sense and conviction of the Father's adopting love, or that He grants the privilege of adoption itself, as is suggested in John 1:12. Galatians 4:6 does not contradict this, since God may

send the Spirit of prayer into our hearts because we are sons while at the same time adopting us by His Spirit. But more on this elsewhere.

He is also called the Spirit of prayer, under which title He is promised in Zechariah 12:10. How He produces this in us is described in Romans 8:26-27 and Galatians 4:6, which is why we are said to pray in the Holy Spirit. Our prayers may be considered:

1. In two ways. First, as a spiritual duty required of us by God. In this case, they are produced in us by the Spirit of sanctification, who helps us carry out all our duties by elevating all the faculties of the soul for their spiritual function in each one.

2. Prayers are also a means of retaining communion with God — a way we pour out our hearts in the Father's presence and receive refreshing tastes of His love. The soul is never more lifted by the love of God than when the Spirit draws it into intimate fellowship with God through this duty. This belongs to the Spirit of consolation — the Spirit promised as Comforter. This brings us to the next thing to consider in our communion with the Holy Spirit: what are the particular effects He produces in us and toward us, given that He has been bestowed on us in the way described and works in the manner explained? These effects are: bringing Christ's promises to our remembrance, glorifying Him in our hearts, pouring the love of God into us, bearing witness to our spiritual condition, sealing us until the day of redemption, serving as the earnest of our inheritance, anointing us with the consolation of our privileges, confirming our adoption, and being present with us in our prayers. Here is the wisdom of faith: to seek out and meet

the Comforter in all these things — not to miss their sweetness by being unaware of who their author is, nor to fall short of the response He calls for from us.

Part 3, Chapter 4: General Consequences of the Holy Spirit's Work — Consolation, Peace, Joy, Hope

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This chapter concerns the general effects that the Holy Spirit's work produces in the hearts of believers: consolation, peace, and joy.

Having traced the way of our communion with the Holy Spirit and examined the most important effects He produces, it remains to describe the general consequences these effects bring about in the hearts of believers. I will do little more than name them here, since my aim is not to analyze their nature in detail but only to show how they relate to the subject at hand.

Consolation is the first of these. Acts 9:31 tells us the disciples walked in the fear of the Lord and in the consolation of the Holy Spirit. He is the Comforter, and from His work toward us and in us we receive comfort and consolation. This is the first general consequence of His work. Comfort or consolation in general is the settling and quieting of the soul in rest and contentment — in the midst of troubles or free from them — through the awareness or presence of some good in which the soul has a share, a good that

outweighs the evil, trouble, or distress it has to face. Wherever comfort and consolation are properly spoken of, there is always a reference to trouble or distress. 2 Corinthians 1:5-6 says that as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. Suffering and consolation are set in contrast, with consolation being the relief that answers suffering.

Consolation comes from the presence or awareness of a greater good that outweighs the evil or distress we are facing. All the sources of our consolation lie in the effects and acts of the Holy Spirit described earlier. There is no true comfort apart from them. Consider a person under the greatest calamity that could possibly come upon a child of God — or a combination of all the evils Paul lists in Romans 8:38. If the Holy Spirit is performing the works described toward that person, then in spite of all his suffering his consolations will overflow. Suppose he has a continuing sense of God's love poured out in his heart — a clear inner witness that he is a child of God, accepted by Him, sealed and marked by God as His own, and an heir of all God's promises. That person cannot fail to triumph in all his troubles.

From this source of all our consolation come the descriptions of it in Scripture based on its qualities. First, consolation is lasting — it is called everlasting consolation in 2 Thessalonians 2:16. It does not fade, because it rises from everlasting things. Temporary comfort may come for a short time from temporary things, but lasting consolation comes from things eternal: everlasting love, eternal redemption, an everlasting inheritance.

Second, consolation is strong. Hebrews 6:18 says that the heirs of the promise receive strong consolation. Just as strong opposition sometimes bears down on us, our consolation is equally

strong — it overflows and cannot be conquered. It breaks through all opposition, steadies the heart under any trouble, and fortifies the soul so that it can cheerfully face whatever it is called to endure, because it comes from the One who is strong.

Third, consolation is precious. For this reason the apostle makes it his great motive for calling the Philippians to obedience in Philippians 2:1: if there is any consolation in Christ — if you place any value on this precious mercy — then by those comforts, let it be so among you.

This is the first general consequence the Holy Spirit's great effects produce in the hearts of believers. It is so wide-ranging, touching so many aspects of our walk with God, that the Holy Spirit takes His very name for the whole work He performs for us from this: He is the Comforter. We have no consolation apart from the Holy Spirit, and all His effects toward us produce this consequence in us, to some degree. Whatever comes to us in the ways described that does not carry consolation with it — in root at least, if not yet in ripe fruit — is not from the Holy Spirit. This shapes how we value His love, teaches us where to turn in distress, who to pray for, whom to pray to, and whom to wait on in times of confusion.

2. Peace also flows from this same source (Romans 15:13). 'May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.' The power of the Holy Spirit extends not only to hope but to our peace in believing. The same connection appears in the promises of John 14:26-27. Christ says He will give the Comforter — and what follows from that? He continues: 'Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you.' Christ gives His peace to His people in no other way

than by giving them the Comforter. This peace consists in the soul's sense of its acceptance with God as a friend. Christ Himself is called our peace in Ephesians 2:14, because He removed the hostility between God and us and canceled the record of debt that stood against us (Romans 5:1). Being justified by faith, we have peace with God. A settled confidence of our acceptance with God in Christ is the foundation of this peace — it includes deliverance from eternal wrath, rejection, curse, and condemnation, all of it working sweetly on the soul and conscience.

This peace is a branch from the same root as consolation — a consequence of the Holy Spirit's effects described earlier. Consider a person chosen in the Father's eternal love, redeemed by the blood of the Son, and freely justified by God's grace, so that he has a right to all the promises of the gospel. Yet this person cannot be brought to any settled peace — not by his own reasoning, not by thinking about the promises, not by considering God's love or Christ's grace in them — until peace is produced in him as a fruit and consequence of the Holy Spirit's work in him and toward him. Peace is the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). The mindset of the Spirit is life and peace (Romans 8:6). Everything we have comes from Him and through Him.

3. Joy also belongs to this group. The Spirit, as was shown, is called the oil of gladness (Hebrews 1:9), and His anointing brings gladness with it — 'the oil of joy for mourning' (Isaiah 61:3). The kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17). The Thessalonians received the gospel 'with joy of the Holy Spirit' (1 Thessalonians 1:6). Peter calls this joy 'inexpressible and full of glory' (1 Peter 1:8). Giving joy to the hearts of believers is a defining work of the Comforter. He does it through

the particular effects described earlier. The rejoicing in hope of the glory of God mentioned in Romans 5:2 — which carries the soul through any tribulation even to the point of glorying in it — has its source in the Spirit's pouring out the love of God in our hearts (verse 5). Now there are two ways the Spirit produces this joy in believers' hearts.

1. He works it directly and immediately — without the consideration of any other acts of His, and without the need for any reasoning or drawing of conclusions. Just as in sanctification He is like a spring of living water welling up in the soul, directly imparting His life and refreshment, so in consolation He works directly on the souls and minds of believers, filling them with joyful exultation and a glad, spiritual disposition. This joy does not arise from our own reflection on God's love; rather, it provides the occasion for such reflection. When He pours the love of God into our hearts and fills them with gladness through an immediate act of His power — just as He caused John the Baptist to leap with joy in the womb at the approach of Jesus' mother — the soul then rises from that joy to a consideration of the love of God from which further rejoicing also flows. There is no human explanation for this joy except that the Spirit works it when and as He wills. He secretly pours it into the soul, overcoming all fear and sorrow, filling it with gladness, exultation, and sometimes with unspeakable heights of spiritual delight.

2. He also works joy mediately — through His other works toward us. He gives a sense of God's love along with our adoption and acceptance with Him, and then, on the basis of that awareness, enables us to receive it. Consider what has been said about His workings toward us: the assurance He gives of God's love, the

life, power, and security He provides, the pledge He gives of our eternal welfare. It is easy to see that He lays a more than sufficient foundation for this joy and gladness. Even so, we are not able by any reasoning, conclusion, or deduction of our own from these things to move our hearts to the joy intended. It is no less the Spirit's own work to produce joy through these considerations than to produce it directly without them. This process of producing joy in the heart is illustrated in Psalm 23:5-6. 'You anoint my head with oil.' From this the psalmist draws his triumphant conclusion: 'Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life.' For more on this effect of the Comforter, see Isaiah 35 throughout.

4. Hope is also an effect of the Holy Spirit's work in and toward us (Romans 15:13). These, then, are the general consequences of the Holy Spirit's effects in the hearts of believers. If we were to trace all their branches — exultation, assurance, boldness, confidence, expectation, glorying, and the like — it would become clear how deeply our whole communion with God is shaped by them. But I am only naming the main points and pressing on to what remains. The general and particular way of our communion with the Holy Spirit should come next, but some other considerations necessarily come in here first.

Part 3, Chapter 5: Observations on the Spirit — Contempt, Pretense, and the False Spirit Discovered

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Some observations drawn from the preceding discussion about the Spirit. The contempt of the Spirit's entire administration by some. The empty pretense of the Spirit by others. The false spirit exposed.

Having worked through this material, I should now show directly how we hold the communion described with the Holy Spirit in the things identified as His particular work toward us. But there are serious errors in the world regarding the Holy Spirit's administration — on one side, contempt of His true work, and on the other, pretending to what is not His work at all — that I cannot pass by without comment. That is the business of this chapter.

Consider the condition of those who profess to believe the gospel of Jesus Christ and yet despise His Spirit — treating His operations, gifts, graces, and dispensations to His churches and saints with contempt. While Christ was in the world with His disciples, the greatest promise He made them — both for their own benefit and for carrying on the work He had entrusted to them —

was the promise of the Holy Spirit. He instructed them to pray to the Father for the Spirit as something as necessary as bread for children (Luke 11:13). He promised the Spirit as a spring of water welling up within them for their refreshment, strengthening, and consolation unto everlasting life (John 7:37-39). He also promised the Spirit to carry out and complete the entire work of ministry committed to them (John 16:8-10), along with all the important works and privileges described earlier. After His ascension, this gift became the foundation of the glorious communication of gifts and graces described in Ephesians 4:8, 11-12 — because Christ had received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33) — and this in such a remarkable way that it made the greatest and most glorious distinction between the administration of the new covenant and the old. The entire work of ministry is especially linked to the Holy Spirit. He calls men to that work, and they are set apart to Him (Acts 13:2). He equips them with gifts and abilities for that work (1 Corinthians 12:7-10). Without this administration of the Spirit, the entire religion we profess amounts to nothing, and there is no benefit from Christ's resurrection from the dead.

This is the state of things: in our worship of and obedience to God, in our own consolation, sanctification, and ministerial work, the Spirit is the principle, the life, the soul — the whole of everything. And yet so intense has been Satan's hatred and human wickedness that their great effort has been to shut the Spirit out completely from all gospel worship and ministry.

First, His gifts and graces were not only belittled but nearly excluded from public worship by the imposition of a heavy liturgical form to be read by the minister — something that is neither a par-

ticular gift of the Holy Spirit to anyone, nor properly a ministry gift at all. It is remarkable to consider the arguments and justifications that learned men invented to defend it: its age, its composition or endorsement by martyrs, and the beauty of the uniformity it brought to the worship of God. But the main argument they pressed most forcefully — the arena where they deployed all their eloquence — was the alleged emptiness and folly of men praying by the Spirit. When reduced to its core, their whole case amounts to this: although the Lord Jesus Christ has promised the Holy Spirit to remain with His church to the end of the world — equipping men with gifts and abilities for the worship He requires and accepts — the Spirit's gifts are still not sufficient for the purpose, either in prayer or preaching. Therefore, we must not only supplement men with our own directions but exclude them from exercising those gifts altogether. I need not spell out the countless evils that flow from this position: ordaining into ministry men who had never once tasted the powers of the age to come or received any gift from the Holy Spirit for that purpose; promoting a grand outward form of worship wholly foreign to the power and simplicity of the gospel; silencing, destroying, and banishing men whose ministry was attended by the evidence and demonstration of the Spirit. My aim here is simply to point out the public contempt that has been shown toward the Holy Spirit, His gifts, and His administration in the church of God — even among those who profess the gospel.

It is also deeply grieving to consider how that same contempt of the Spirit took root in the private lives of ordinary people. The very name of the Spirit had become a term of ridicule. To claim to pray by the Spirit, or to defend such praying, was enough to make

a person an object of mockery and reproach from all quarters — from the pulpit to the stage. And yet these same people would likely have considered themselves wronged if anyone suggested they were not true Christians. Have there not been some who claimed to lead the flock — standing a level above their fellow believers and claiming authority over them — who made it their business to mock and ridicule the gifts of the Spirit of God? And if such was the spirit of those in leadership, what could be expected from openly irreligious people? Is this the fellowship of the Holy Spirit to which believers are called? Is this how we should receive the One whom our Savior promised to send as a replacement for His bodily presence, so that we would lose nothing by His going? Is it not bad enough that people are content with such dull blindness — calling themselves Christians yet looking no further for comfort and consolation than the moral reasoning common to pagans — when one infinitely holy and blessed person of the Trinity has taken up this very office to be our Comforter? Must they also oppose and despise Him? Nothing reveals more clearly how few who bear the name of Christ truly have a share in what that name means. Let us be eager for the gifts of the Spirit, not resentful of them.

From what has been discussed, we can also test the spirits that have gone out into the world and have been active at various times since Christ's ascension. The defining sin of the generation that was passing away lay in open, cursed opposition to the Holy Spirit. Satan, whose goal as the god of this world is always to dominate — and who does not stay long in any form that God's providence has overthrown — has now transformed himself into an angel of light and now claims the Spirit as his own, and nothing else. But there

are seducing spirits (1 Timothy 4:1). We are commanded not to believe every spirit but to test the spirits (1 John 4:1-6). The reason given is that many false spirits have gone out into the world — that is, people claiming that the Spirit has revealed new doctrines to them. Paul hints at these deceptions in the early church in 2 Thessalonians 2:2, warning people not to be shaken by any such claims of the Spirit. In truth, the spirits of these days are so blatant that a person with minimal discernment can identify them — and yet their deception is so powerful that not a few are taken in. Satan's delusions have swung to an extreme opposite from his earlier tactics.

Not long ago his chief strategy was to promote outward religious forms without the Spirit, heaping all possible reproach on the Spirit Himself. Now he promotes a spirit that operates without and against those very forms, heaping all possible contempt on them. Before, he wanted a ministry without the Spirit; now he wants a spirit without any ministry. Before, reading the word was enough without either preaching or praying in the Spirit; now the Spirit is supposedly sufficient without reading or studying the word at all. Before, he allowed an embrace of what Christ accomplished in the flesh; now he speaks only of a Christ within the Spirit and denies that Christ came in the flesh — which is the very mark of the false spirit we are warned about in 1 John 4:3. Since it is certain that the Spirit we are to receive is the Spirit promised by Christ — a point so widely acknowledged that the Montanist Paraclete, Muhammad himself, and the claimants of our own day all affirm and claim the same — let us briefly test these claims against some of the effects Christ promised the Holy Spirit would produce.

The first general effect, as we observed, was this: the Spirit would bring to remembrance the things Christ spoke, for our guidance and consolation. This was the Spirit's work toward the apostles who were the writers of the Scriptures, and it is His work toward believers to the end of the world. The things Christ spoke and did are written so that we might believe, and believing have life through His name (John 20:30). They are written in Scripture. The Spirit's promised work, therefore, is this: He brings to our remembrance and gives us understanding of the words of Christ in Scripture for our guidance and consolation. Is this the work of the spirit that has spread through the world and led many astray? Not at all. That spirit's work is to belittle the things Christ spoke as recorded in the word, to claim new revelations of its own, and to lead people away from the written word where the whole work of God and all the promises of Christ are recorded.

Further, the work of the Spirit promised by Christ is to glorify Him. 'He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you' (John 16:14). His work is to make Christ glorious, honored, and highly valued in the hearts of believers — by showing them Christ's own things: His love, kindness, grace, and His accomplished redemption. That is the work of the Spirit. The work of the spirit that has gone abroad is to glorify itself. It belittles and despises the Christ who suffered for us, dismissing Him under the label of 'a Christ outside of us' — which it treats with open contempt. Its own glory and honor are all it pursues, completely inverting the order of the divine plan. The Son came to glorify the Father, and He said, 'I do not seek My own glory, but the glory of Him who sent Me.' After completing the work of redemption, the Son was to be glorified with the Father — as He Himself prayed:

'Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son' (John 17:1). For this reason the Holy Spirit is sent, and His work is to glorify the Son. But the spirit we now encounter has made its whole business the glorifying of itself — and by this we can clearly see where it comes from.

Furthermore, the Holy Spirit pours the love of God into our hearts and from this fills them with joy, peace, and hope — quieting and refreshing the hearts of those in whom He dwells, giving them freedom and rest, confidence, and the boldness of children before their Father. The spirit of which some now boast is a spirit of bondage. Its greatest work is to make people tremble and quake, driving them into a cowering, fearful state of soul — driving them back and forth with dread and slavery, consuming their very natural strength and causing their whole person to wither. Almost nothing more clearly marks the spirit that now drives certain people as not being the Comforter promised by Christ than this: that it is a spirit of bondage and slavery within those it inhabits, and a spirit of cruelty and contempt toward others — directly opposing the Holy Spirit in believers and all the purposes for which He is given to them as a Spirit of adoption and consolation.

To give one more example: the Holy Spirit given to believers is a Spirit of prayer and intercession, as we have shown. The spirit we are dealing with claims to lift people above such lowly and contemptible means of communing with God. In short, it would be easy to work through every major effect of the Holy Spirit in and toward believers and show that the pretending spirit of our day stands in direct opposition and contradiction to every one of them.

So Satan has moved from one extreme to the other — from bitter, open opposition to the Spirit of Christ, to a false and shameless claim to the Spirit — both extremes serving the same end.

I could give many other examples of the contempt or misuse of the Spirit's administration. Those already mentioned are the two extremes to which all others can be reduced. I will not digress further from the main subject at hand.

Part 3, Chapter 6: Of Particular Communion with the Holy Spirit

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Of particular communion with the Holy Spirit. Of preparation for it: valuing the benefits we receive through Him; what He comforts us against; with what He comforts us; and how He does it.

With the way now cleared, I come to show how we hold particular communion with the Holy Spirit — as He is promised by Christ to be our Comforter and as He works out our consolation by the means described earlier. The first thing I will do is lay some groundwork for the duty to be considered — and I will do this by leading believers' souls to a proper appreciation of His work toward us, which is why He is called our Comforter.

To lift our hearts to this frame and prepare us for this duty, consider three things.

First, what He comforts us against. Second, with what He comforts us. Third, the principle behind all His actions and operations in us for our consolation.

There are three things in our entire pilgrimage through this life in which the consolations of the Holy Spirit are useful and necessary.

First, in our afflictions. Affliction is part of what God has provided for His children in His household (Hebrews 12:5-6). There is a measure of affliction appointed for each person. To be entirely without affliction is itself a kind of spiritual danger, and in that sense a form of affliction. What I want to address is this: in all our afflictions we need the consolations of the Holy Spirit. It is natural for people to seek relief from distress by whatever means they can find. How people handle pressure tends to follow the bent of their natural temperament. The spirit within a person can bear up under hardship — or at least struggle with it.

There are two great errors, one of which commonly seizes on people in their afflictions and prevents them from handling them rightly. The apostle mentions both in Hebrews 12:5: 'Do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reproved by Him.' People fall into one of these two extremes: either they despise the Lord's correction, or they collapse under it.

First, people despise it. They treat what has happened to them as a minor or ordinary thing. They take no notice of God in it. They manage on their own — looking only at outward causes, providing for their own defense and recovery, with little regard to God or His hand in their affliction. The root of this is that they turn to sources of relief that God will not mix His grace with. They seek remedies other than those He has appointed and miss entirely the benefit and profit of the affliction. This is what every person will do who finds relief from anything other than the consolations of the Holy Spirit.

Second, people collapse and sink under their trials and afflictions. The first group despises the Spirit's help through pride; the second refuses it through discouragement, sinking under the

weight of their troubles. If we had not learned to take God's chastisements lightly and pay little attention to His dealings with us, we would find that our seasons of affliction make up no small part of our pilgrimage.

There is no right handling of our souls under any affliction — no way for God to receive glory from it or for us to gain any spiritual benefit or growth through it — apart from the consolations of the Holy Spirit. When our Savior told His disciples about the great trials and tribulations they were about to face, all He promised them was: I will send you the Spirit, the Comforter; He will give you peace in Me even as you have trouble in the world. He will guide, direct, and sustain you through all your trials. The apostle tells us this is exactly what happened (2 Corinthians 1:4-6). Under the greatest afflictions, the Spirit carries the soul to the highest joy, peace, rest, and contentment. As the apostle writes in Romans 5:3: 'We also exult in our tribulations.' He had just said that we glory in hope of the glory of God (verse 2). And what if many afflictions and troubles come upon us? Even in those, says the apostle, we glory. But from where does our spirit draw the strength to handle afflictions well enough to glory in them? He tells us in verse 5: it comes from the love of God being poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. For this reason believers are said to receive the word 'in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit' (1 Thessalonians 1:6) and to take joyfully the seizure of their property. There is no right handling or growth from any affliction except through the consolations of the Holy Spirit. If you care at all about not wasting your trials, temptations, and afflictions, learn to value the only thing that makes them useful.

Sin is the second burden of our lives — and by far the heavier one. The consolation of the Holy Spirit is uniquely suited to address it. Hebrews 6:17-18 draws an analogy from the manslayer under the law: a person who had accidentally killed someone, bringing the guilt of bloodshed upon himself, ran urgently to the city of refuge for his deliverance. Our great and only refuge from the guilt of sin is the Lord Jesus Christ, and it is in our fleeing to Him that the Spirit administers consolation to us. A sense of sin fills the heart with distress and turmoil — and it is the Holy Spirit who gives us peace in Christ. Sin produces a dread of wrath — the Holy Spirit pours the love of God into our hearts. Satan and the law accuse us as objects of God's hatred — the Spirit bears witness with our spirits that we are God's children. There is not a single weapon that sin uses against our peace for which one or another of the Holy Spirit's effects toward us is not perfectly suited to counter it.

Throughout the entire course of our obedience, His consolations are also necessary — so that we may carry on cheerfully, willingly, and patiently to the end. In short, in all the concerns of this life and in all our hope for the life to come, we stand in need of the consolations of the Holy Spirit.

Without them, we will either despise afflictions or collapse under them, while God's purposes in them go unmet.

Without them, sin will either harden us into contempt of it or cast us down so that we neglect the remedies God has graciously provided against it.

Without them, duties will either inflate us with pride or leave us without the sweetness that belongs to genuine, renewed obedience.

Without them, prosperity will make us worldly and sensual, content to find our satisfaction in earthly things, and completely unprepared for times of adversity.

Without them, the comfort we find in our closest relationships will pull us away from God, and the loss of those relationships will leave our hearts as cold and hard as Nabal's.

Without them, the calamity of the church will overwhelm us, and its prosperity will fail to move us.

Without them, we will have wisdom for no task, peace in no condition, strength for no duty, success in no trial, joy in no circumstance, no comfort in life, and no light in death.

Our afflictions, our sins, and our obedience — along with everything that comes with them — are the great concerns of our lives. What we are before God is expressed through these, as is how rightly we handle them and the opposites that fall under the same category. Through all of these, a thread of consolation from the Holy Spirit runs, bringing us to a joyful outcome throughout. How sad is the condition of those souls who lack these consolations? What poor substitutes are they forced to turn to? Whether they are defeated or seem to win, they have nothing but the misery of their trials.

The second thing to consider — in order to teach us to properly value the consolations of the Holy Spirit — is their content: what it is He uses to comfort us. This can be grouped under the two headings I treated earlier: the love of the Father and the grace of the

Son. All the consolations of the Holy Spirit consist in His making known to us and communicating to us the love of the Father and the grace of the Son. There is nothing in either of these that He does not make a source of consolation for us. In this way, in fact, we hold communion with the Father in His love and with the Son in His grace through the operation of the Holy Spirit.

First, He communicates to us and makes known the love of the Father. After instructing His disciples about the foundation of the consolation they would receive through the Comforter, our Lord Jesus closes it all with these words in John 16:27: 'The Father Himself loves you.' This is what the Comforter is given to make known to us — that God is our Father and that He loves us. In particular, that the Father — the first person of the Trinity, considered distinctly as such — loves us. This is why the Spirit is said so often to come forth from the Father: because He comes in pursuit of the Father's love, to bring the hearts of believers into an awareness of it so that they may be comforted and established. By persuading us of the Father's eternal and unchangeable love, the Spirit fills us with consolation. All the Spirit's effects described earlier move in this direction. A sense of this love is enough not only to bring us relief but to make us in every condition 'rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory.' It is not through an increase of grain and wine and oil, but through the shining of God's face upon us, that He brings comfort to our souls (Psalm 4:6). A soul that has the Spirit can say: The world hates me, but my Father loves me. People despise me as a hypocrite, but my Father loves me as a child. I am poor in this world, but I have a rich inheritance in the love of my Father. I am pressed on every side, but there is bread enough in my Father's house. I grieve in secret under the power of my desires

and sin where no one sees me — yet my Father sees me and is full of compassion. With a sense of His kindness — which is better than life — I rejoice in tribulation, glory in affliction, and triumph as a conqueror. Though I am being put to death all day long, all my sorrows have a bottom that can be reached and my trials have limits that can be reached — but who can express the breadth and depth and height of the Father's love?

The Spirit also comforts us by communicating to us and making known the grace of Christ — all the fruits of His redemption, and all the desirability of His person as it belongs to us. The grace of Christ, as I discussed at length earlier, falls under two headings: the grace of His person, and the grace of His office and work. Through both, the Holy Spirit administers consolation to us. He glorifies Christ by revealing His excellencies and His desirability to believers — as 'the chiefest among ten thousand,' 'altogether lovely.' He then shows them Christ's own things: His love, His grace, and all the fruits of His death, suffering, resurrection, and intercession — and with these He supports their hearts and souls. Under this heading comes everything that brings refreshment: the pardon of sin, deliverance from the curse and the coming wrath, justification and adoption with all the privileges that attend them, and the hope of glory given to us.

Third, the principle and fountain behind all His workings for our consolation also deserves consideration for the same purpose — and this brings us a step closer to the actual communion we are directing people toward. That principle is His own great love and infinite condescension. He willingly comes forth from the Father to be our Comforter. He knew what we were, what we were capable of, and how we would treat Him. He knew we would grieve Him,

provoke Him, suppress His promptings, and defile His dwelling place — and still He came to be our Comforter. Failing to properly consider the great love of the Holy Spirit weakens every foundation of our obedience. If this truth lived and remained in our hearts, what a deep value we would place on all His workings and operations toward us! Nothing is truly precious unless it comes from love and goodwill. This is the approach Scripture takes to raise our hearts to a right appreciation of our redemption by Jesus Christ. It tells us He did it freely — that by His own will He laid down His life, that He did it out of love. 'In this is love, that He laid down His life for us.' 'He loved us and gave Himself for us; He loved us and washed us from our sins by His own blood.' To this it adds the condition we were in when He undertook our cause: sinners, enemies, dead, estranged — and in that condition He loved us and died for us and washed us with His blood. Can we not in the same way come to value the gift of the Spirit for our consolation? He comes forth from the Father for this very purpose; He distributes as He wills and works as He pleases. And what are we, the ones toward whom He carries on this work? Stubborn, crooked, ungrateful — grieving, vexing, provoking Him. Yet in His love and tenderness He continues to do us good. Let us by faith consider this love of the Holy Spirit. It is the head and source of all the communion we hold with Him in this life. How small a portion this is of what could be said! But what has been said is enough to show that the work before us is among the greatest duties and most excellent privileges of the gospel.

Part 3, Chapter 7: General Ways of the Saints Acting in Communion with the Holy Spirit

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The general ways believers act in communion with the Holy Spirit.

Just as in describing the Holy Spirit's workings in us we first identified the general qualities of how He acts, so now in describing our soul's response to Him I will first lay out the general ways faith operates in relation to His work, before moving to the particulars. There are three general patterns of the soul's conduct in this communion, all expressed negatively in Scripture, but each including a positive duty.

1. Do not grieve Him. 2. Do not quench His promptings. 3. Do not resist Him.

There are three aspects of the Holy Spirit to consider.

1. His person, as dwelling in us. 2. His workings by grace — His promptings and motions. 3. His work through the ordinances of the word and the sacraments — all serving the same end and purpose.

Each of the three cautions above corresponds to one of these three aspects.

1. Do not grieve Him — with respect to His person as He dwells in us. 2. Do not quench Him — with respect to the actings and promptings of His grace. 3. Do not resist Him — with respect to the ordinances of Christ and the gifts He gives for their administration.

Since the whole general duty of believers in their communion with the Holy Spirit is contained in these three things, I will treat each of them in turn.

The first caution concerns His person directly, as He dwells in us. It is given in Ephesians 4:30: 'Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.' Isaiah 63:10 records a complaint against those who grieved the Spirit of God, and this caution appears to be drawn from that passage. It is clear that this refers to the person of the Holy Spirit.

This is clear, first, from the phrase itself and its double article: 'that Holy Spirit.' And also:

2. From the work assigned to Him in the following words: sealing us until the day of redemption. As has been shown, this is the work of the Holy Spirit. Now, while this could in principle refer to the Spirit at work in others or in ourselves, the apostle clearly intends the latter sense — as shown by his adding that notable and outstanding privilege which we ourselves enjoy: He seals us until the day of redemption.

Let us then examine what this expression means as the first general rule of our communion with the Holy Spirit. 'Do not grieve the Spirit.'

The word 'grieve' — meaning to cause sorrow — can be considered from two sides: actively, on the part of the one who grieves, or passively, on the part of the one grieved. In the latter sense the expression is figurative, since the Spirit cannot literally be made sorrowful — an experience that implies change, disappointment, and weakness, all of which are incompatible with His infinite perfection. Yet people may actively do what would naturally grieve anyone who cares about them the way the Holy Spirit does. If He is not grieved in the full sense, that is no credit to us but to His own unchangeable nature. Two things, then, are meant by this expression.

First, that the Holy Spirit is disposed toward us as one who is loving, caring, tender, and deeply concerned for our good and well-being — and therefore, when we sin, He is said to be grieved. It is like a good and loving friend who is naturally pained when someone he cares about goes wrong. This is what we are primarily to keep in mind in this caution — the love, kindness, and tenderness of the Holy Spirit toward us. Do not grieve Him.

Second, we may do things that are fitting to cause grief — even if He is not passively grieved — and our sin is no less real for that. The apostle explains how this grieving happens in the surrounding verses (Ephesians 4:21-29). He presses progress in sanctification and all the fruits of regeneration (verses 25-29). He warns against various specific sins that run counter to this, and then gives this general enforcement of both encouragements and warnings: 'Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God' — that is, by falling short of the universal holiness that our union with Christ demands. The positive duty contained in this caution — not grieving the Holy Spirit — is this: pursue complete holiness with a conscious regard for the

love, kindness, and tenderness of the Holy Spirit. This is the foundation of our fellowship with Him in general. When the soul reflects on the Holy Spirit's love, kindness, and tenderness toward him — on all the acts and fruits of His love and goodwill — and on that basis, because the Spirit is so invested in how we live and walk, chooses to turn from evil and walk in all holy duties: that is communion with Him. Making this awareness — that the Holy Spirit who is our Comforter is delighted by our obedience and grieved by our sins and follies — a continual motive for walking closely with God in all holiness: this is the first general way of our communion with Him.

Let us pause here a moment. We lose both the power and the joy of our obedience by neglecting this truth. We see what moves the Holy Spirit to become our Comforter, and by what means He carries out that work for us. How unworthy it is to grieve the One who comes to us for the very purpose of giving us consolation. Let the soul, throughout the whole course of its obedience, exercise itself by faith in reflecting on this and laying due weight on it. The Holy Spirit, in His infinite love and kindness toward me, has condescended to be my Comforter. He does it willingly, freely, powerfully. What have I received from Him? In the midst of my many troubles, how He has refreshed my soul! Can I live a single day without His consolations? And shall I be careless toward Him in the things that matter to Him? Shall I grieve Him through negligence, sin, and foolishness? Shall His love not move me to walk before Him in a way that fully pleases Him? In this way we have fellowship with Him in general.

The second rule is found in 1 Thessalonians 5:19: 'Do not quench the Spirit.' Various interpretations have been offered for these words. Some say it refers to the Spirit in others — that is, their spiritual gifts — but then it overlaps with what follows in verse 20: 'Do not despise prophetic utterances.' Others say it refers to the light God has set up in our hearts — but where is that ever called simply 'the Spirit'? It is the Holy Spirit Himself who is intended here — not immediately in respect of His person (which is what is in view when He is said to be grieved, since grief is a personal quality), but in respect of His promptings, actings, and operations. The Holy Spirit was pictured by the fire that was kept perpetually burning on the altar. He is also called a Spirit of burning. The way to oppose fire in its action is to quench it. So the opposition to the Holy Spirit's actings is called quenching the Spirit — like wet wood thrown into a fire. This is why we are said, under the same figure, to fan into flame the gifts that are in us. The Holy Spirit is at work in us — striving with us, acting in us, moving in various ways for our growth in grace and the producing of fruit consistent with the principle He has placed within us. Take care, the apostle says, lest through the power of your desires and temptations you fail to attend to His workings and so hinder Him in His goodwill toward you — so far as that is in your power.

This, then, is the second general rule for our communion with the Holy Spirit, and it concerns His gracious operations in and through us. The Holy Spirit acts, exerts Himself, and puts forth His power in us in several ways: partly by stirring up and moving the grace we have already received; partly by new supplies of grace from Jesus Christ that come in as occasions arise for their use; and by raising good impulses directly or through circumstances within

us — all tending toward our advancement in obedience and our walk with God. All of these we are to observe carefully and take note of. We hold communion with the Holy Spirit when we consider Him by faith as the immediate source of all our supplies, assistance, and every form of relief we receive through grace — the author of every good impulse, stirring, and movement in our hearts, and every striving and contending against sin. When we see all His workings and stirrings in terms of what they are aimed at — our consolation — and on that account are careful and watchful to make the most of every one of them for that end, knowing they come from One who is so loving, kind, and tender toward us: that is communion with Him.

This is what is meant. Every gracious working of the blessed Spirit in and toward our souls is to be consistently recognized by faith as coming from Him in a distinctive way. His mind and His goodwill are to be observed in it. From this arises care and diligence to make the most of every prompting of His; reverence for His presence with us and a proper spiritual attentiveness to His holiness follows; and our souls grow accustomed to interaction with Him.

The third caution concerns the Holy Spirit and His work in the administration of the great ordinance of the word. Stephen tells the Jews in Acts 7:51 that they had resisted the Holy Spirit. How did they do it? The same way their fathers did: 'As your fathers did, so do you.' How did their fathers resist the Holy Spirit? Verse 52 tells us: they persecuted the prophets and killed them. Their opposition to the prophets as they preached the gospel — proclaiming the coming of the Just One — was their resisting of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is said to be resisted through contempt of the

preaching of the word, because the gift of preaching comes from Him. 'To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.' This is why, when our Savior promises the Spirit to His disciples to be with them in convicting the world, He tells them He will give them a mouth and wisdom that their opponents will not be able to contradict or resist (Luke 21:15). This was fulfilled in Stephen's case: 'They were unable to resist the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking' (Acts 6:10). The Holy Spirit establishes a ministry in the church, sets people apart for it, and equips them with gifts and abilities to preach the word. Refusing to obey that word, opposing it, and failing to bow before it is called resisting the Holy Spirit. This is the third general rule of our communion with the Holy Spirit: in the preaching of the gospel, the authority, wisdom, and goodness of the Holy Spirit in equipping people for that work and His presence with them in its power are to be recognized; and submission is to be given to the word on that basis. Obedience to the word as it is preached in the ministry is to be rendered for this reason: because the Holy Spirit alone equips people for that purpose. When this awareness causes us to bow low before the word, we hold communion with the Holy Spirit in that ordinance.

Part 3, Chapter 8: Particular Directions for Communion with the Holy Spirit

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Before giving specific directions for our communion with the Holy Spirit, I must first state some cautions, insofar as the directions touch on His worship.

First, the divine nature is the ground and cause of all worship, so it is impossible to worship any one person of the Trinity without worshipping the whole Trinity. The scholastic theologians have maintained — and with good reason — that the formal ground and object of divine worship is not the persons as precisely considered in what distinguishes them from each other, that is, in their relations to one another. Rather, it belongs to the divine nature and essence, and to the distinct persons as they are identified with that essence itself. Therefore the practice of praying to the Trinity by repeating the same petition separately to each person is groundless, if not outright wrong. It implies that one person is being worshipped while the others are not — when in fact each person is worshipped as God, and each person is God. It would be as if we were to ask the Father for something and expect Him to grant it, then ask the same thing of the Son and expect Him to grant it, and

then ask it of the Holy Spirit too — performing three distinct acts of worship for the same request and expecting to receive the same thing granted three separate times, when in fact all the outward works of the Trinity are undivided.

The proper and distinctive object of divine worship and prayer is the essence of God in its infinite excellence, dignity, majesty, and its role as the first and sovereign cause of all things. This belongs equally to all three persons and distinctively to each — not formally as a person, but as God, blessed forever. All adoration is directed toward what is common to all, so that in each act of adoration and worship, all three are adored and worshipped. Creatures worship their Creator; a person worships Him in whose image he was made and from whom every good and perfect gift descends — all of this describing God as God.

Second, when we begin our prayers to God the Father and close them in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son is no less invoked and worshipped at the beginning than the Father is. Christ is specifically mentioned as Mediator at the close — not as the Son directing a prayer to Himself, but as Mediator in relation to the whole Trinity or God in Trinity. When we invoke God the Father, we invoke every person, because we invoke the Father as God, and every person is God.

Third, the heavenly pattern given in Ephesians 2:18 sets this out clearly. Our access in worship is said to be to the Father — through Christ or His mediation, by the Spirit or His assistance. Here there is a distinction among the persons as to their operations, but none at all as to their being the object of our worship. The Son and the Holy Spirit are no less worshipped in our coming to God than the Father Himself. It is simply that the Father's grace

— which we receive through the Son's mediation and the Spirit's assistance — is what we draw near to God for. So when the distinct ministry of the Trinity and each person draws us to worship — that is, to exercise faith toward or call upon any person — we worship the whole Trinity and every person, by whatever name we use: Father, Son, or Holy Spirit. This must be kept in mind throughout: when any work of the Holy Spirit ascribed to Him particularly draws us to worship Him, He is not worshipped in isolation — the whole Godhead is worshipped.

Fourth, with these cautions stated: we are to worship the Holy Spirit distinctly. Just as faith is directed to both the Father and the Son in John 14:1 — 'Believe in God; believe also in Me' — this same faith extends equally to the Holy Spirit. Christ called the disciples to direct their faith toward Him upon the completion of His mediatorial work; and the Holy Spirit, now carrying on the work He was commissioned to do, calls for the same. The ground of worshipping the Son is not His mediation but His being God — though His mediation is a powerful incentive to do so. Likewise, the ground of worshipping the Holy Spirit is not His being our Comforter but His being God — though His being our Comforter is a powerful incentive to do so.

This is the essence of the first direction. The grace, actings, love, and effects of the Holy Spirit as our Comforter ought to stir us up and move us to love, worship, believe in, and call upon Him. Yet since all of this is directed to Him as God, it is no less directed to the other persons than to Him. It is simply through the fruits of His love toward us that we are moved to offer it.

With these things in place, let believers learn to exercise faith distinctly toward the Holy Spirit as the immediate and effective cause of all the good things described. Faith to believe in Him, and faith in all things to believe Him and yield obedience to Him. Faith — not imagination. The distinction of the persons in the Trinity is not to be pictured in the mind but believed. Scripture so fully, frequently, clearly, and distinctly attributes the things we have been speaking of to the immediate work of the Holy Spirit that faith embraces Him in the revealed truth and regards Him in a particular way — worshipping Him, serving Him, waiting for Him, praying to Him, praising Him. All these things believers do by faith. The person of the Holy Spirit, revealing Himself in these operations and effects, is the distinctive object of our worship. Therefore, when He ought to be particularly honored and is not, He is particularly sinned against. In Acts 5:3, Ananias is said to have lied to the Holy Spirit — not to God in the general sense (which would refer to the whole Trinity), but specifically to the Holy Spirit. He was to have honored the Spirit in a particular way through the particular gift He had publicly professed; failing to do so, he sinned specifically against Him. But this needs to be worked out further in its particulars.

Let us therefore place real weight on every effect of the Holy Spirit in any of the particulars described, on this basis: that they are acts of His love and power toward us. Faith will do this — faith that takes notice of His kindness in everything. Frequently He carries out the work of Comforter toward us in specific ways, and yet we are not fully comforted; we take no notice at all of what He does. That is when He is grieved. Of those who do receive and welcome the consolation He offers and administers, how few actually

think of Him as the Comforter and rejoice in Him as they should. With every act of consolation a believer receives, his faith ought to draw this conclusion: this is from the Holy Spirit. He is the Comforter, the God of all consolation. I know there is no joy, peace, hope, or comfort except what He works, gives, and bestows — and to give me this consolation, He willingly condescended to take up this office of Comforter. His love was in it, and on that account He continues it. He is also sent by the Father and the Son for this very purpose. Through this I become a partaker of joy — it is in the Holy Spirit; of consolation — He is the Comforter. What value, then, shall I place on His love? How shall I treasure the mercy I have received?

This applies to every particular effect of the Holy Spirit toward us, and in this we hold communion and fellowship with Him. Does He pour the love of God into our hearts? Does He bear witness to our adoption? The soul considers His presence, reflects on His love, His condescension, goodness, and kindness; it is filled with reverence toward Him and with care not to grieve Him; and it works to keep His temple — His dwelling place — pure and holy.

Our communion with the Holy Spirit also produces in us a returning of praise, thanks, honor, glory, and blessing to Him for the many mercies and privileges we receive from Him. We do the same with the Son of God for our redemption. 'To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood' — to Him be praise and glory (Revelation 1:5-6). Are not the same praises and blessings due to Him by whom the work of redemption is made effective for us — who undertook our consolation with no less infinite love than the Son undertook our redemption? When we feel our hearts

warmed with joy, upheld in peace, strengthened in our obedience — let us give Him the praise that is due; bless His name and rejoice in Him.

This glorifying of the Holy Spirit in thanksgiving — flowing from a deep, spiritual sense of His consolations — is no small part of our communion with Him. Reflecting on His free commitment to this work, His coming forth from the Father for this purpose, His being sent by the Son and His condescension in that, His love and kindness — the soul of a believer pours itself out in grateful praise to Him and finds sweet satisfaction in that duty. There is no duty that leaves a more heavenly savor in the soul than this one.

Our communion with the Holy Spirit also includes praying to Him for the continuation of the work of consolation He has undertaken. John prays for grace and peace from the seven spirits before the throne — that is, the Holy Spirit, whose operations are perfect and complete. This aspect of His worship is explicitly mentioned throughout Scripture, and all other aspects of worship necessarily accompany it. Let believers consider what need they have of these effects of the Holy Spirit that have been described — and of many others that could be added. Weigh all the privileges of which we have been made partakers. Remember that He distributes them as He wills and holds sovereign authority over them — and you will be ready for this duty.

How and in what sense this worship is to be carried out has already been explained, as has the ultimate ground and object of it. In the practice of this duty no small measure of the life, energy, and vitality of faith is expressed. We fall short of the spaciousness of spirit in our dealings with God and are held back from walking in the full width of His ways — to which we are called — if we do

not learn to meet Him in the particular way He is pleased to communicate Himself to us. In these things He does so in the person of the Holy Spirit; and in that person we meet His love, grace, and authority through our prayers and petitions.

Also, consider the Holy Spirit in His condescension to this commission from the Father and Son to be our Comforter, and ask for Him daily from the Father in the name of Jesus Christ. This is the daily practice of believers. They look to and by faith consider the Holy Spirit as the One promised to be sent. In this promise they know that all their grace, peace, mercy, joy, and hope lie — for it is by this promised Spirit and by Him alone that these things are communicated to them. If our life toward God and the joy of that life matter to us, then we should be abundant in this: asking for the Spirit from the Father as children ask their parents for daily bread. In this asking and receiving of the Holy Spirit we have communion with the Father in His love — from which the Spirit is sent — and with the Son in His grace — by which the Spirit is obtained for us — and also with the Spirit Himself on account of His willing condescension to this work. Every request for the Holy Spirit includes an embracing of all of these. Oh, the riches of the grace of God!

Humbling ourselves for our failures toward Him is another part of our communion with Him. That we have grieved Him as to His person, quenched Him in the promptings of His grace, or resisted Him in His ordinances is something to mourn over, as has been stated. Let our souls be brought low before Him on this account. This is a significant element of godly sorrow, and meditating on it is as well suited to filling the heart with humility and holy anger against sin as almost anything else. I could go on in similar

reflections and also apply them to the specific effects of the Holy Spirit described earlier — but my purpose has only been to identify the main headings and leave their fuller development to others.

I will close this entire discussion with some reflections on the sad state and condition of those who have no share in this promise of the Spirit and have never known His consolation.

Those who have no share in this promise of the Spirit have no true consolation or comfort, whatever their outward circumstances may be. Are they suffering or in trouble? They must carry their own burden. And how unequal they are to that burden — when God is pleased to press down with more than ordinary weight — is easy to see. People may summon inner resolve and commit themselves firmly to wrestle with their troubles.

But when this comes merely from natural strength of character, it is mostly just an outward show. It is performed for the benefit of others, so they will not appear low-spirited or defeated. Inside, their hearts are consumed and hollowed out by trouble and anxiety. Their thoughts are tangled, and they keep struggling but never arrive at any real victory. Every new difficulty, every small shift in their circumstances, brings fresh distress. What keeps them going is a groundless resolve, and they are easily shaken.

And what is the best their determination and endurance amounts to? It is nothing more than a struggle against God, who has placed them in this situation — like a fly straining under a mountain. Even when, on the basis of outward principles and reasoning, they try to practice patience and acceptance, it is all still a striving against God — an effort to be at peace under the very thing God has sent on purpose to disturb them. God does not afflict peo-

ple who have no Spirit in order to build their patience; He does so to disrupt their false peace and false security. All their arming themselves with patience and determination is either an attempt to hold onto what God intends to tear away from them, or it brings them closer to ruin. This is the best they can offer themselves as consolation in their times of trouble.

If they persuade themselves that God cares about them and find some relief in that thought — as they often do on one basis or another, especially when other supports have failed — all that relief is like the dream of a hungry man who imagines he is eating and drinking and feeling satisfied, only to wake up empty and disappointed. So it is with all the relief they imagine they will receive from God and the support they think they have from Him. When they are awakened in the last day and see everything clearly, they will find that God was against them, laughing at their calamity and mocking when their fear fell upon them.

So it is with them in trouble. Is it any better in their prosperity? That prosperity may be considerable, and Scripture describes it in vivid terms — long lives, often quiet and peaceful ends. But do they have any true consolation all their days? They eat, drink, sleep, and enjoy themselves, and perhaps accumulate wealth — but how little does this distinguish them from the animals that perish? It is commonly noted that Solomon had unrivaled opportunity to experience and understand these things to their utmost, far beyond any person of our generation. His verdict on them is well known: they are all emptiness and chasing after the wind. This is their consolation — the crackling of thorns under a pot, a quick flash and blaze

that appears only to disappear. Both adversity and prosperity consume them, and whether they are laughing or crying, they are still dying.

Second, they have no peace — no peace with God and no peace within their own souls. I know that many of them, building on false foundations and false expectations, manage to maintain some appearance of quiet. But this is their actual state: since true and solid peace is an effect of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers, as has been shown, those who have no share in the Spirit have no such peace. They may cry 'Peace, peace!' when sudden destruction is at hand. The foundations of their peace — as can easily be shown — are darkness and ignorance, a deadened conscience, self-righteousness, and empty hope. All the sources of their peace can be reduced to these. And what will any of these do for them in the day when the Lord deals with them?

The same must be said about their joy and hope: they are false and will not last. Let those who have settled into a confident belief in their share in the blessings of the gospel, and yet have despised the Spirit of Christ, consider this seriously. I know there are many who may claim Him and yet are strangers to His grace. But if those who in profession treat Him kindly and honor Him will perish if He does not dwell in them with power — where shall those appear who openly oppose and insult Him? Scripture tells us that unless the Spirit of Christ is in us, we are spiritually dead, we are disqualified, we do not belong to Christ. Without Him you can experience none of these glorious effects He brings to believers that have been described — and yet you are so far from even asking whether He is in you or not that you are ready to mock those in whom He is. Are there none who profess the gospel who have never once seriously

asked whether they have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit? You who consider it nearly ridiculous to be asked such a question — who regard everyone who speaks of the Spirit as a vain pretender — may the Lord awaken such people to see their condition before it is too late. If the Spirit does not dwell in you, if He is not your Comforter, then God is not your Father, the Son is not your Advocate, and you have no portion in the gospel. May God awaken some poor soul to think on this before their neglect and contempt of the Holy Spirit reaches that point of final despising from which there is no return. May the Lord spread before them all the folly of their hearts, so that they may be ashamed and humbled and no longer act so presumptuously.

Thanks for Reading

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