

John Owen, *Communion with God*

A Study Guide

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INTRODUCTION

I have no hesitation in saying that, apart from Holy Scripture, John Owen's *Communion with God* is the most important book that I have ever read. For most Christians, the Trinity is a carefully defined doctrine that they must believe; yet it has little practical significance. In *Communion with God*, Owen presents the doctrine of the Trinity as the most intensely practical and personal doctrine in Scripture. This book has transformed my preaching, my prayers, my personal assurance of salvation, and its ideas have pervaded virtually every other aspect of practical holiness. For these reasons, I have put together this study guide for the use of our own congregation, and hope that it may be used of God to more widely promote the use of Owen's work by many churches.

In order to help readers become oriented to this book, it is helpful to begin with a brief analysis of some of Owen's most significant contributions. Owen argued that though each of the three Persons of the Godhead are identical with respect to the being or essence of God, yet believers have a peculiar fellowship or communion with each Person distinctly. With respect to worship, each of the three Persons is worthy of worship, not because of their distinct personalities, but because they hold the divine essence in common. However, the personal properties of each Person and the function that each Person assumes in accomplishing and applying redemption provide additional motives

for worshipping the one true and living God. After proving that believers have fellowship with the Godhead in general and each Person in particular, Owen went on to examine the fellowship that believers have with each Person in the Godhead distinctly. Using the Trinitarian Blessing of 2 Corinthians 13 as a template, Owen used a one-word summary to describe the communion that believers have with each person. Communion with the Father is summarized by love, communion with the Son is characterized by grace, and communion with the Holy Spirit is characterized by receiving the comforts of fellowship with all three Persons as applied to the soul.

The first section dealing with God the Father is brief, but profound. According to Owen, the “great discovery” of the gospel is the love of the Father. Believers usually conceive of the gospel in terms of the love of Christ that passes knowledge (Eph. 3:19), but since it was the Father that chose his elect and planned redemption from eternity past, the Father is the source of love within the Godhead. The Father could never manifest his love apart from sending the Son to die for the redemption of his elect, but the love of the Father compared to the love of Christ is likened to the light of the sun compared to the rays proceeding from the Son. Chapter four is especially useful from a pastoral standpoint. Owen notes that in light of the depiction of the great wrath of God against sinners and that fact that believers were once children of wrath just as the others (Eph. 2:3), very few believers seem to attain a solid assurance and enjoyment of the Father’s love. In this chapter, Owen provides practical helps in order to stir up believers to a genuine assurance of the love of the Father.

The second section of *Communion with God* addresses the communion in grace that believers have with the Son. All of Owen’s writings on the Lord Jesus Christ are

masterful and, in a sense, Owen viewed him as the central figure in the Trinity due to his role as the only Mediator between God and man. This section on communion with Christ occupies 182 pages of his original 274-pages (129 pages out of 209 in the abridged version).¹ In the midst of this section are two “Digressions.” The first provides motives to endear Jesus Christ to the hearts of his people, and the second details reflections on the manner in which Christ is the wisdom of God for our salvation. In the abridged version, these digressions have been labeled simply chapters eight and nine. These digressions reflect the heart of a man to whom Jesus Christ was all in all, and Owen’s affection for the Savior is contagious.

After the digressions, the outline of the book becomes a bit convoluted. For example, on page 118 (original), Owen presented a four-part outline of the communion believers have in Christ. The first two parts of communion with Christ consist of “delight” (abridged chapter eleven) and “valuation” (abridged chapter twelve), which both Christ and his people have for each other. The last two points of the outline, however, depict Christ exercising compassion and supplying our needs, while we in turn maintain chastity with him as his bride and performing obedience. As Owen developed these themes, though all the material is immensely profitable, it is easy for the reader to get lost and not know where he is in the outline. Another example is that on page 46 (abridged, 46-47), Owen began discussing a distinction between the personal and purchased grace of Christ that he did not resume until page 154 (abridged, 118). In a sense, the abridged text has removed this difficulty entirely by omitting Owen’s original

¹ Note that the page numbers in the introduction refer to the original rather than to the abridged version of *Communion with God*.

outline. This make the book more accessible to most readers, yet it also sacrifices some of the sense of unity and progression in the original book.

Some features that profoundly stand out in the section on communion with Christ are an outstanding defense of the “active obedience” of Christ (pg. 159-164; abridged, 120-124), the relation of adoption to Christology, and an exposition of the nature of “Christian liberty” (both in chapter ten; abridged, chapter seventeen). Readers might expect Owen’s treatment of adoption to be included in the section on communion with the Father, but Owen correctly included it under communion with Christ, since the believer’s *union* with Christ is the basis for his adoption. Sometimes it is easy for Protestants to focus exclusively on the forensic aspects of justification and their relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ in a cold and technical manner. Without laying aside these vital aspects of the doctrine, Owen sets them in the warmhearted context of the Church’s marriage union with her Lord.

The last section of *Communion with God* directs the reader’s attention to communion with the Holy Spirit. Communion with the Holy Spirit is summarized in terms of “comfort,” due to the fact that the Spirit of God is the source of every comfort and of every application of the promises of the gospel. Without communion with the Spirit of God, there would be no communion with the Father or the Son. The Spirit works by glorifying Jesus Christ in the hearts of believers so that they come to the Father through him. Chapter two (chapter nineteen, abridged) places great emphasis upon what was later referred to as “Definitive Sanctification.” In fact, the *only* sense in which Owen used the term “sanctification” in this chapter was in terms of a one time definitive act produced by the Spirit of God in a believer, resulting in a decisive breach with the power

of sin. Chapter three presents nine aspects of communion with the Holy Spirit (abridged, chapter nineteen has reduced these to seven).

Particularly noteworthy are the sections on the sealing of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit as the earnest or down payment of the future inheritance. One profound observation is that the reason why the sin against the Spirit is singled out as unpardonable is rooted in the procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son. Sinning against the Person and work of the Spirit is tantamount to sinning against the entire Trinity and against all possibility of the application of the grace of God to the soul. The same thought lies behind the warning given to believers not to grieve the Spirit of God. The last chapter of *Communion with God* is perhaps the most valuable of all, since it provides profound insights into the relationship between the essence of God and the three Persons of the Godhead, as well directions to maintain communion with the Holy Spirit and, through him, to receive every comfort and application of communion with the Father and the Son.

One feature that is of great value in this book (as in most of Owen's writings) is the profound and careful exegesis of several portions of Scripture. The section treating communion with Christ contains a thorough exposition of the bulk of the Song of Solomon. It is worthwhile to use the indices in volume sixteen of Owen's *Works* in order to follow Owen's careful treatment of various passages of Scripture in this book. Owen demonstrated that the Triune nature of God is not simply an essential doctrine of Christianity, but that the Triune nature of God and how we relate to each of the three Persons of the Godhead is the sum and substance of Christianity. Reading Owen is always profoundly profitable, but he is tedious and lengthy at times. In the case of

Communion with God, I regret that he did not write much more. However, the abridged version has removed over one fourth of the length of the original work and made it accessible to a broader audience. It is my hope and prayer that that this abridged text along with this study guide may encourage many to discover the riches of John Owen.

CHAPTER 1

Summary

According to 1 John 1:3, the primary blessing of participating in communion with the saints is that the saints themselves enjoy communion with God. No man in his natural fallen condition enjoys communion with God, but God exclusively gives himself for the fellowship and enjoyment of those who come to him through faith in Jesus Christ. Believers enjoy the fruits of communion with God in part in this present life and they shall enjoy the fullness of God's covenant blessings in Christ when they enter into glory.

Questions

1. What is the glory of true Christian fellowship? (1). How should this affect our relationship to other believers in this world?
2. What is the meaning of "a holy and spiritual communion?" (1).
3. How is the communion of the saints under the Old and New Testaments the same? How does it differ? (2).
4. What does communion with God involve? In other words, what does God communicate to us, and what do we give back to him? (3). Relate to the covenant of grace.

CHAPTER 2

Summary

If chapter one proves that the saints have communion with God generally speaking, then chapter two demonstrates that the saints enjoy communion with each divine Person distinctly. A profound and careful Reformed Trinitarian theology lies at the back of Owen's discussion in this chapter. Therefore, the reader would do well to review a precise treatment of this doctrine in order to connect Owen's practical conclusions with their assumed doctrinal foundations.

The witness or testimony of God to man as well as the communication of all spiritual graces, come to man from all three Persons in the Trinity, as well as from each Person considered particularly. This Triune God, in turn, becomes the object of faith, love, trust, joy, and the exercise of all other spiritual graces. Assuming the definition of chapter one that communion consists of receiving good things from God and of giving worship and obedience back to him, Owen demonstrates the manner in which such communion respects each divine Person. The manner in which the saints are "taught" by God serves as a good illustration of how the soul has communion with entire Godhead as well as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit distinctly. The last small section of this chapter sets the stage for the remainder of the book by speaking of redemption in terms of the sovereign will of the Father, the purchased treasure of the Son, and the immediate and effectual application of the whole to the sinner by the Holy Spirit.

Questions

1. How does our fellowship with God relate to our receiving of the testimony that he gives of himself? What is the role of Scripture in our communion with God? (4).
2. Owen asserted, “Faith, love, trust, joy, and all other spiritual graces are the means by which the soul has communion with God” (5). How does this lay the foundation for arguing that we must have communion with each Person of the Godhead distinctly?
3. How do we “specially” place our faith in the Father when we receive his testimony concerning the Son? (5-6). In light of Ephesians 2:18, what are the practical implications of this in our worship?
4. In the unabridged version of *Communion with God*, Owen used “instituted worship” (pg. 12) rather than worship simply (abridged pg. 6). What is the difference between these two terms and who does this change our emphasis in the manner in which we pursue communion with God?
5. In light of his divine nature, what is the only proper response of those who love the Lord Jesus Christ? (7).
6. Why is it necessary to regard each divine Person distinctly in order to enjoy true communion with God? (8). What is Modalism and how does Owen’s description of communion with God rule out this error?
7. What does Owen refer to by “teaching?” (9). How does “teaching” relate to the heart and life of those who are taught?
8. Up to the end of the chapter, Owen has emphasized what is *common* to communion with each Person in the Godhead, but he ends the chapter by

sketching out what is *distinct* to each Person in the economy, or working out, of redemption (10-11). How are these distinctions fundamental to our understanding of the gospel? Think through what is distinct to each Person.

CHAPTER 3

Summary

The primary characteristic of the communion of the saints with the Father is *love*. The Father's love rests in his eternal and immutable decree of election in Jesus Christ. His love is received and experienced by sinners only as they receive and embrace Jesus Christ by faith. Lack of assurance of the Father's love is sadly common among believers, and it is the cause of most spiritual difficulties, deeply grieves the Father, and robs believers of the proper motivation for personal holiness. Our communion with the Father in love is accentuated both by the ways in which our love is comparable to his as well as in the ways that his love far excels our own.

1. Which Person of the Godhead would you ordinarily associate with love? (Hint: Eph. 3). How does Owen's emphasis on the love of the Father transform your relationship to the Father? (12, 15).
2. Why is assurance of the Father's love a point of practical difficulty for so many Christians? What is Owen's solution to this problem and how can you adapt it to yourself? (bottom of pg. 13).
3. What is the love of "good pleasure and determination?" What is the love of "friendship and acceptance?" (14). How do these two relate to one another in terms of eternity and time?
4. Keeping in mind that communion is the sharing of good things for the mutual delight of those who are communion with one another, in what way do believers express and enjoy communion with the Father? (bottom of pg. 17).

5. On what grounds are we assured of the love of the Father, and in what manner do we receive his love? (18).
6. What is the relationship between the Father's love towards us and the Lord Jesus Christ? (21. See the honey and well analogies). What practical implications does this have for the manner in which we receive assurance of our salvation? What relationship does our assurance of the Father's love have to personal holiness?
7. The love of the Father is greatly magnified by the ways in which it differs from our love to him. List some of the ways in which the Father's love differs from our own (21-24. At least 6 things. Use these for meditation).
8. Owen wrote: "The *doctrine* of grace may be turned into an excuse for doing evil but the *principle* cannot." What is the difference between the doctrine of grace and the principle of grace? What is the practical significance of this distinction? (25).

CHAPTER 4

Summary

In the abridgment of this chapter, Owen's original outline and progression of thought is lost almost entirely. The original chapter is divided broadly in terms of stating a problem relating to assurance of the Father's love, followed by several directions, answers to objections, and exhortations to assist us in receiving a full and biblically grounded assurance of the Father's love. I have noted below points at which the abridgment has significantly altered the original text.

Questions

1. Owen noted that *ignorance* of the Father's love was the cause of most spiritual troubles (27). What is the relationship between doctrine and personal piety and growth in grace?
2. After emphasizing the fact that the nature of the Father should cause us to wonder at his love for us, Owen described four attributes of the Father's love towards us. What are these four attributes and why should they lead us to extol the Father's love? (27-29).
3. The abridged version asserts that it is "the greatest desire of the Father" that we love him (31). The original book stated that it is "exceedingly acceptable unto God, as our Father" that we love him (orig., 34). What is the difference between these two statements? How may the abridgment be misleading? What does Scripture set forth as "the greatest desire of the Father?"

4. How may we retain the picture of God's holiness in the Bible alongside the immeasurable love of the Father? Are these two ideas compatible? How should God's holiness *increase* our joy over his love?
5. The abridged version describes the Father's love as "the chief property of his nature" (32). Owen originally wrote of the "eminency of the Father's love" by which the soul is "overpowered, conquered, and endeared unto him" (orig., 36). How does the paraphrased version lend itself to distort historic Trinitarian orthodoxy? How does the original statement by Owen protect it?
6. Some people fear self-deception and false assurance of the Father's love. What two elements are absolutely necessary to be assured of the Father's love? (bottom of pg. 33). In what order must they always come?
7. The last section of this chapter contains five points of application (34-37). These points have not been numbered in the abridgment. Identify the five points in the text and list them for useful points of meditation. Hint: the last of the five points is entitled "Application" in the abridged text.
8. How is the Father's love a strong refuge and comfort in the midst of persecution? (35). How does this relate to prayer?
9. In what way are Christians "the most misunderstood people in the world? (35-36).
10. The question often arises whether or not it is appropriate to address our prayers to any of the three Persons in the Godhead. In light of the first four chapters of *Communion with God*, is it appropriate to address our prayers to any Person of the Trinity? Why is it most appropriate to address God as Father?

CHAPTER 5

Summary

This chapter begins what makes up Part II of Owen's original work. This is the longest part of the book and it deals with communion with the Lord Jesus Christ in grace in an unparalleled manner. Chapter five introduces the subject by providing a description of the communion between the saints and Christ from Song of Solomon chapter two. Christ delights in his saints in the context of the Church, the Church delights in Christ by resting upon him for all things, and both Christ and his Church take great delight in fellowship with one another. The purpose of this chapter is to argue *that* the saints have communion with Christ, as well as to provide a general description of that communion.

Questions

1. How does the love of the Father relate to fellowship with the Son? Relate to "calling" (38).
2. What role does the detailed exposition of Song of Solomon 2 play in this chapter? How does it illustrate communion with Christ in terms of Owen's definition of communion?
3. In what ways do we commune with Christ as our shade or shelter? (42. Two ways).
4. Up to this point, Owen has described the peculiar acts of communion by the Son toward the saints and vice versa. Now Owen describes the characteristics of the *common* fellowship between Christ and his saints. What are the four ways in which Owen characterized this communion? (42ff).

5. To what do the “ordinances” and “banqueting houses” refer? (43). What place does this give to corporate worship in our personal communion with God?
6. What two things are necessary for him who is fainting? (44). In what manner does Christ fulfill these needs on behalf of his Church?
7. What place does the Church have in communion with Christ? (45). How should this affect our relationship with the local church?

CHAPTER 6

Summary

The purpose of chapter six is to describe *what* communion with Christ consists of. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ consists in his “personal grace” and his “purchased grace.” “Personal grace” is the foundation of all the benefits procured by Christ, and it consists of the union of the divine and human natures of Christ in one Person. Union with Christ’s Person is the foundation of several of the following chapters. “Purchased grace” is not resumed again until chapter thirteen (pg. 118).

Questions

1. What are the three definitions of “grace” used by Owen? (46-47). Which two are included under “purchased grace?” What is the difference between “purchased grace” and “personal grace?”
2. Owen wrote, “The glory and beauty of the Lord Jesus is seen in the union of both of these natures in one Person” (48). In what way do the two natures of Christ in one Person make up the glory and beauty of his “personal grace” as our Mediator?
3. On page 49 (bottom lines) Owen describes Christ as an “umpire” in his role as Mediator between God and man. The abridged version is misleading in this case since it adds, “making sure that each side fulfills its promises and obligations to the other.” Owen’s original emphasis was not upon the need for a Mediator to ensure that each party kept the rules, but to ensure that the *infinite distance* between God and man could be bridged. Sin did not *create* this distance between God and man, but the distance between God and man *necessitated* that the infinite

weight of sin's guilt could only be borne by one who was fully God and fully man. How is this thought useful for producing humility in us?

4. Does "personal union in Christ" refer to our union with Christ? or to the union of the divine and human natures in the one Person of Jesus? (50).
5. Why is there ultimately no hope or satisfaction apart from Christ? (53-54).

CHAPTER 7

Summary

This chapter describes *how* the saints have communion with Christ in his “personal grace.” This communion with Christ comes through our marital relationship with him as his bride. In this relationship, Christ communicates himself in all his glory, and we continually receive and embrace his beauty by an act of the will.

Questions

1. What is the main purpose of the gospel ministry? (55). How should this affect the content and design of preaching?
2. In what way are the saints the “glory” and “honour” of Christ? (55).
3. What two things must we especially take note of in regard to our communion with Christ? (56, bottom).
4. What is the difference between Christ committing himself to us and our committing ourselves to him? (58-59).
5. On page fifty-nine, we are exhorted to receive Christ by an act of the will as well as to prefer his beauty above all others. In the original text (58-59) the order of these two points was reversed. Is it important to behold the beauty of Christ above all before embracing him with the will? Why or why not?
6. What does it mean to “receive Christ in his beauty and supreme glory”? (60). Think in terms of how you first receive Christ and how you pursue communion with him subsequently.

CHAPTER 8

Summary

This chapter and the following one were originally listed as “digressions” on the excellencies of Christ for the purpose of endearing our hearts to him, and the unique wisdom and knowledge of Christ. In this chapter, Owen argued that considering the necessity of both the divine and human natures in the one Person of Christ provides many motives to stir up our love to him. He finished this chapter by continuing his extended exposition of Song of Solomon 5.

Questions

1. What is the sole purpose of this “digression?” (61). How does our love towards Christ relate to our communion with him?
2. What is the relationship between the Deity of Christ and the sufficiency of his grace? (62). ie, why was it necessary for our Mediator to be God?²
3. Why was Christ born without the imputation of Adam’s guilt? What role did the Holy Spirit play in this? (64-65). What relationship did Christ sustain to the covenant of works? Why could guilt be imputed on the cross but not by birth?
4. What is “created grace” (as opposed to “infinite grace”)? (65). Think in terms of Owen’s earlier use of “personal grace.”
5. The unabridged version of *Communion with God* includes a section on the human development of Jesus, viewing him as the pattern of all gifts and graces (orig.,

² Consider *Westminster Larger Catechism*, question 38: “It was requisite that the Mediator should be God, that he might sustain and keep the human nature from sinking under the infinite wrath of God, and the power of death; give worth and efficacy to his sufferings, obedience, and intercession; and to satisfy God’s justice, procure his favor, purchase a peculiar people, give his Spirit to them, conquer all their enemies, and bring them to everlasting salvation.”

- 66). Owen taught that the work of the Holy Spirit in Christ was designed to be the pattern for the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer. On page 67 of the abridged version, he wrote, “All grace becomes his.” How does this relate to our personal union with Christ in the covenant of grace?³
6. Why was it necessary for Christ to have two natures in one Person? (66-68. 3 reasons).⁴
 7. In what ways should Christ’s retention of two natures in his *exaltation* comfort us? (68).
 8. The Protestant Reformers generally rejected medieval allegorical expositions of Scripture. The Song of Solomon was virtually the single exception to this rule. At this point in *Communion with God*, Owen has presented a substantial interpretation of the Song of Solomon as an allegory of the relationship between Jesus Christ and his Church. His interpretation was representative of his time. Is this approach to the Song of Solomon valid? Why or why not?
 9. What is the “analogy of faith” (*analogia fidei*)? (70).
 10. How is Christ’s all-seeing eye a comfort to us in prayer? (73).

³ Think in terms of *Westminster Larger Catechism*, question 31: “The covenant of grace was made with Christ as the second Adam, and in him with all the elect as his seed.”

⁴ Again, compare to *Westminster Larger Catechism*, question 40: “It was necessary that the Mediator, who was to reconcile God and man, should himself be both God and man, and this in one person, that the proper works of each nature might be accepted of God for us, as the works of the whole person.”

CHAPTER 9

Summary

Christ sets the wisdom and knowledge of God on display in a superlative manner. Wisdom particularly refers to the wisdom of God as it is displayed in salvation. In salvation, Christ reveals all of the attributes of God more clearly than they could have been known in any other manner. The beauty of Christ as the wisdom of God is that all of the attributes of Almighty God are turned to our eternal good rather than our eternal destruction.

Questions

1. In what sense is Christ the power and wisdom of God (1 Cor. 2:4)? What is the “essential wisdom” of God? (78).
2. Why would “a vague and general mercy which overlooks sin” dishonor God? (80).
3. In what manner may false views on justification distort the knowledge of the true God into an idol? (81).
4. Why do we learn of the justice of God “supremely in Christ?” (81). How is the cross an exercise of the justice of God if Christ was an innocent sacrifice?
5. In what way does the mercy of Christ benefit the non-elect? How does this differ from the covenanted love that he has towards his elect? How do sinners misunderstand the longsuffering of God? (83. Hint: Ecclesiastes 8:11).
6. In the Garden of Eden, Adam was blessed with a gracious promise of eternal life (“the grace lost in Adam”) and communion with God, upon the condition of

- perfect and perpetual obedience. How does the redemption that comes through the Lord Jesus Christ bring greater glory to God and bring us into “an unquestionably better condition” than if Adam had never sinned? (86).
7. How do we profit from the all-sufficiency of God as a result of the covenant of grace? ie, why should the all-sufficiency of God be treasured by us personally? (87).
 8. What three things are necessary to enjoy the comforts of our salvation? (87-89).
 9. What is the summary promise “of the whole covenant of grace?” (89).

CHAPTER 10

Summary

Not only do we come to know the glory and attributes of God more clearly in Christ than anywhere else, but we come to know ourselves and our spiritual needs in light of the Person and work of Christ. In particular, Christ has sent his Spirit to convince us of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8). As we know God through Jesus Christ, we must walk with him in agreement, friendship, holiness, spiritual strength, confidence, and with God's glory as our purpose and aim.

Outline

1. In what three ways does the Holy Spirit cause us to know ourselves in light of Christ's Person and work? (90. John 16:8).
2. Why is the "true knowledge of sin" known in Christ only? (90-91). Relate to the desert of sin and the suffering of Christ.
3. How does the atonement of Christ and the manner in which we depend upon the Spirit in our sanctification prove our total depravity even more clearly than the Law of God? (92).
4. Why was sin "allowed entry into the world?" (93).
5. For what two reason can man never obtain righteousness by keeping the Law? (94).
6. What are "works of supererogation?" (94). Why are they impossible?
7. How does Christ's death on account of sin convince men of the certainty of a final and universal judgment? How his resurrection? (95-96).

CHAPTER 11

Summary

Communion involves a reciprocal delight between two persons. Christ delights in his people through the covenant of redemption made between the Father and the Son from all eternity as well as through the marriage relationship that he daily enjoys with his Church. The delight that Christ has in his people is the primary truth that moves them to delight in him in return. Nothing is better for the saints than to enjoy the presence of Christ. This is illustrated by the Shulamite's lament in Song of Solomon 2, since she could not endure the absence of her beloved even for a moment. At times the saints experience a sensible absence of Christ's presence and comforts. At those times, they must use every means provided by God to recover the joys and comforts of Christ's presence as the object of their delight. The sections treating the Spirit's aid in prayer (101-104) and the souls inability to endure the absence of Christ (106) are particularly noteworthy and full of comfort.

Questions

1. In what way does Christ effectually reveal his mind to us? (100).
2. What is the difference between understanding the doctrines of Scripture, and knowing "the mind of Christ?" (100).
3. How does the Spirit enable us to unburden our desires before the Lord in prayer? (101).
4. Owen noted, "A sense of need is the spring of desire" (102). How does the Holy Spirit show us our need in prayer?

5. Why is the one who prays truly “dissatisfied with his prayers?” (103).
6. What is the difference between praying for the content of a promise, and praying “according to the promise?” (103). Hint: James 4:3.
7. Why is it necessary to pray in Christ’s name? (103). Relate to the promises of God (2 Cor. 1:20). How should these things affect the way in which we use the name of Jesus in prayer?
8. “Carelessness concerning fellowship with Christ is evidence of a false heart” (105). How may we be careless of fellowship with Christ? Why does this reveal a false heart?

CHAPTER 12

Summary

Owen's original outline of this chapter marked out the value that Christ set upon his saints, his pity and compassion towards them, and the bounty that he bestows upon them as three distinct points in an outline. Christ not only delights in his people, but he has set a high value upon them. This is demonstrated by the contrast between God's dealings with fallen men versus fallen angels, as well as by all that Christ accomplished for his people through his suffering and obedience. The only proper response of the saints is that they value Christ in return above all else. Christ also shows compassion towards his saints in their temptations and their trials. He assists them by the work and presence of the Holy Spirit, whom the saints must beware of grieving through sin. In response to Christ's help and compassion, the saints owe him spiritual chastity, particularly with regard to the biblical purity of their worship. Lastly, Christ bestows great and bounteous riches upon his saints, demanding the response of personal holiness. This holiness includes the power of holiness in their hearts by the Holy Spirit, as well as the fruits of holiness in their lives.

Questions

1. List some of the evidences of the value that Christ has set upon his saints (109-110).
2. What is "the first lesson that the gospel teaches believers?" (110). What is our motivation to learn this lesson?
3. List some of the ways that Christ aids us in our temptations (112).

4. Why is justification by a partial dependence upon our own works unfaithfulness to Christ? (113). How can the good works of believers be pleasing to God without contributing to their righteous standing before God?
5. How do we grieve the Holy Spirit? With regard to obedience? With regard to comforts? With regard to unbelief? (114-115).
6. What does unfaithfulness to Christ in worship mean? (115). What does faithfulness in worship look like? What level of importance should the Church place upon the manner in which God must be worshipped?
7. What “church” did Owen primarily have in mind in his treatment of worship? (115-116).
8. Owen wrote, “The great sin of believers is that they do not make as much use of Christ’s bounty as the might. Every day we ought to take from him mercy in abundance. Supplies from Christ do not fail. But our faith fails in receiving them” (117). What is our primary duty in response to Christ’s estimation of us?

CHAPTER 13

Summary

Owen's discussion of communion with Christ in his "personal grace" has now been completed. The text now addresses communion with Christ in his "purchased grace." In this chapter Owen includes a significant exposition of the "active obedience" of Christ and its connection to imputed righteousness. It was also necessary for Christ to pay the price of redemption for his people to the Father through his sacrificial and atoning death. The chapter ends by introducing the importance and comforts derived from Christ's intercession in heaven for the saints.

Questions

1. What is "purchased grace?" What are the three aspects of purchased grace? (118).
2. Why did Christ observe the ceremonial as well as the moral law of God, even though the ceremonial law was designed for sinners only? (118).
3. What is the "active obedience" of Christ? Why is the "active obedience" of Christ essential to our salvation?
4. Why are believers bound to observe the moral law even after they have been freed from the penalty of the moral law? (122).
5. What is the relationship between the "active obedience" of Christ and the covenant of works? (122).
6. Clarification – The abridged text states: "There is no such thing as 'passive obedience.'" (123). The original text asserted: "It cannot be clearly evidenced

that there is any such thing, in propriety of speech, as *passive obedience*; *obeying is doing*, to which passion or suffering cannot belong: I know it is commonly called so, when men obey until they suffer, but properly it is not so” (original, 163). Owen did not deny the doctrine of what is commonly referred to as Christ “passive obedience,” but he did object to the terminology.

7. With respect to our righteous standing before God, what two things are necessary in our justification? (123-124).
8. What is redemption? To whom is the price of redemption paid? (124-125).
9. What is the significance of the “eye for an eye” principle? How does this principle relate to the death of Christ on the cross? (126-127).

CHAPTER 14

Summary

In the beginning of the last chapter, Owen mentioned “three great blessings” that come through communion with Christ in his purchased grace. These three blessings are summarized once again here and serve as an introduction to the next three chapters. For this reason, after introducing his subject matter in general, Owen proceeded to unfold the blessings of acceptance with God, sanctification/holiness, and the privileges of adoption.

Questions

1. Why is the removal of the guilt of sin insufficient for acceptance with God? (129).
What is “negative righteousness?” What is “positive righteousness?”
2. What is the difference between the guilt of sin and the defilement of sin? (129).
How does Christ cleanse believers from them both?
3. How shall believers view their good works on the Day of Judgment? (130).
4. What is the “first and chief gift of sanctification” that we receive from Christ?
(130).
5. What is “habitual grace?” How does it relate to the practice of personal holiness?
(131).

CHAPTER 15

Summary

The blessing of acceptance in the sight of God is the first of the three major blessings of communion with Christ in his “purchased grace.” Two requirements are necessary for fellowship with Christ in order to be accepted before God. The first is that all that Christ accomplished was not accomplished for himself, but for others. The second is that Christ must procure perfect righteousness for his people. Two major objections arise in relation to acceptance with God. First, if union with Christ in his death justifies the elect, why were they not justified at the time of his crucifixion or from eternity in the decree of God? Second, why is personal holiness required of those who are already freely accepted by God? Owen answered the first question in terms of the manner in which believers participate in the covenant of grace, and he answered the latter question by examining the purposes of God’s plan of redemption. In regard to both questions, Owen’s demonstrates that the manner by which God justifies sinners brings the most glory to all three Persons in the Godhead.

Questions

1. How does the work of the Holy Spirit relate to our reception of Christ by faith? (132).
2. How should life be viewed without acceptance with God through Christ? (133).
3. Note the questions posed on pages 133-134. How does Owen’s conception of covenant theology avoid the errors of eternal justification, or of justification prior to conversion? (134-137). Relate to Christ’s procurement of the promises of God

- and to union with Christ through faith. How does this method of justifying sinners bring glory to the peculiar work of all three Persons in the Godhead? (137).
4. What are the “two different functions” of Christ’s obedience and our own, respectively? (138).
 5. What are some of the reasons for and uses of personal holiness in the covenant of grace? (138-140).
 6. What did Owen intend by stating, “Though our obedience is not the means by which we are justified, yet it is the way appointed by God for us to walk in to obtain salvation?” (140).
 7. List some of the reasons *why* believers enjoy communion with Christ by approving his righteousness (141-143).
 8. Why must believers, who are assured of their acceptance with God, “keep alive in their hearts a sense of the guilt and evil of sin?” (143).
 9. Why cannot a true believer rejoice to glorify Christ by multiplying sin? (145).

CHAPTER 16

Summary

Christ imparts personal holiness to his people in three ways: by his intercession, by giving the Holy Spirit, and by instilling a new principle of life in his people. Christ procured all of the promises of God for his people by fulfilling the terms of the covenant of grace, yet all of these benefits must be received by faith only. Union with Jesus Christ through faith is the ultimate foundation for all holiness of life. Every reason and motive that the Scriptures provide for personal holiness drive us back to the Lord Jesus Christ as the object of our faith.

Questions

1. Owen noted that Christ does not pray that the Father might love us, “because the eternal love of the Father is not the fruit but the source of the purchase” (147). If the Father himself loves us, then why is the intercession of Christ necessary? Is the Father “persuaded” to bless us through the intercession of Christ? In what ways is the doctrine of Christ’s intercession often distorted?
2. In what way is union with Christ the *foundation* for holiness? In what way is union with Christ the *motive* for holiness? (149).
3. What is the difference between the guilt of sin and the defilement of sin? What is the cause of a proper sense of the defilement of sin? (150).
4. In the Old Testament, what two things did the shedding of blood and the sprinkling of blood signify? How do these things relate to the benefits bestowed upon us by Christ? (150-151).

5. What three needs do the saints acknowledge for personal holiness? (152).

CHAPTER 17

Summary

It is instructive that Owen's treatment of adoption does not appear with his treatment of communion with the Father, but with communion with the Son. The reason for this is that believers are the sons of God only because the Christ with whom they are in union is *the* Son of God. Christ's natural sonship is the basis for our adoption into the family of God. In this way, communion with Christ in his privileges is the third and last way in which we enjoy communion with him in grace (the first two were communion with him in personal grace and purchased grace). Every privilege that a believer enjoys is rooted in his or her adoption. All the terms necessary for adoption have been fulfilled on their behalf and the life and love imparted through adoption necessitate a life of holiness. The primary benefits of adoption consist in *liberty* from Satan's family and from the condemnation of the Law as well as the blessing attached to sharing in Christ's inheritance.

Questions

1. What is the relationship between adoption and union with Christ (153).
2. What are the five prerequisites to adoption? How are each of these points fulfilled in our adoption by God? (153-154).
3. To whom is the public declaration of adoption made? In what ways is this declaration made to each? (155-156).
4. In what three respects are believers set at liberty from the moral law? (158). Does this liberty cancel all obligations to the moral law? Why or why not?

5. What is the character of the liberty that comes through adoption? (159).
6. What is the relationship between life, love, and obedience? How does Owen's comparison between the liberty of slaves and the liberty of sons illustrate these principles? (159-160).
7. Why does loving obedience cast out fearful obedience? (160). Consider in light of the following: "The law of liberty is the law stripped of its terrifying, killing, condemning, and cursing power, and made by the blood of Jesus, pleasant, lovely, and helpful" (161).
8. What is "the chief reason" for which the Lord Jesus Christ established a preaching ministry? (162).
9. What are the three primary privileges of our inheritance in Christ? How do these three privileges interrelate? (163-164).
10. How does our adoption through union with Christ affect our relation to the physical world? What is the difference between a spiritual right and a civil right to the physical world? (165-166).
11. Take special note of the eight summary benefits of our adoption on pages 166-167. Use these points for meditation and worship.

CHAPTER 18

Summary

In this chapter, Owen began his treatment of communion with the Holy Spirit. Chapter 18 is founded upon a complex orthodox Trinitarian theology. The inter-Trinitarian relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit comes to the forefront when we consider the manner in which the Spirit comes to us. The Spirit is sent forth by the Father and the Son and is, in some sense subject to them in the economy of redemption, without sacrificing his sovereign freedom or deity. This chapter emphasizes the point with which Owen began the book, namely, that although believers enjoy a distinct communion with all three Persons of the Godhead, the external work of the Triune God in time are undivided. In other words, the entire Godhead acts in every divine act whether creation, providence, or redemption.

Questions

1. How is the presence of the Holy Spirit “better and more profitable” to believers than the bodily presence of Jesus Christ? (169).
2. The distinction between the being or essence of the Persons of the Godhead and the work of each Person in time has usually been described in terms of the “ontological Trinity” and the “economic Trinity.” These concepts lie behind Owen’s description of the procession of the Holy Spirit on page 169. According to Owen (original text pg 227), the ontological procession of the Spirit is eternal and it is inferred from the economic procession of the Spirit in time. How does

- the economic procession of the Spirit relate to the love of the Father and the intercession of the Son? (170).
3. In the original text (pg. 229), Owen described the Holy Spirit as willingly subjecting himself to be sent by the Father and by the Son, not with regard to his *essence* but with regard to his *office*. How does this magnify the Holy Spirit's work as our comforter and helper? (abridged text, 171).
 4. Why is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit the "unpardonable sin?" (171-172). What does this imply about the nature of the "unpardonable sin?"
 5. How is the full character of the covenant of grace revealed in the work of the Holy Spirit? Three things (172).
 6. In what three ways does faith receive the Holy Spirit? What is "the most important work faith has to do in this world?" (173).
 7. How may the distinction Owen made between the Holy Spirit abiding with us and the comforts that he bestows upon us help in the assurance of our faith? Does the Spirit ever leave believers wholly without comfort? (174-175).
 8. What three adjectives describe the work of the Spirit in believers? (175. Revisited on 178-179).

CHAPTER 19

Summary

This chapter presents seven “general works” of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. For those comparing the abridged text with the original text, chapters two and three of section three have been combined to comprise chapter 19 of the abridged text.

Questions

1. John 14:26 contains a promise of bringing to remembrance all things that Jesus said. How did this promise apply to the apostles exclusively? How does it apply to us today? (177-178). How should we regard the relationship between the work of the Holy Spirit and our memory of Scripture?
2. How does the sovereign (and unpredictable) work of the Holy Spirit in comforting believers strengthen, rather than hinder faith? (179).
3. The Pope is called the “vicar of Christ,” indicating that he stands in Christ’s place on earth. Who is the true “vicar of Christ?” (180).
4. What did Owen mean when he wrote, “What we have of heaven in this world lies in the work of the Holy Spirit?” (182).
5. How does the Holy Spirit assure our hearts that we are justified in the sight of God? (182-183. Note: There is an “objective” and a “subjective” aspect to this answer).
6. What is a seal? How is the Holy Spirit as seal to the believer? (184).
7. What does it mean that the Holy Spirit is the “earnest” of our inheritance? (186). What does this tell us about the nature of our inheritance?

8. In what four ways does the Spirit teach us? (188).

CHAPTER 20

Summary

It is the Holy Spirit that applies comfort, peace, joy and hope to the hearts of believers.

Questions

1. Comfort and strength is “the chief work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers” (190). What three characteristics of this comfort does Owen list and how do these things motivate our obedience.
2. Many people desire “peace,” but there are many different conceptions of what peace is. What is the “peace of Christ?” (191). How do we receive this peace?
3. What is the connection between joy, the love of God, and tribulation? (192). In what ways can we pursue this joy? In what respects is this joy beyond our pursuit?
4. What is “the great hope of the believer?” (193).

CHAPTER 21

Summary

Satan attempts to distort each of the “general works” of the Holy Spirit to his own ends and purposes. He does this both by open opposition to the work of the Spirit as well as by passing off his methods and ministers as truly possessing the Spirit of God. The best way to resist these temptations of Satan is to contrast his work from the true work of the Spirit of God.

Questions

1. What are the two opposite ways in which Satan seeks to cast contempt upon the work of the Holy Spirit? (194).
2. Why does Owen refer to a “liturgical service” as Satan’s attempt to produce a ministry without the Holy Spirit? (194). What “liturgical service(s)” did he have in view?
3. What is the connection between the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures? In what way does the idea of continuing revelation dishonor the Spirit? (194-195).
4. In what ways can we despise prayer as “a base and contemptible way of communing with God?” (196).

CHAPTER 22

Summary

Although the Spirit is sovereign and he comforts his people when, where, and how he pleases, the most likely way to receive his comforts is contemplate the works that he was sent to accomplish. When we fail to acknowledge and honor him properly in his work of comfort, we often fail to receive and apply his comforts to our souls.

Questions

1. What is the purpose of affliction in the life of a believer? Why is it necessary to depend upon the power of the Holy Spirit in order to profit from affliction? (197). How does this differ from the way a non-believer may learn to endure hardships?
2. How are the comforts of the Holy Spirit connected to the Lord Jesus Christ? (198). What does this imply about the role of faith in Christ in every aspect of the Christian life?
3. Owen listed seven things that will occur without the comfort and strength of the Holy Spirit (198-199). Identify these seven things. Why is it necessary to increase our sense of sinful weakness in every aspect of life? How does acknowledging our weakness promote the work of the Holy Spirit in us?
4. How does the Holy Spirit convince and assure us of the Father's love (199-200).
5. Why does the Holy Spirit comfort us? (ie, What is the motivating factor or cause behind his work of comfort?). What are the consequences of failing to consider his work properly? (200-201).

CHAPTER 23

Summary

One important factor in our communion with the Holy Spirit is that we must remove all obstacles to fellowship with him and his benefits. In particular, we must not grieve him, we must not quench his blessings, and we must not resist him in the administration of his ordinances.

Questions

1. What do the Scriptures mean when they warn us against grieving the Holy Spirit? What do they not mean? How is the grieving the Holy Spirit different than grieving a fellow human being? (202).
2. How do we grieve the Holy Spirit? How do we avoid grieving him? What are the consequences of grieving him? (202-203).
3. What does it mean to quench the Holy Spirit? (203). How does this relate to the manner in which we use the gifts and graces that we have received from God?
4. Can sinners resist the gracious call of the Holy Spirit? (204). How does the distinction between the external call of the gospel and the internal call of the gospel assist us in answering this question?
5. What is the relationship between the Holy Spirit and preaching? (204). Does he work in the preaching of the Word even when he does not change the heart of a sinner. Why or why not?

CHAPTER 24

Summary

The Holy Spirit must be worshiped as a distinct Person within the Godhead. However, this must be understood on the backdrop of the truth that the being or essence of God cannot be divided, and that every act of worship respects all three Persons. Owen concluded this great book with some brief directions as to how we ought to pursue communion with the Holy Spirit as well as a few words of warning to those who do not have the Spirit of God dwelling in them.

Questions

1. Owen noted that every act of worship respects all three Persons in the Godhead. This is due to the fact that though the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit may be distinguished by an incommunicable quality or personality, they cannot be separated and the Godhead cannot be divided into parts. How is this fact manifested in prayer? (205).
2. In the original text of *Communion with God*, Owen marked out four specific directions to help believers foster communion with the Holy Spirit (original text, 270-272). In the abridged text, the four directions are no longer marked, but they are found on pages 206-208. Identify Owen's four directions and take careful note of them in your dealings with the Holy Spirit.
3. What role does praising the Holy Spirit play in the continuation of his comforts to our souls? (207). On what occasions should we particularly praise him?

4. How should Christ's promise to send the Holy Spirit affect our hope in praying for the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives? (207).
5. *Communion with God* sets forth the glorious blessings of personal fellowship between the soul and all three Persons of the Holy Trinity. In light of this fact, what is the value of Owen ending his work with a sober exhortation to the non-believer? (208-209).

APPENDIX: A WORD ABOUT THE ABRIDGEMENT

Any time a work is abridged, die hard fans of the original work groan in agony. Owen's *Communion with God* is a doctrinal and devotional masterpiece and, in many ways, it stands as a key to the heart of his thought on every other subject. The use and value of a paraphrased abridgement of this great work lies in the fact that now the aged widow in the church will gain *something* from Owen for the profit of her soul, whereas she never would have trudged her way through the small print of volume two of Owen's *Works*. All who take serious interest in Owen's writings shall never be satisfied with an abridged version (and should not be). But all should agree that passing on portions of his piety and love for the Triune God in some form is better than keeping his works as a locked up treasure that are enjoyed only by a select few. However, it is in order to make a few comments about the characteristics of the abridgment.

On the one hand, the reader should be aware that not a single sentence of the original text has been left unchanged. Every sentence that has not been omitted for the sake of brevity has been reworded for the sake of simplicity and clarity. The original outline of the work has also been largely lost in the abridgement. This sacrifices some sense of the overall plan and continuity of thought in Owen's book. Law has almost entirely omitted Owen's system of numbering his points. At times he blended what Owen viewed as separate ideas into the text with no indication of a new section. At other times, he highlighted points that Owen blended into his original text. Law has also removed most of the doctrinal expansions of Owen's Trinitarian and Christological formulations. A particular example of this is his omission of Owen's treatment of the subsistence of the human nature in Christ under one Person, the "community of

attributes” in Christ (*koinonia idomaton*), and the consequences of this doctrine in the execution of Christ’s offices in one Person (50).

On the other hand, the abridgment contains many positive contributions that will be welcomed by most modern readers. Owen’s original outlines, though always well thought through and well organized, were often hard to keep track of and filled with minutiae. Law’s omission loses some sense of Owen’s progression of thought, but it makes the book less intimidating to present-day readers. Though Law has changed every line in the book in some way, he has contained the germ of the original ideas and application in a way that makes this book both edifying and an easy to read introduction to Owen. I have tried to note throughout this study guide places in which Law has deviated significantly from the original text in order to create discussion and further the usefulness of the abridged version. If a text must be abridged, all in all, this book is an example of how to abridge well.

This author hopes that some readers shall gain enough profit from the abridged version of *Communion with God* that they will go back and read the original. The original is more precise and possesses greater theological depth. After reading the abridged copy, reading the original shall be even more profitable and accessible. I thank God for the opportunities for growth that this abridgement has brought to my own congregation. My prayer is that the reader would discover that Owen’s *Communion with God* is truly one of those rare books that is worth reading over and again.