

No Growth in Christ If No Communion with Christ

Song of Solomon 1:15-17; John 15:1-6

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If you see a dry branch on your fruit tree, and by summer you observe that there are no new buds and no leaves that sprout forth from the branch, you can be assured there will be no fruit either. What is the problem? The dry branch may be visibly united to the tree, but the branch has become dry because there is not the passing of life in the sap from the tree to the branch. There is a visible union, but no communion.

It is likewise true that there are professing Christians that are visibly united to Jesus, but their outward profession of faith, knowledge of much truth, membership in the Visible Church, and attendance at public worship is not bringing forth fruit. What is the problem? Like the dry branch, they do not have a communion of life and love with Jesus Christ that brings forth the fruit of the Spirit. They profess to know God but there is no heart and love for Jesus Christ. Jesus spoke of both dead branches and fruitful branches in John 15:1-6. What made the difference between the withered branch and the fruitful branch? It was not a mere outward visible union, but was a living and abiding communion. The end and goal of union with Jesus Christ is communion with Jesus Christ.

Every true Christian will be a fruitful Christian (some 30, 60, or 100 fold). But there will be no growth where there is not communion with Jesus. Fruitfulness is directly related to spending time with Jesus in the Word, prayer, meditation, and in the appointed ordinances of the Lord.

The main points from our text are: (1) Jesus Initiates Communion (Song 1:15); (2) The Bride Returns Communion (Song 1:16a); (3) Communion with Christ Brings Growth in Christ (Song 1:16b-17).

I. Jesus Initiates Communion (Song 1:15).

A. As we approach today's text, remember we sit in the presence of our beloved King whenever His ordinances are administered (Song 1:12). You are never closer and nearer to the Lord Jesus than when enjoying His holy ordinances. Though you cannot see Him with your natural eyes, faith beholds Him and love embraces Him. His elect bride does not have to be dragged into His presence, for His presence is as fragrant as myrrh and camphire (Song 1:13-14). His fragrance captivates you to such a degree that you do not want to leave.

B. The Lord Jesus now breaks forth with expressions of love to His elect bride. He cannot constrain Himself (Song 1:15).

1. The word, "**Behold**", introduces these loving words of Jesus to you His elect bride. Jesus is saying, "Look here and take notice. This is important. I don't want you to miss this, my beloved bride."

2. What is it that is so important to the Lord that you, His beloved bride, hear and not miss? There are three expressions of love.

a. "**Thou art fair.**" Jesus repeats Himself for emphasis—Song 1:8 (same Hebrew word, meaning "beautiful"); Song 1:10 ("comely"); Song 1:15 (twice). One time would be sufficient to make clear His evaluation of her beauty. Why then does He repeat Himself? Not for His benefit, but for yours. Through your many struggles with opposition from others, trials and afflictions, sorrow and heartache, falling and stumbling into sin, and constant battles against those temptations to sin in your life, you can easily become so discouraged and overwhelmed that you forget or doubt that Jesus sees the beauty of His grace (election, redemption, regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification) in you. You are not beautiful in yourself, but in Jesus Christ. You may take your eyes off of Him, but He never takes His eyes off of you. You

are more beautiful to Him than any other creation in all of creation—you are His new creation. There are sights in God’s creation that take your breath away, but it is you, dear Christian, that takes away the breath of Jesus. He repeats Himself not because He forgets, but because you forget. Your hatred for your own sin is good and necessary as a Christian, but dear ones, it will drive you to despair if you do not believe the words of the Lord Jesus: “Behold, thou art fair.”

b. **“My love.”** Once again, the Lord Jesus repeats Himself in calling you, His elect bride, “my love” (Song 1:9). The word for “love” here literally means “companion”. For this is what marital love does—it makes the one loved his/her companion—to commune with—to be near—to walk with—to live with—to be faithful to—and to age with even unto death. The love of Jesus for you, dear Christian, is not a distant love, but is a companion love. It is the love of One who will not be near only in the good times, but who will be near you in all of the fiery furnaces and raging storms of life. It is the love of One who will not betray you or only be near you when you walk in faith, but also when you falter in doubt—not only when you are strong, but when you are weak. His love is both a dying love (a sacrificial love) and an undying love (that will never end). His love is unchangeable. It cannot increase or decrease. It is the love of Jesus Christ for you that will not allow you to give up, when you feel like doing so. Dear ones, the repetition of your affection in word and hugs is daily needed if it will transform the one loved.

c. **“Thou hast dove’s eyes.”** Again this is a compliment from the Lord Jesus to you, His beloved bride (cp. Song 1:9). Quite literally, the text reads, “thine eyes are doves.” Yes, the eyes of the one who is loved are beautiful, not only because of their color or brightness, but also and especially because they are a window to the soul and reveal the love and affection within that one has for Jesus. The eyes are here windows to what is in your heart for the Lord. Whatever your eyes are fixed upon tells you where your heart and affections are (Matthew 6:21; Proverbs 17:24). What do you see as your treasure above all treasures? That will reveal where your true love and affection lies. Jesus says here that the eyes of His chosen bride are doves. The dove is a symbol of humility, tenderness, and purity (Matthew 10:16—**harmless** as doves—innocent, free from deceit, unmixed in devotion). Those are the graces that the Lord Jesus sees and loves in you, because that is Jesus in you (Hebrews 7:26). Jesus was courageous in doing what was right, and was strong when coming against the hypocrisy and self-righteousness of the Pharisees, but He was also humble, tender, and pure. Those are not feminine spiritual graces; they are Christian graces, dear men. And, dear ones, He sees those graces in you with His all-penetrating eyes even when you cannot see them yourself—for He sees that He has implanted them in you, that He is growing them in you, and He also sees the fullness of them in your glorified state.

II. **The Bride Returns Communion (Song 1:16a).**

A. Now the beloved bride begins with her own “Behold”. She likewise desires that the Lord Jesus hear what weighs so heavily upon her own heart. She doesn’t want her Heavenly Husband to miss where her heart truly is—with Him, near Him, and upon Him. Here is her “Behold”. If Jesus has His “Behold”, she has her own “Behold”.

B. She returns the expressions of love to her beloved Lord Jesus with similar (if not the same) words Jesus had just spoken to her. There seems here to be a holy competition. When Jesus admires her beauty with “thou art fair” (Song 1:15), His bride responds by admiring His infinitely greater beauty with “thou art fair” (Song 1:16). When Jesus extols His love for her by calling her “my love” (Song 1:15), His bride responds by praising Him and calling Him “my beloved” (Song 1:16). What is the Holy Spirit teaching us from this holy competition?

1. First, the love of Jesus Christ for you, dear Christian, is the fountain/source, and your love for Him is the stream that flows from it. His love for you is original, and your love for Him is derivative. Jesus initiates communion with you—He spreads the table and calls you to come to the table and enjoy His

love, His mercy, His grace, His repentance, His forgiveness, His righteousness, His faithfulness, His truth, His patience, His courage, and His tenderness. This is true in all of His appointed ordinances, but is especially graphic in the Lord's Supper. There would be no love for Jesus and no desire to commune with Him and delight in Him if He did not first initiate and woo you to Himself through His love in election, redemption, and effectual calling. All boasting in ourselves and all pride should by this amazing truth be crushed within us; but sadly it isn't, and we must rehearse this truth every day. When you desire to sanctify the entire Lord's Day as a time to enjoy Jesus and to commune with Him, realize you would not so desire to do so if Jesus had not first made clear in His Love Letter that He has commanded and has set apart the Sabbath from all other worldly distractions because He wants to commune with you. When this is understood, the Lord's Day becomes a delight and not a burden.

2. Second, the Holy Spirit teaches us that Jesus is "**MY** beloved". Jesus calls her "**MY** love" (Song 1:15), and she returns that expression by calling Him "**MY** beloved" (Song 1:16). It would be the height of presumption for a sinner to call Jesus "my beloved" to whom the seraphim in heaven declare, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty", if it were not for His sacrificial love for you, His elect bride. We were spiritual harlots and pursued our many lovers in this world. What right could we possibly have to call the holy Son of God, "**MY** beloved" (not just beloved in a general sense, but "**MY** beloved"—the beloved that belongs to me)? Again, He can only become "My beloved" because He first set His love upon me (wicked and defiled as I am by nature). This use of "my" expresses that an unbreakable marital union has begun—You are His and He is yours by way of the Covenant of Grace.

3. Third, note that Jesus is "pleasant" to His bride. He is not boring to be around. He is not a hard task master that is cruel, that berates her, or that abuses her. He will not break the bruised reed or quench the smoking flax. Dear ones, if you do not find Jesus Christ to be pleasant and His presence to be pleasing to you now, why would you want to go to heaven where all of the saints in glory will forever find Jesus to be most pleasant and where in His presence is the greatest pleasure to be found? When you find Jesus to be pleasant and His presence to be where your chief pleasure is, there will be no hardship in spending time in communion with Him (now and for all eternity).

III. Communion with Christ Brings Growth in Christ (Song 1:16b-17).

A. The chosen bride of the Lord Jesus now turns her attention to the blessings of her communion with Jesus Christ. There are two blessings noted here.

1. **Growth** ("also our bed in green"). To have a green bed is to have a fruitful bed i.e. a bed that is alive and thriving (as opposed to a bed that is brown, that is dry, and that is dead). The truth that is taught here is that growth and fruitfulness in the Christian life and in the Church of Jesus Christ (Song 1:16b) comes from the responsive love and communion that we see between Jesus and His bride (Song 1:15-16a). Overcoming those besetting sins and resisting those powerful temptations to please yourself or others at the expense of Christ's truth and purity comes from spending time in communion with Jesus Christ—loving Him, embracing Him, finding Him fair and beautiful, enjoying Him, finding your chief pleasure in being in His presence. Do you approach praying, reading your Bible, or attending the public ordinances of worship as a cold, impersonal, ritual (with as much enthusiasm as brushing your teeth)? If so, do not expect to find growth in putting off the old man and putting on the new man and in hating your sin and loving His righteousness. That is mere formalism. It is not communion with and enjoyment of Jesus Christ. It is when you hear and believe His truth of love and beauty to you in this Song of songs, and when you respond in like words of love and beauty to Him that the means of grace issue forth in growth and fruitfulness. There are no shortcuts. It is the way in which Christ's life, power, love, purity, and beauty reach the branches.

2. **Stability** ("The beams of our house are cedar, and our rafters of fir" Song 1:17). The

second blessing that flows from communion with Jesus Christ is stability and perseverance. Both cedar and fir were especially known at that time to be woods that would not easily rot, but would give strength to the building (as in the case of the Solomon's temple). Stability rather than being tossed to and fro by every storm and by every temptation and by every affliction comes from spending time with the Lord Jesus in His Word (not just reading it, but studying it), in prayer, and in meditation upon His Word applying it to your life (growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus and His truth as summarized in faithful Confessions). There is a corresponding relationship to your lack of communion with Christ and the emotional roller coaster experiences you have in life. Even in the midst of sorrow and grief, tears and heartache, it is Jesus Christ that sustains you. It is His promise that upholds you. It is His communion with you and yours with Him that transmits His life, grace, and strength to you in bringing stability.

B. In closing, don't pass over the "our" in Song 1:16b,17 ("**OUR** bed", "**OUR** house", "**OUR** rafters"). What belongs to Jesus by right has become your by gracious privilege. You are joint heirs with Jesus Christ. It is one thing to be an heir of God (and heir to particular blessings). It is another thing to be a joint heir with Jesus Christ. All things that are His are yours (1 Corinthians 3:21-23). There is nothing that you, dear Christian, lack in order to enjoy blessed communion with Jesus Christ that has not already been purchased for you by Jesus Christ. You and I have no excuse not to be enjoying the Lord Jesus every day. It is the way of life, growth, and fruitfulness now and for all eternity.

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