

The Communion of the Saints

By Paris Reidhead*

Will you turn, please, to 2 Corinthians, Chapter 13, verse 14; the last word, the last verse of this second letter will enable us to at least get a hold of the basic idea that is represented by the theme of the morning, THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS. You notice in verse 13, he has said, "All the saints salute you." And in verse 14, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen."

The word communion is a word that is much before us these days in another form. You are acquainted, of course, with the fact that 1/3 of the world are living under what could be called a communion state. Another third are being greatly influenced by this communion of ideas. We have the word in its current expression called, Communism. But really it is the same basic idea, that is underlying the word as is used here. For the word in the Greek that is most frequently translated communion, means "koinonia," a participation, a sharing, fellowship, and distribution. These are some of the synonyms that are used for this word.

Now there is, as you well understand, a communion of sinners. You are aware of this. The saints are not the only ones that have communion. There is a communion of sinners, and in order that we can have a frame of reference by which we can measure what we are saying, I would like to acquaint you with something of what the Bible says about this communion of sinners, this sharing that sinners do.

Would you turn to Psalm 1. That is a very good place to begin, this portion of Scripture. It holds before us a warning regarding this communion of sinners. Most of you are familiar with it. But that you might see it, I would bring it to you.

"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly." They are sharing. The ungodly are sharing their axioms, sharing their ideas, their rules by which they live. What would the counsel of the ungodly be? Years ago I heard a young man say, Well after all, you've got to look out for #1. Take care of yourself. If you don't, who will? Here was the counsel of the ungodly being given to another. Get while the getting is good. Many of these axioms, many of these rules are employed constantly by sinners. And so, blessed, happy is the man who walketh not in the shared experience and the rules of conduct of the ungodly, "nor standeth in the way of sinners," does not commune with them by his presence (Psa. 1:1). To stand in their way means to share their company, to be where they are, to listen to their conversation and enjoy it. Standing means, not simply passing by enroute to some other place of vital meaning, but it has reference to a choosing to stand there, because one enjoys what is going on around them.

Then it says, "nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful," mocking, laughing, holding up for ridicule those who do not hold the same philosophy, nor share the same interest (Psa. 1:1b). This is something of the communion of sinners. Then we would go on elsewhere to find that there is something further to be said about this. I think if you would turn to Psalm, Chapter 10, or the 10th Psalm rather, verses 2 to 11, you will find that he has taken pains to acquaint us a little further with the communion, the sharing of the sinners. "The wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor," and so the wicked will find justification, rationalization in doing this, because others do it. "Let them be taken in the devices they have imagined. For the wicked boasteth of his heart's desire" (Psa. 10:3-4). He is proud of what he has done, and he shares this. Someone has recently, just this past week I read that man is a boasting, bragging animal and that he has to have something to brag about and someone to brag to in order to be happy. Now this was, of course, the philosophy of a scornful individual, a cynic who could see nothing in man but the abuse of what God gave him. But nonetheless he was expressing exactly what the Scripture says, "that the wicked boasteth of his heart's desire," and "blesseth the covetous, whom the Lord abhorreth." This is the sharing. This is the communion of the wicked. Boasting of their conquests, and blessing those as good whom God has held to be cursed of Him. "The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God" (Psa. 10:4). And so because he won't seek after God he uses every device and means possible to persuade others not to seek after God. And thus atheism becomes contagious. And since wickedness is endemic in the human heart, it is possible for this contagion to be carried to others. This is their sharing. God is not in all his thoughts. This does not mean that He isn't there negatively, but He isn't there as One who is to be respected. The most religious people I find are the wicked. If you folk that love Christ talked as much about Heaven and

Hell, and God and damnation as the unsaved do, we would have a witness going out constantly. It is just appalling to me to hear how religious sinners are, always talking about Christ, and always talking about God. Strangely enough it is God damning people, and not saving people that engages their thoughts. Hell is constantly on their lips. These verities you see, by frequent usage, they are trying to destroy significance. This is a sharing. This is the communion of sinners. This is that which God abhors.

And then in verse 6 of the 10th Psalm, “He hath said in his heart, I shall not be moved: for I shall never be in adversity. His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and fraud: under his tongue is mischief and vanity. He sitteth in the lurking places of the villages: in the secret places doth he murder the innocent: his eyes are privily set against the poor. He lieth in wait secretly as a lion in his den: He lieth in wait to catch the poor: he doth catch the poor, when he draweth him into his net. He croucheth, and humbleth himself, that the poor may fall by his strong ones. He hath said in his heart, God hath forgotten: He hideth His face; He will never see it” (Psa. 10:6-11). This is the communion of sinners, blasphemy and uncleanness, bitterness, cursing, deceit, misrepresentation. Here is that which is shared. We share what we have. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. And the person that speaks bitterness speaks from a bitter heart. The person that speaks cursing speaks from a heart that is filled with blasphemy. The person that speaks unkindness speaks from an unkind heart. The hard mouth is but the orifice of the spring of the personality, and what is in flows out. This is sharing. This is communion. It is the communion of the wicked. It is the communion of the condemned. It is the communion of sinners.

Now would you see the end of such communion, because there is an end, and we find it in the first Psalm again, verse 4—6. Well we see that the ungodly “are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand *approved* in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.” And what one shares is an evidence of what one is, because he is speaking out of what he has.

In Psalm 7 we come to verse 11, and there we find the end of this communion of the sinners, this sharing; “God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day. If he turn not, he will whet his sword; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready. He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death; he ordaineth his arrows against the persecutors. Behold, he travaileth with iniquity, and hath conceived mischief, and brought forth falsehood. He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made. His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealings shall come down upon his own pate” (Psa. 7:11-16). —This is the communion of sinners... Its nature, its ground, its end, and consummation.

Now we find that there is another, there is the communion, or the sharing, the fellowship, the participation of the saints. I believe that we would turn to Malachi, the 3rd Chapter, to be instructed in regard to the matter of the communion of the saints, a very lovely Scripture here that is known to all of us. We could have quoted it if we had started, but isn't it strange how often we can quote Scriptures we have difficulty in finding. So make a note of this for your reference tomorrow, will you? Malachi 3:16 and 17: “Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.” Now this is the communion of saints.

Upon what do they speak? They speak on that that they have experienced. What has happened to them? They have come to fear the Lord. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Psa. 111:10). “The fear of the Lord is to hate evil,” and here are those that are just as wicked as the sinners we have heard described (Pro. 8:13). They have done everything that has been attributed to these that are under the sentence of death. The difference is this, that these are awakened sinners, these are convicted sinners, these are repentant sinners, these are individuals that have come to fear the Lord, to hate evil, to hate iniquity and consequently in their brokenness they have cast themselves upon God's grace, they have known cleansing and pardon and forgiveness, and they meet others that fear the Lord. I said this morning in the class that God put into all of nature a recognition of His own kind. It is true that out in Africa how strange it was to go along the hiway and to see, as we did at times, vast herds of hartebeests. They would be together. They migrated. They stayed together. And a little further on, during the time of migration, you would see an immense herd of roan antelope, and then the gazelle; each recognized its own kind. Birds of a feather flock together. There is something that God put in them, an intuition that says, This one has had something similar to that which I have had, and they share together.

Now is it not strange that when men and women have come to fear God and hate sin that they should recognize others that have had the same experience. And consequently the Communion of the Saints begins with brokenness, begins with repentance, begins with forsaking of sin, begins with cleansing, and pardon, and consequently there is now a new creation, those that have partaken of Divine Life, and they recognize each other. It is not some institution. It is not some organization. It is not some membership. It is something that has happened in men. "They that feared the Lord spake often one to another." They knew others that had feared the Lord. This is the ground of the communion of saints, something that has happened, and something that they share, and out of this experience, out of this that they have received they share. Now they spake often one to another.

When I find those who claim to be Christian, but have no willingness to speak of Christ, I do discover something that is rather appalling to me, because there is a sense in which life must bubble, a spring must flow, and not that it has to be ceaseless or continuous, but there should come to us a sense in which we desire.

When I was Pastor in a church in Minnesota, we had an appalling thing happen. I have not recovered from it yet. The first Sunday I was there, the day I was installed, one of the deacons said to me, Now, Pastor, we are accustomed to have fellowship after the Sunday night service. Won't you come and share with us? Well I went. And when I got there I was rather amazed. The table looked as though they were having a banquet. It was filled with all sorts of things which I never even should have looked at, much less eaten, being so inclined as to gain two pounds just looking past the magazine pictures of these things, you see. And so here they were, spread out on the table. And I smelled coffee, and I thought, Well this is all right. We sat down. They were talking about everything under the sun except Him who ought to engage us, and we sat down. And I thought, Well the fellowship is going to begin when we get to the table. They are just all waiting. And when we got there, we had a word of perfunctory blessing, and it went on about so—and—so's hat, their house, their car, and I began to say, When is the fellowship going to begin, because this was not my idea of it. And finally I thought I would break in. I said sort of, Hurrah for Jesus, just to get the subject before us, just a little word to let the people know that I was there out of love for Christ, and there was a deathly silence. And after that it passed off, and they went right back to fellowship. And then after a few moments I said something else about the Lord. You would have thought that He was an unwelcome guest. They did not even want to talk about Him. And the next Sunday when they called me I said, I am awfully sorry but I cannot go. I had no time for that kind of fellowship. It was not fellowship in Christ. It was fellowship in congeniality and each other, and their homes, and their families, not in Him. And those that feared the Lord spake often one to another... Not about the inconsequential, but about Him, because He filled them, and He engaged them, and they loved Him, and they talked about what controlled them.

A Pastor told of going to a home for a week, and his hostess attended the meetings, and she said, Well you know, I just cannot talk to anybody about the Lord. I find it so difficult. I do not know why. And then one day he looked out and said, "What is that?" And she said, "Oh, those are my ducks." "You're interested in ducks?" And then he had a duck. For the next 30 minutes she told him about ducks, all there was to be said about them. And she had read books, showed him her library, everything. You see she was just full of that which was important to her. And so, since raising of ducks had become consumingly important, that is the point that she wanted to share. She wanted to share what was important. And so do you. You share what is important. You talk about what is important. You minister in what is important to you. And when the Lord becomes important you talk about the Lord. "They that feared the Lord spake often one to another about the Lord because they feared Him." This is the place of their communion. This is the place where they were. "And the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon His name."

Do you have communion as a saint with saints? Do you? Do you share? That is what communion means, sharing, just sharing, and passing on. If He is real, then you pass on that which is reality, what He does, what He means. This is sharing. It is not trying to think up something very obtuse and difficult, and complicated. It is what is real to you. And "they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it"... Do not forget this. The Lord does hear what you are saying. He said, "We are going to give an account of every idle word" (Mat. 12:36). Did you know that? Did you know that one day... It is a little bit disturbing to me, back when I first started preaching they did not have wire recorders; now they have tape recorders. But it is a little disturbing to go into a community and have someone say, Oh, we have heard you. I have never been here before. — Well you remember when you were at Mahaffey, and they made a recording? Well we have those tapes, and

we play them all around in our homes. And the missionaries say, You've been out in the Baliem. Have I? Yes, we have your tapes from Mahaffey, and we played them all up and down the valley. It is a strange thing to know that you can be in two places at once, isn't it. I remember out in North Dakota I was driving along and speaking on two radio stations at the same time, due to a coincidence of recording. Turned on this station, and I was speaking there. Turned on that station, I was speaking there. And I was not either place. I was driving between them. Oh, it is an amazing life we live you know. Just think, one day the words you have spoken are going to be played back to you, the conversation, in the presence of the angels, in the presence of the redeemed, and God will switch the tape recorder and then come back to you. And the words you have spoken are going to come, words of bitterness, words of complaining, words of criticism, words of uncleanness, words of praise, words of worship, words... sharing. They are all going to come. The Lord hearkened. He has hearkened and heard. The difference is, Where our words have been other than pleasing to Him there has been loss. These are words that pleased Him, and glorified Him.

Most of us have not understood human beings. You know another definition of a man is, He is a writing animal. Well of course I do not like the use of the word animal there, but it does point out the characteristic distinction that men write, men speak and write, and communicate their ideas. More people have been destroyed eternally by the ideas written down by Muhammad in the Koran; more people have been destroyed economically by that which has been written down in books — words, ideas, sharing. Evil communications corrupt good manners, and by the same token that which is good will be to the eternal glory of Christ. Sharing of ideas, sharing of words. "They that spake often one to another did so because they feared the Lord, and they thought upon His Name." And our Lord says, "They shall be Mine, in the day when I make up My jewels." Isn't this strange we usually associate this making up of jewels with the little children's song, When He Cometh. But in a sense He says, You are His jewels when as a saint you are sharing what He has given, what He means, what He is.

Now let us move on to one other thing, and that should engage us as we come to the close of this meditation, The Communion of His Church, His Body, and if you will turn to I Corinthians 10, we will see briefly something that ought to hold us there. Remember how we shared previously as sinners, and then remember what God did to us in breaking us, and bringing us to Himself, giving us this new heart and new nature, making us new creations, but we not only became saints, recognizing saints, but He also put us into a body, the body in its universal sense comprises Christ, and all the redeemed of the ages that make up this invisible body, invisible to us but known to Him, those that are in His presence now, those of us that remain here. And in that sense part of this body. But there is another sense in which He binds us together in local communities. And there again the word community means a group of people that are sharing, participating, having fellowship. Now we have it here in this 16th verse, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion... is not the fellowship ... of the blood of Christ?" Is it not participating in the merit and power and working of the Blood of Christ? Is it not sharing in all that was accomplished by the shedding of His Blood. "This is the cup of blessing which we bless. ...The bread which we break," is it not the sharing, the fellowship, "the participation of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread."

Now this is the body. This is that group in which we meet. So we find there are rules here as there have been rules previously. In II Corinthians, Chapter 6, we find just a brief statement that will help us to understand what is expected of us if we are to have fellowship in sharing: "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion — there is our word — hath light darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (II Cor. 6:14-7:1). This is the ground of fellowship. This is the ground of sharing, the ground of communion in the church, a forsaking of all that grieves Him, a leaving of all that soils or dirties or prevents fellowship, a giving of ourselves up to this which we have been called, a being the temple of the Living God that He might dwell in us, and walk in us, reveal Himself through us.

You see, God's great strategy for world evangelism and for local evangelism is His Body, the Church. Not just the individual believer, but the Church in its corporate sense. But it is to be made up of people that have come to fear the Lord, that have cleansed themselves in this sense, as we have seen it set forth here, with the particular demands that are made, and that they gather to the Lord Jesus Christ, they come to Him; the cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of Christ? And the bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? We have come, therefore, to see that sharing means to share in all that He has done, to share in all that He is, to partake ourselves of all that He has provided, and then to speak often in testimony in our witness, in edification, exhortation and comfort concerning the Lord Jesus. Then it is a sharing of our responsibility, that is a supporting of teachers, a sharing in the distress of the needy, a sharing in the sorrow of the afflicted. It is a sharing in life's service, recognizing that the end of our being is not the accumulation of wealth, but the provision of opportunity for ourselves and others to have the means whereby they can develop into all that God has purposed for them to be. I believe that there is a great deal for us to see right here at this point. What is the implication of being a Christian, a member of the body of Christ, a saint as far as our life is concerned, our social life, and our economic life? These are issues with which we propose to deal in days to come. But at this point as we come now to the Table of the Lord, it is a sharing in worship.

With a company as large as this, some 250 or more, as gathered here, it's impossible for all to speak. We would be here throughout the 24hour period. It's impossible for many to speak. And yet as we come together that which is being; said is being said for us, and by us, and to us. As we sing, we share the testimony of the writer. As we hear the Word, we share in the experience of the Scripture being presented. As we come to the Table of the Lord, what are you saying, You are saying this: Once I was a sinner. Once I stood with the wicked. Once I followed the counsel of the ungodly and walked as they walk. But now I have come to fear Him. I have renounced myself. I have renounced Satan as my god and governor; I have renounced selfishness as the end of my being. I have received Jesus Christ as my Sovereign, to reign and to rule. I have confessed that I was so hopeless nothing could meet my need, but His shed Blood. And I have therefore testified by my presence here and participation that I was utterly undone, and needed His shed blood to wash away my stain. "Nothing in my hands I bring simply to His cross I cling¹." This is the testimony as you come to the cup, and as you come to the bread. You are saying, All is in Jesus. It is all upon Him. We are sharing in His blood. Everyone who partakes of the bread says, If it had not been for the fact that Jesus Christ died, I would have perished. I have nothing to offer. Everyone that lifts the cup says, By the drinking of it, I too testify by this that I have no grounds whatever for expecting mercy, but that God loved me and Christ died for me. So there is a testimony. But there is more than just a testimony of the past. There is the sharing of the testimony of the future. "This do as oft as ye do it in remembrance of Me" till I come — until I come (I Cor. 11:24). And so as you eat the bread, you are saying,

The Lord Jesus went away

But not to stay.

He is coming back again.

And I am yearning for Him to come, for when He comes we won't have this supper any more. I long to see Him. I yearn to be with Him. And you are saying also, not only that you are testifying to your expectancy of His coming, but you are testifying also to your purpose to please Him. I eschew all evil. I renounce all of myself, and all attitudes and traits and tendencies. I declare relentless, ceaseless war upon everything in me unlike Christ. For when you take of that Bread you are saying, I am not yet all I am going to be, but He made provision for me in His Cross, in His broken Body, His poured out Blood, and so just as you eat, and He says, Do this as oft as ye do it, you are saying, I am partaking more and more day by day of the finished work of Christ. The Cross has not done all it is going to do in me. He has not been allowed to live in me to the measure that He pleases, but I am pressing on. I have not attained, but I am pressing on to partake more, and still more, and ever more of the provisions of His love and grace. My, what a sharing when we come to the Table of the Lord.

But of course you know that it doesn't stop here. Communion doesn't stop here. "They continued steadfastly in the Apostle's doctrine and fellowship of breaking of bread and of prayers" (Acts 2:42). Might it be that this sharing goes on, and on, and on,

¹ "Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me." Text: Augustus M. Toplady, (1740-1778); Music: Thomas Hastings, (1784-1872).

realizing that if Christ is as real to you as you testify when you come to His table then you must make Him known, you must share. It is the expression of your life. Just as in life you are hungry and in life you breathe, so you have a desire to share more of His Word, and to share that which you have received of His Word in witness.

Let me ask you. Are you a saint? Have you been born of God? Are you living in the communion, the “koinonia,” the sharing, the participation, the fellowship of the saints? Well you are. You are sharing something. Are you sharing Christ? Shall we bow in prayer.

Our Father, before us is this spread table, the elements that speak to us of the Communion of His Body, of His Blood. We thank and we praise Thee, Father, that there is now this high and holy privilege of saying by our presence, and by our participation, and by our sharing that once we were sinners, undone, hopeless and helpless, but that Jesus Christ by His grace awakened us, and drew us to Himself, and broke us at the foot of His Cross. By His Blood, He has washed away our stain. By His Life, He delivers us day by day. We have a testimony we are sharing, but it is so easy to share when we are here of one mind, of one persuasion, of one conviction. We ask Thee, Father, that we may be equally free and at liberty, released to share Him, in work, in recreation, in fellowship. We believe, Lord, that there are many around us that are waiting to find out whether or not our God and we care for them enough to talk to them about the Lord Jesus. So we pray that something so wonderful may happen as we come now to the Table of the Lord, that there will be released a real fellowship, a real sharing, that the Bread will have new meaning, that the Cup will have new meaning, and that there will be brokenness. For we all must break. And there will be accepting of cleansing, for we all are in need of an Advocate, and then there will be a committing of all we are and have to Him. Make this a precious time as we come to our Lord’s Table and share of His Life, His Body, His Blood, and thereby learn something of what sharing will be as we go out into the world that knows Him not. In His Name and for His sake we pray. Amen.

* Reference such as: Delivered at The Gospel Tabernacle Church, New York City on Sunday Morning, March 4, 1962 by Paris W. Reidhead, Pastor.

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