

**The Vine and the Branches – Part II**  
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**John 15:1-12**  
**March 1, 2015**

I'd like to ask you to turn with me in your Bibles to John 15. We are coming for our second message from this passage about Jesus, the true vine. Last week we asked the question, we noted the context of this passage, a very familiar passage if you've been a Christian for long. You've probably been through this passage a number of times or heard the image. Very familiar, and yet one that often we think about, and we fail to see it in context.

We noted the last time that Jesus speaks this image: "I am the vine, you are the branches," really, as bookended by discussion of spiritual warfare. The end of Chapter 14, remember the disciples are with Him in the upper room. It is the night before He is to be crucified. He has been talking with them about a number of things on His heart in His *Farewell Discourse*. He knows that He is about to go to the cross, the shadow of the cross is looming. He feels the weight and a burden for His disciples, and so He is sharing with them many things that are urgent upon His heart. He tells them at the end of Chapter 14, "Let's get up. We must go from here. Let's leave the upper room. We must go and meet the enemy," basically, is the force of that. ...*the ruler of this world is coming...*, Jesus says in Chapter 14, Verse 30.

Then, in Chapter 15, Verse 18, the passage that immediately follows the discussion of the vine and the branches, He talks about persecution. He says in Verse 18, "***If the world hates you,***... and He spends a number of verses, actually all the way into Chapter 16, Verse 4, talking about the reality of persecution, the opposition that the people of God will experience from the world. And so in the midst of this discussion of spiritual warfare, on the front end and the back end, He sandwiches in the middle this amazing and rich imagery of the vine and the branches.

So we noted that really the thrust of what is being said is, when life is falling apart around you, when the days are getting darker spiritually, when trials are growing, when times are tough, and becoming more and more turbulent, what are you to do? As the psalmist says in Psalm 11, or he refers to what someone has said to him, "You say to me, 'As a bird, flee to your mountain. When the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?'" When you see things falling apart around you, what are you to do as a Christian?



We certainly live in days like that, growing darkness. Every day you turn on the news, you listen to the radio, you hear about something that is distressing, at least for those of us who love God, and love His word. The gentleman that we heard that was hacked to death in the Middle East, an American who was over there, had written things against Islam, hacked to death. More and more news about ISIS. Even things like the Atlanta police chief being fired, and the struggle for religious freedom, to be able to speak out against the evils of sin, to call sin as it is, to be able to say that now looks like it is going to be a crime for us to say that homosexuality is against God's will, and is sin. And for us, it is not hate speech, that is love speech. To be able to say the truth, to say, "Listen, you may feel those desires, you may feel those things inside of you, but there is a better way. You are to experience your sexuality according to God's design." All of us have perverted hearts apart from grace, and we all would go the wrong way, but God has said, "A better way."

So we live in a world where we feel like we can't even speak the truth, even the discussions about net neutrality, and government takeover of the Internet. All of these things can discourage you. I flip on the radio and I flip it off very often because I'm getting discouraged, or the news broadcast. But it is so good to remember what really matters, and Jesus basically, the disciples don't have a full understanding of what is about to happen. Jesus had told them He's leaving, they don't know why, and they are distressed about that, their hearts are troubled, but they have no idea what is coming. In the midst of this discussion, when He's trying to prepare them for the warfare that is about to happen, for the storm that is brewing, He says to them, "Abide in Me just like a branch abides in the vine." What He is saying is, what we saw last week, "What are you to do when the world is falling apart around you? What are you called to do as a Christian?" Now you may need to write your congressman, call their office, vote certainly, but what is the main thing you are supposed to be doing? Ten to one in importance over worrying about what the government is doing, ten times more important it is for us as Christians to abide in Christ, and to be what we are called to be. And this verse says, "What you are called to do is bear fruit. As a grapevine branch does, bear fruit, do what you are created to do."

We said that the fruits, last time what we're called to do when you look at Isaiah 5, God wants righteousness. The passage we read earlier, He was looking, He planted the vine, He was looking for righteousness, but He found bloodshed. What does God want from you as a Christian? He wants you to live a righteous life. He wants you to obey. So when things are falling apart around you, what are you supposed to do? Obey. Live a holy life. Jeremiah 2, Jeremiah talks about the same image of the

vine, and he says, “When God planted the vine He wanted true worship. He didn’t want idolatry.” What are you supposed to do when the world is falling apart around you? You are supposed to worship, truly from your heart to give glory to God in every circumstance, to praise Him in all things. In John 15, we see that Jesus, as He expounds upon what it means to bear fruit, the fruit that He wants us to bear, and seven times in eight verses you will hear, as we read this passage in a moment, you will hear the phrase ‘*bear fruit*’, seven times in eight verses. What does He want you to do? Bear fruit.

One of the fruits is love. He wants you to love God, and love one another, and love all people. Righteousness, true worship, love—that is what we are called to do. But I said that this week, last week we talked about ‘*What Are You Called to Do?*’ We summarized that just now. Today what we are going to look at is ‘*How Do You Do That?*’ How do you bear fruit? That is the question. It is one thing to know what to do, it is another thing to know how to do it. That’s what we’re going to look at this morning, how to do it. Now I want you to listen for a word that occurs more times than ‘*bear fruit*’ in the passage. There is one word that occurs 10 times in seven verses. Listen for that word because that is the key to how you bear fruit.

***John 15:1-12 ~ “I am the true vine, and My father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. 3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. 7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. 9 Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. 10 If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love. 11 These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.*”**

How do you bear fruit? The word you heard ten times was the word ‘*abide*’. “Abide in Me,” Jesus says. “As a branch has to abide in the vine, you are to abide in Me.” Let’s go to the Lord in prayer.



*Father, we ask that you would help us as we consider Your word this morning. That Your Spirit might work in our minds, in our hearts, to lead us to abide in Christ, to depend upon grace, and to live holy lives. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.*

Now how do you abide in Christ? How do you bear fruit? You abide in Christ. But how do you abide? What does that mean? That is what I want us to look at in our time this morning. What does it mean to abide in Christ? How do you do it? I think there are three points that summarize what Jesus is saying here about how we are to bear fruit by abiding in Him, how we are to remain in Him. There are three things, what we're going to see, the three points basically are we have to continually affirm, or continually acknowledge your emptiness, continually affirm His fullness, and continually attach yourself to Him.

### 1) Continually Acknowledge Your Emptiness:

That to bear fruit, in each circumstance it starts by first of all continually acknowledging your emptiness. Jesus makes it very clear that we are, in and of ourselves, completely empty of anything that we can do for God. He makes this especially clear in Verse 5.

***John 15:5 ~ ... he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.***

How much can you do apart from Jesus? Nothing. We can do nothing. So unless we are abiding in Jesus, and the idea that basically we're going to see that abiding in Jesus is having a living, real, organic relationship with Jesus Christ moment-by-moment. This is the key to bearing fruit. That whatever circumstance we are in, if we are a true follower of Christ, if we want to bear fruit, we need to be looking to Jesus, loving Jesus, seeking to please Jesus, and thinking about Him. Our minds have to be continually turning away from the circumstances around us, looking at Christ, and to do that, part of what we do is we acknowledge our emptiness. We acknowledge our inability.

I said earlier in talking about Isaiah 5, that when Jesus says in John 15:1, "I am the true vine," the adjective 'true' means 'genuine, authentic, true as opposed to the false, or the inadequate'. He is basically saying that, "The mind of the Old Testament is not the true vine, I am the true vine." When you think about that, really there is a microcosm message. The Israel is a microcosm for humanity in the Old Testament. There is a message, one of the messages of the Old Testament is the complete inability of man to do anything good. When man falls in the Garden

of Eden, rebels against God, he starts to experience physical death, he knows things are a mess, but he has no idea how much of a mess he is, how much a mess we are. He doesn't realize how lost being lost is.

We tend to minimize our sin. We overestimate our abilities. It is part of what sin is. We don't think we're that bad. One of the reasons God worked through the Nation of Israel is to put on display a message for how bad we are. There are other things that are going on, but that is one of the things that is happening, and he uses the image of the vine. He says in Isaiah 5, He cleared the area, and He dug up the rocks, and He planted a choice vine. The image is He took the people of Israel from Egypt, and He planted them in Canaan. He did all that He needed to do to prepare the soil, and He planted that vine, and then it says in Isaiah 5, He dug a, I forget the word, but anyway a place to tread the grapes, a winepress, built a tower. So when God planted this vineyard, He says, "Think about a man who would," for us, I don't know anybody who grows grapes. I know I had some family members who used to grow muscadines. Has anybody had muscadines? Really good stuff but we don't really grow grapes as much, but maybe you garden. When you garden you go out and you go to work, don't you? You clear the soil of rocks, you till it up, you plant the seeds. You make sure that it is watered. When it is not raining, you go water it, and then you expect something to happen. And if it doesn't happen, you don't just keep doing it year, after year, after year.

I planted tomatoes, I got no tomatoes. I'm going to plant them again, and I got no tomatoes. Plant them again, and I got now tomatoes, and the definition of doing the same thing over again, expecting different results, that is the definition of insanity, right? This is crazy. Well what God is basically doing is saying, "Look, I've done everything necessary for human beings. I took people to myself. I called Abram and changed his name to Abraham. I worked in the life of Isaac and Jacob. I gave Jacob 12 sons. I made the nation Israel. I took them into Egypt, and took them from 70 people to probably 3 million in the womb of Egypt. I delivered them with my mighty hand from the Egyptians. I showed them My power and My glory with the plagues upon Israel. I showed them My power and My majesty by bringing them through the Red Sea, and destroying the Egyptian army. I showed them what a great provider I am, and leading them into the desert with no food, and no water, I gave them water from the rock, I gave them bread from Heaven. My presence was with them as a pillar of fire by day, a pillar of cloud by night. I led them to the Promised Land, I planted them in the land. They struggled, and stumbled along the way." God had to kill some along the way in judgment because even when Moses is up on the mountain, remember getting the law? There they are carrying on, sinning, but the Lord shows grace. He continues to show grace through the period



of the judges, it is evident that they need a king. If they just had a king, a godly king, they'd be okay. So God gives them Saul, then He gives them David. What a great king David was, but David wasn't a perfect king. David sinned with Bathsheba. A judgment, it still wasn't perfect and pure.

They needed a temple, God gives them a temple through Solomon. They needed a wise king, God gives them a wise king in Solomon, and yet they still fall into sin again, and again, and again. As they fall, God sends prophet, after prophet, after prophet. Basically what He is doing He is trying to keep tending that vine, you see? He is tending the vine, and tending the vine, and tending the vine, and tending the vine, and what happens? Worthless grapes, worthless grapes, worthless grapes, worthless grapes. He sends them into exile, He uproots the vine and casts it over into Babylon. But then in His grace He picks it up and plants it back in the land of Israel, He sends them back under Zerubbabel, and then later Ezra and Nehemiah. He sends other prophets—Zechariah, Haggai, Malachi, and what happens? Worthless grapes. Worthless grapes. No real righteousness, no real worship. All of that to prepare the way for the Savior of the world.

If Israel couldn't do it with all that, the news is you and I could not. If you had every advantage, every blessing, you could not do one thing worthy of God. Your best, Isaiah says in Chapter 64 that our righteousness is filthy rags. That word is a very descriptive image. Filthy rags mean rags that are filthy with basically human excrement, human waste, it is ugliness. Our righteousness God sees as soiled rags. That is the best that we do. We are hopeless, that is the message through the Nation of Israel. When Jesus comes and says, "I am the true vine," it is a proclamation. God has found a way to bring humanity back to Himself. He has found a way to make humanity able to produce fruit that is fitting for God. But the only way that you and I can produce is to realize that we, in and of ourselves, have no ability, and we must place all of our hope in Christ. When we see that, when we see that we are truly inadequate, that we have nothing to offer to God, that we are like sheep that continually go astray, that is the first thing that we must see, our emptiness. We are basically, I mean, the best picture of us is we're a vine branch not attached to a vine. Imagine a vine branch just lying on the ground. It is not going to produce any fruit, is it? Or even a vine branch that is a half inch away from the vine. It's not going to produce any fruit. It can do nothing unless it is attached fully to the vine.

So acknowledge your emptiness. This means as you go through your life, continually know that what you need is help. As a Christian, to be saved you have to come to a place of acknowledging that, "I have nothing to offer to God and that all of my hope is in what Jesus Christ has done." And you repent, and you believe,

and you place your faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ, His perfect life, His propitiatory death, that He died as a sacrifice for sin, sins of everyone who would ever believe. He rose again to show that He was a spotless lamb, a Lamb of God. When you place your faith in Him you are saved, and then the rest of our life to bear fruit. What do we have to do? Continually acknowledge that in and of ourselves we are empty. That is the first thing—continually acknowledge your emptiness.

## 2) Continually Affirm His Fullness:

The second thing to bear fruit, how do you bear fruit? How do you abide? After you continually acknowledge your emptiness, you continually affirm His fullness. He says, “I am the true vine. I am the genuine vine.” We noted that when He says, ‘I AM’, this is one of the key ‘I AM’ sayings in John’s Gospel. Jesus repeatedly identifies the wonder of who He is, and what He is going to do by these ‘I AM’ sayings. He says, “I am the bread of life.” “I am the light of the world.” “I am the resurrection and the life.” “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” “I am the true vine.” We’ve noted that when He says that that actually in the Greek, you can say, ‘I AM’ simply in Greek with just a verb, that the verb itself has the pronoun in it. ‘*Eimi*’ says ‘I AM’, that is the Greek word ‘I AM’, that’s how it translated, but here we have ‘*ego eimi*’. He puts the pronoun in front of the first person being verb ‘I AM’. He puts the pronoun in front of it to say, in a sense, “I Myself am.” It is an emphatic way of saying it. “I Myself am the true vine.” He and He alone are the true vine.

I mentioned the other ‘I AM’ sayings. He is basically saying, “Listen, everything that you are not, everything that you lack, I am.” This is the most wonderful news in the world. We are empty, but He is full. All of our emptiness is just an opening for His fullness. Think of the images in John. I mentioned earlier just a moment ago, that He says, “I am the bread of life.” He’s teaching us through these images how He’s everything we need. We need to eat every day, three meals a day, basically. Some people skip breakfast, but they make up for it usually later in the day somehow, with snacks and stuff, right? My breakfast is usually two cups of coffee, but then I make up for it later. But when we think about eating, isn’t it funny how you’ll be eating sometimes and you’ll just be finishing a good meal, and you’ll think, “What am I going to have for dinner?” It’s because the Lord has made us to need food, to enjoy food, but we need to eat regularly. You don’t just eat one day and think, “I think I’ll eat again in a couple of weeks,” unless you’re fasting intentionally. You don’t accidentally do that. “I just forgot to eat the last

fourteen days. I don't know what I was thinking." You will remember, won't you, to eat?

He says, "Listen, we need sustenance every day, physical sustenance to live. "In the same way, you need Me. That's how you need Me. You need Me every day, all day long to satisfy the needs of your heart. I am the bread." We don't only need food, but we need water. He says in John 7, He stands at the Feast of Tabernacles and says, "The one who believes in Me, from his belly will flow rivers of living water." Jesus says, "I am the one who will satisfy you and fill you up with living water, so that you overflow as a fountain of water. You're thirsty, and I am the one who will satisfy your thirst."

We live in a dark world, and He says, "I am the Light of the world. You don't know where to go or what to do. I'm the Light. Follow My guidance. I am the one." We are stupid and foolish like sheep, and He says in John 10, "I am the good shepherd." He's everything that we need. That's what He's trying to teach us. So to abide in Christ means that as you go through life, you see continually your emptiness and His fullness. Let's think about how this really works out.

You're tempted to sin, areas that we struggle in, sins that tend to beset you that you find yourself doing and saying, "Lord, I promise you I don't want to do this again, and here I've just lost my temper again. Here I've been anxious and fearful again. Here I've entertained lustful thoughts again. Well, when we're tempted, how are we to respond to that? Well, this is the opportunity. That's when you're supposed to abide. If you want to bear fruit of righteousness in temptation, you have to abide, and the way that you do that is first of all think yourself empty. Acknowledge your emptiness.

When you're tempted, one of the things that we mess up on this is we think we're supposed to act like we've got it together. We're tempted. "I'm not supposed to do this," and we do it in such a way that it's actually the subtle deceptiveness of our own indwelling sin. The essential problem with man is pride, and pride is self-sufficiency, thinking we can do it. So even as a Christian, we're tempted to sin, and we'll think, "I know I can't do this. I don't want to do this. I don't want to lose my temper right now. I've got to get this under control. I've got to work on this. I can't do this." We're thinking like that, but it's all here. What are we supposed to do? Abide in Christ. Look to Him. Attach yourself to Him. How do you do that?

First of all, you realize, “Wait a minute. Here I am tempted to be angry. This is exactly what I would expect.” Don’t try to pretty it up. Don’t put makeup on it. This is my heart. Look at my heart. Agree with God. I’m empty of any ability to do righteousness. “Here I am, Lord, about to sin. Look at me, helpless and hopeless, but I have a Savior who is fullness, and completely able. He is the Almighty God.” So I look at Jesus now from my emptiness and I say, “Lord Jesus, You never lost Your temper in a sinful way. You were tempted to be angry and could have been angry sinfully, over the top, because so many people did so many terrible things to You. You had a legitimate reason for anger, but You never responded in sinful anger, not one time. You were able to handle this.”

Maybe it’s fear. You’re tempted to fear. “Here I am afraid again. Here I am wrestling with fearful thoughts.” What are you supposed to do? Sit there and fight it out yourself? “I can’t do this.” No, you look to Christ. “I’m empty. Yes, here I am again feeling the gravity of that same path, and what I’ve got to do is stretch out my wings of faith and look to Christ. Jesus, You were in much more fearful circumstances than I have ever been in, and You never sinned in fear. You are perfect righteousness. You were able to walk in peace. You had peace throughout Your life. You never were overcome with anxiety or sinful lust.” He is your righteousness. He is your bread. He is your water. He is your life. He is your vine.

He doesn’t expect you as a branch to be able to do it yourself. God didn’t make little, mini vines. He made branches that must be continually attached to Jesus. That brings us to the third point. Not only acknowledge your emptiness continually, and not only affirm His fullness continually, but thirdly:

### C) Attach Yourself to Him Continually:

Realize you’re empty, realize He’s full, but how do you lay hold of Him? I think there are three things under this last point, under this third point, three sub-points. How do you hold onto Jesus? How do you really attach yourself to Him? It’s so important for a branch to be fully attached to the vine, isn’t it? You think about if you have a tree and a branch is broken off, or not all the way off, but it’s broken and separated. Is that limb going to bear fruit if it’s an apple tree? No, it’s got to be repaired. It’s got to be attached fully so that the sap and the life of the tree goes into the branch. How do you attach yourself fully to Christ in the moment? When you see your emptiness, you acknowledge His fullness, how do you attach yourself to Him fully? There are three things.

In the passage, Jesus gives us three ways that we can attach ourselves to Him, and the first is seen in Verse 7:

***John 15:7 ~ If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.***

I think what He's teaching us is that to abide in Christ, you must let His words abide in you so that this first sub-point about how to attach yourself continually to Him is let His words fill your mind. Let His words fill your mind. If you want to be walking through life and you're going to encounter temptations, you're going to encounter opportunities where you're reminded of your inadequacy, your emptiness, you look at His fullness, what do you do? Fill your mind with His words. That's what He said in Verse 7.

***John 15:7 ~ If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you,...***

To abide in Jesus is the same thing as His words abiding us. It creates that sense of connection. Think about passages of Scripture that you know, that you meditate on, you memorize, you get in the word, and whenever you get in the word, you don't just get in the New Testament, you get in the whole Bible, but what you do is it's not that you read the Bible in a merely a theological way, an informational way. You read it in an experiential, practical way, and the way you do it is you focus on what does this tell me about You, God? What does this tell me about You, Jesus, about Your character?

I mentioned earlier that if you feel tempted to the same sin that you've committed a number of times before, and you're struggling in that moment, what do you do? Well, you remember who He is. You put His word in your mind. You think about His character. What is He like? I was reading some verses from Psalm 130 this week about the goodness of God and the goodness of Christ.

### ***Psalm 130***

***1 Out of the depths I have cried to You, O Lord.***

***2 Lord, hear my voice!  
Let Your ears be attentive  
To the voice of my supplications.***

The Psalmist is in need. He's found a place where he's completely overwhelmed. It's like us when we feel tempted to sin. The Psalmist is crying out:

***Psalm 130***

***1 Out of the depths I have cried to You, O Lord.***

***2 Lord, hear my voice!  
Let Your ears be attentive  
To the voice of my supplications.***

As he reaches out to God, he reminds himself, "How am I going to attach myself?" He reminds himself of who God is. He's letting God's words abide in him. Listen to what he says next, in Verse 3:

***3 If You, Lord, should mark iniquities,  
O Lord, who could stand?***

As I reach out to You in my moment of weakness, I'm remembering that Your holiness, Lord, is so great. My sinfulness is so great. The distance is so great between me and You, that if You should mark iniquities, if You should count them up, who could stand?

***4 But there is forgiveness with You,  
That You may be feared.***

"You've said that You are a forgiving God. You're a merciful God." So when you try to abide in Jesus, you think about the fact that He is a forgiving Savior. He goes on to say:

***7 O Israel, hope in the Lord;  
For with the Lord there is lovingkindness,  
And with Him is abundant redemption.***

***8 And He will redeem Israel  
From all his iniquities.***

You remember as you reach out to God, as you realize how dirty you are, how empty you are, how full Christ is, “Your character is such that You look upon the weak and the empty, and delight to show Yourself strong.” You let His words fill your mind, and as His words fill your mind, what happens is next you let His love fill your heart, because the more you think about the word of God and what it says about Jesus and what it says about God’s character, the more amazed you are that, as He says here in John 15, He encourages them in Verse 9:

***John 15:9 ~ Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love.***

The way that you attach yourself fully to Jesus is you let His love fill your heart. He says there, “I have loved you just as the Father has loved Me; abide in My love. I have loved you.” It’s not, “I’m thinking about loving you,” or, “I’ve stopped loving you.” It’s, “I have loved you.” That is, “I started loving you, and I’m continuing to love you, and I’ve made a decision that I will never stop loving you. I have loved you, and I have loved you in the same way My Father has loved Me.” Now, that is something.

In fact, it’s really interesting. In Verses 9 and 10, basically what He says in Verses 9 and 10, look at this:

***John 15:9 ~ Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. 10 If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.***

This is what Jesus is saying. If you’re a Christian, Jesus wants to have the same kind of relationship with you that He has with His Father. He wants you to know Him and know His love, and to experience a love that is absolutely mind-blowing, the same kind of love that He has with His Father. He says, “My Father has loved Me, and I abide in His love by keeping His commandments.” He’s saying to us, “I now have loved you. Abide in My love by keeping My commandments. I want to have the same kind of intimate relationship with you.”

Now listen, one of the things that just really will totally blow your mind is to think about and meditate on the wonder of the Trinity, that God has always existed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. One of the hymns that the young people sang earlier that Chris Anderson wrote, talked about the Father and His being with us, and the Son and His being with us, and the Holy Spirit, and His being with us—the three Persons of the Godhead.

The reality is that the three Persons of the Godhead have always existed in a communion of love and incredible, overwhelming joy. The Father takes such delight in the Son. The Son takes such delight in the Father. The Father takes such delight in the Spirit. The Spirit takes such delight in the Son. There is this incredibly beautiful community of reciprocity, reciprocal love flowing back and forth.

I remember hearing my professor in Seminary talk about this issue. He was talking about the doctrine of the Co-inherence of the Persons. I remember when he announced that lecture that day. I was in Seminary and he says, “Today we’re going to talk about the doctrine of the Co-inherence of the Persons of the Trinity,” and I yawned, but Dr. Kelly started talking about that, and he started sharing what that really means, and he said, “This is one of the things it means. You’ve heard that God created man because He was lonely. That is a lie. God has never been lonely a single moment. God doesn’t need us. You’ve heard He created us because He needed us. He doesn’t need anything. The Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit are fullness, overflowing fullness of love, and bliss, and peace, and joy. Everything about who God is, is complete in Himself. He needs nothing outside of Himself. The Father is so delighted in the Son.”

There are three times in Jesus’ ministry where the Father speaks out of Heaven, three times where a voice comes out of Heaven. The first and the last, the Father says basically the same thing. Think about when those are—the baptism and the transfiguration. At the baptism, the Father looks at the Son and says (and the same thing is said at the transfiguration), “This is My Son, whom I love, with whom I am well-pleased.” That’s what He says both times. “This is My Son, whom I love, with whom I am well-pleased.” It’s like God can’t contain Himself. It’s like a father at his son’s ballgame, or like a dad watching his daughter sing or play, like we did today. You guys did a good job of not saying, “That’s my boy! That’s my daughter!” but you probably felt like you’d like to say that.

Well, that’s what the Father felt when He looked at the Son. “This is My Son, whom I love, with whom I am well-pleased. He does everything that I want. He’s perfect in every way. I can’t stop talking about Him.” That’s how the Father loves the Son. And when you look at Jesus, when you read through John’s Gospel, He’s continually saying, “Listen, the works that you see Me doing, the words that you hear Me saying, are not Mine, but they’re from the Father.” He’s basically saying, “Look, what you see Me do, give the Father glory,” and here’s the Father saying, “Look at the Son. Give Him glory.” And the Spirit is the same way, saying, “Look at the Son.” Jesus says when He’s about to leave the world, “It’s good for you that

I go. Why? Because if I go, you get the Holy Spirit.” He’s saying, “You think it’s been good for Me to be here? Wait until He gets here.” There’s this incredible communion of love, and He says, “Now I want to have a relationship with you like the Father has with Me. I want you to know that kind of love, to be completely embraced, and affirmed, and enveloped in a love that will never let you go, to know the wonder of that, to bask in the sea of that kind of irrepressible affection. That’s what God wants for you and me if you’re in Christ, and if you’re not in Christ, He wants you to be in Christ so He can love you like that.

Now, why would God want that with me or with you? Why would He want to have a relationship with us like that? And when you’re sitting there about to sin, to commit that same sin again that you’ve been struggling with, and you realize your emptiness, “I’m so unrighteous. Look at my heart.” Like Paul said, “In my flesh dwelleth no good thing.” But there’s a Savior. Jesus is righteous. Jesus is able. And as you hesitate to even look to God, because here you are with guilt and the burden of your sin, but you’ve got to remember that He loves you. He loves you so much that He loves you just like His Son, and the wonder of that swallows up everything else. The wonder of why God would want to love me or to love you swallows up then the desire even for sin. When you let His love fill your heart, He says, “I have loved you,” then the third thing that happens after that—you attach yourself fully by letting His words fill your mind, letting His love fill your heart, and then you let His will rule your life.

When you abide in that kind of love and think, “He loves me, and He wants a relationship with me, and this means that if I were to sin, I would be distancing my relationship. I would be hurting my experience of that love. What a stupid thing to do. I choose something better. I choose holiness. I willingly choose holiness. I surrender to You, Lord. If You love me like this, I give myself to You.” That’s how real obedience happens. It doesn’t happen because we’re concerned about what other people think. It doesn’t happen because we want to keep our reputation. It doesn’t even happen because we don’t like being dirty because of our sin. That’s true. When you sin, you don’t like how it feels afterwards, do you? It’s like when you get nasty outside working, and it feels so good to take a shower. You want to get clean again. And so that’s not enough reason to turn from sin, but the love of Christ is enough reason to turn from sin. When you look and see that He has loved you, and is going to continue to love you, and He wants to draw you to Himself more and more every day, and sin is an obstacle to that, and here even as you are sinning, even after you’ve sinned and come back to Him, His love is perfect, drawing you to Himself, saying, “I’ve already washed you. I’ve already cleansed you. Come back to Me.” But the more that you bask in that, the less that you want

to be anywhere else. And then you abide in Him and you bear fruit. You abide in His love and righteousness. Little by little over time, three steps forward, two steps back. Three steps forward, one step back. But over time, you look more and more like Jesus, and over time you have more and more joy in Jesus, more and more holiness.

This is what we're supposed to do—if persecution were to break out in our day, and certainly it looks like if things don't change, it could, what are we to do? We're to bear fruit. We're to live righteous lives. We're to live holy lives. We're to love our enemies even as they persecute us. We're to love enough to speak the truth with clarity. And when you're tempted, when you're being persecuted, we can experience persecution in small ways where people are looking down on us. What do you do? Well, think of yourself empty. "Here I am, Lord, about to not even speak for You. I want to hide my faith at this moment. Look at me. Jesus, You never wanted to turn back from speaking the truth in a moment that it needed to be spoken. You never disowned Your Father. I need you right now. And even now, You love me as if I had lived a perfect life. You love me and accept me. Even though I was tempted even now, I want to shine for You. I want to stand up and speak for You as I should." "Abide in the vine, and you will bear much fruit. Apart from Me, you can do nothing."

Let's pray together...

*Our Father, we thank You for the wonder of Your love and the wonder of a salvation that takes sinners who are stained, whose sins are as scarlet, and You make us white as snow. We thank You for a love that will never let Your children go. Father, help us to abide in our dear Savior and to bear good fruit for Your glory. We pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.*

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