

CHAPTER 26

OF THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

Ground of communion

“1. All saints that are united to Jesus Christ their head, by his Spirit and by faith, have fellowship with him in his graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory: and, being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other’s gifts and graces; and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man.”

Because we are united to Christ (John 1:16; Rom 6:1-6; Eph 2:5-6; 3:16-19; 1 John 3), we are united to one another (1 Cor 3:21-23; 12:7; Eph 4:15-16; Col 2:19).

We share a common life with Christ, his sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory. In a similar way we share a common life with all Christians; we have the same forgiveness of sins and share the same Spirit.

Because we are united together, we should seek each other’s welfare and mutual good (Gal 6:10; 1 Thess 5:11, 14; 1 John 3:16-18).

Essence of communion

“2. Saints, by profession, are bound to maintain an holy fellowship and communion, in the worship of God, and in performing such other spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification; as also in relieving each other in outward things, according to their several abilities and necessities. Which communion, as God offereth opportunity, is to be extended unto all those, who, in every place, call upon the name of the Lord Jesus.”

All Christians are united spiritually, and therefore should seek to improve each other’s spiritual condition (Isa 2:3; Acts 2:42, 46; Col 3:16; 1 Thess 5:14; Heb 10:24-25).

In addition, we should help materially especially those Christians who are in need, as the early Christians did (Acts 2:44-45; 11:29-30; 2 Cor 8-9, esp. 8:1-5, 13-14 and 9:7, 12-15; Jas 2:15-17; 1 John 3:16-18).

Limit of communion

“3. This communion which the saints have with Christ, doth not make them in any wise partakers of the substance of his Godhead, or to be equal with Christ in any respect: either of which to affirm, is impious and blasphemous. Nor doth their communion one with another, as saints, take away, or infringe the title or property which each man hath in his goods and possessions.”

This section warns us of two possible extremes to which some may push this doctrine. One extreme is the equating of ourselves with Christ. Even though we share in his life, we are in no way equal to him; he is entirely unique as the God-man (see Isa 42:8; Col 1:18-19; 1 Tim 6:15-16).

The other extreme is socialism or communism. The fact that Christians are to share materially with those in need is harmonious with our rights of private property as persons made in the image of God and subject to the eighth and tenth commandments. The early Christians in Acts 2:44-45 and 4:31 - 5:11 show an example of Christian charity and generosity, but not of socialism. For one thing, the Greek verbs in those passages are in the imperfect tense, meaning that they were selling their properties and giving their money as the various needs were arising; they did not immediately turn over all their property to the church when they joined, as they would in a socialist organization. The sin of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 was lying to the Holy Spirit, not keeping some of the money (see vv. 3-4, 8-9). The early Christians were instructed to work, to obtain money, so that they might be generous and give to those truly in need (Eph 4:28). Contrary to socialism, in the church only certain categories of people were entitled to receive charitable support (Acts 6:1; 1 Tim 5:1-16; cf. 2 Thess 3:6-15).