



## TENACIOUS FELLOWSHIP

By Rev. Will Nelken

---

*Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, CA, on Sunday, April 25, 2021*

Jesus spoke of invisible realities as though they were obvious (for to Him they were). As a consequence, His words often mystify us, particularly when we first encounter them. However, if we're serious about our faith, we will persist in thinking through His meaning, in order to know Him better and to make Him known.

One of the most baffling and controversial sayings of Jesus is this one:

*John 6:56* *Anyone who eats My flesh and drinks My blood remains in Me, and I in him."*

Taken literally, this smacks of cannibalism. But if you know Jesus at all you will be confident that was NOT His meaning, and there the search for understanding begins. Clearly, this was a figure of speech; to what did it apply? Perhaps the context will illuminate what He really meant by "remain in Me."

### Decisions

*John 6:56* *Anyone who eats My flesh and drinks My blood remains in Me, and I in him.* <sup>57</sup> *I live because of the living Father who sent Me; in the same way, anyone who feeds on Me will live because of Me.* <sup>58</sup> *I am the true bread that came down from Heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will not die as your ancestors did (even though they ate the manna) but will live forever."*

In this text, Jesus described a decision, a choice, and a resultant action: Eat the true bread that I give to you, which is My body and blood, and so, partake of who I am. My life will become yours. (This is the beginning stage of discipleship to Christ.)

And just as relationship begins with a decision, it also is continued by a multitude of similar decisions that feed the same purpose and serve the same outcome.

### Love Me, Serve me

*John 14:15* *"If you love Me, obey My commandments."*

Love cannot be separated from submission. If we were to distinguish between them for discussion's sake, "love" would probably describe my *motive*, "submission" would describe my *attitude*, and "obedience" would describe my *actions*.

Love initiates relationship.

Love inspires submission.

Love empowers obedience.

*John 14:15 "If you love Me, obey My commandments. <sup>16</sup> And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. <sup>17</sup> He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive Him, because it isn't looking for Him and doesn't recognize Him. But you know Him, because He lives with you now and later will be in you. <sup>18</sup> No, I will not abandon you as orphans—I will come to you. <sup>19</sup> Soon the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me. Since I live, you also will live. <sup>20</sup> When I am raised to life again, you will know that I am in My Father, and you are in Me, and I am in you."*

"If" you love Him... do you?

Because Jesus said that if you respond to His invitation affirmatively, He will take you at your word and move in with you!

## **He-You, I-You**

Listen to the language Jesus used (speaking of the Holy Spirit):

*"Who will never leave you."*

*"Receive Him."*

*"He will be in you."*

Because God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit are more than united in purpose, but are actually one being, Jesus shifted the language to remind His disciples that the Spirit who would come to them would perfectly represent Jesus (another just like Me). Thus, the Spirit's abiding presence would be Jesus' abiding presence. So He added:

*"I will come to you."*

*"You are in Me and I am in you."*

This is a relationship rooted in love. *"We love because God loved us first"* (1 John 4:19). But it is not a merely emotional love. It is not a wishy-washy love. It is not a fickle love. It is an abiding love.

Jesus instructed his disciples:

*Abide in Me.*

*Remain in Me.*

*You are in Me, and I am in you.*

## Accept and Obey

*John 14:21 "Those who accept My commandments and obey them are the ones who love Me."*

Does that describe you?

Do you "accept His commandments and obey them"? Or do you bristle at them, and rationalize another approach? Do you procrastinate? Or do you simply ignore them, as if you hadn't heard?

I have been guilty of all of those responses, but they will not further your relationship with Christ; only stagnate it. Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy (or fruitful) in Jesus, but to trust and obey. This is real love.

*John 14:21 And because they love Me, My Father will love them. And I will love them and reveal Myself to each of them."*

See how personal this is for Him? The result is fellowship, with the Father and with the Son, revealed by the Holy Spirit.

*John 14:23 "All who love Me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and we will come and make our home with each of them.*

This is not a temporary or temporal fellowship, but a tenacious and everlasting fellowship! In fact, this fellowship with the Lord, our Savior, is the source of eternal life.

*John 5:12 Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have God's Son does not have life.*

## Tenacious Connection

Now, let's see what "tenacious fellowship" with Jesus really means. Turn to John 15 in your Bible.

*John 15:1 "I am the true grapevine, and My Father is the gardener. <sup>2</sup> He cuts off every branch of Mine that doesn't produce fruit, and He prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. <sup>3</sup> You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. <sup>4</sup> Remain in Me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in Me.*

*<sup>5</sup> "Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in Me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from Me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup> Anyone who does not remain in Me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be*

*burned.* <sup>7</sup> *But if you remain in Me and My words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted!* <sup>8</sup> *When you produce much fruit, you are My true disciples. This brings great glory to My Father.*

This relationship—vine and branches—in which the life sap flows organically and involuntarily from one to the other to produce fruit, depends on only one thing: that the branches do not become separated from the vine; as long as they remain connected, life and fruitfulness will continue.

Five times Jesus emphasized “*remain in Me.*” The first time, He offered His assurance: “*Remain in Me and I WILL remain in you.*” And He warned that “*you cannot be fruitful*” if you are separated. You are not required to prove yourself; only to stay. You are not required to achieve; only to remain. Jesus will not let go of you. He will not turn you away.

What does “remain” mean?

Not to quit. Not to leave. Not to wander. Not to be indifferent.

To stay. To hold on. To linger. To wait. To remain in fellowship.

What does “in Me” mean?

It is not a physical location. It is a personal connection. But it’s described like a physical location, so that we can understand the nature of the connection He refers to.

During 2020, we were asked to shelter-at-home, which meant, as much as possible to stay “in your house.” If you stayed “in your house,” you were not at the same time at the beach. If you were in the house, you were not at the same time at the store.

If you are “in the church” today, you are not also at the ballgame. You are not also driving the ball on the fairway. You are not also bowling or fishing.

If you are “in Christ” you are not also in the world. You are not also robbing a bank. You are not cheating on your spouse. You are not telling lies. It’s a fellowship, a closeness, based on a relationship of mutual trust and love.

On this theme of fruitfulness, those who abide in Him will produce much fruit. Those who do not follow closely “*can do nothing*” (produce nothing).

Of what “fruit” is He speaking?

You may immediately think of the fruit of the Spirit, which Paul described to the Galatians in chapter five. That’s an excellent interpretation of His meaning.

But the context of this passage suggests that the fruit is also outward, in terms of our faithful life’s impact upon other people.

*John 15:9 "I have loved you even as the Father has loved Me. Remain in My love. <sup>10</sup> When you obey My commandments, you remain in My love, just as I obey My Father's commandments and remain in His love. <sup>11</sup> I have told you these things so that you will be filled with My joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! <sup>12</sup> This is My commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you. <sup>13</sup> There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends. <sup>14</sup> You are My friends if you do what I command. <sup>15</sup> I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn't confide in his slaves. Now you are My friends, since I have told you everything the Father told Me. <sup>16</sup> You didn't choose Me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using My name. <sup>17</sup> This is My command: Love each other.*

## **Keeping It Simple**

Jesus summed up the entire Law and the Prophets with two commands, then summed up those two with just one: *This is My command: Love each other.*

If we would just focus on obeying that one command, everything else behind it would also be satisfied. That's as simple as it gets.

If you remain in Christ and in His love, you cannot help but have a positive impact on the people around you. And your primary responsibility in this work is *just to remain*—to love Him and obey His commands. If you do that, He will do the rest!

He said, *"I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit."* So, as you are going, what sort of fruit do you expect to produce? How about "making disciples"?

Once again, I'll remind you that "going" for Christ is generally a passive activity—it is living your life, day by day—and in the course of that, as the Holy Spirit opens doors of opportunity and prompts you to enter them and tell others about Him, He will energize and empower you for the work, and He will work with you to produce much good fruit.

## **Keeping It Continuous**

Here, then, are seven basic elements of intentional, tenacious, and everyday fellowship with Christ:

- We think about Jesus—keeping Him in our thoughts through the day
- We talk to Jesus—keeping the conversation alive through the day
- We talk about Jesus—unashamed, acknowledging His place in our lives
- We love Jesus and let Him love us—energize your emotional side by exchanging "sweet nothings"

- We trust Jesus and believe/obey what He tells us—not side-stepping His direction, but following head-on
- We engage meaningfully with others who love Jesus—encourage each other and sharpen each other
- We represent Jesus to those who don't love Him—be an open book, easily read by searching souls

Then rinse and repeat.

If you do these things regularly, your fellowship with the Spirit of Christ will be strong and sweet. You will recognize His gentle promptings and nudges, and His still, small voice of assurance and direction.

And most importantly, you will bear fruit, more fruit, and much fruit—that will bring honor and glory to God our Father, and to Christ our Redeemer.

Get close to Him. Abide in Him. Remain in Him.

Be tenacious about your fellowship.

That's fruitful living.