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Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

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Love

Galatians 5:22-23

Prayer: *Father God, we do again thank you for this opportunity that we have each week to come before you to offer up corporate worship, to just enjoy the incredible gorgeous fall weather that we have and to enjoy the freedom that we have to meet without fear. Father, we know that that's not the case for many of our brothers and sisters around the world, and so we again thank you for the blessings you've given to us and pray for grace and sustenance for our brothers and sisters. And Father, today, this morning as we again finish up our series on the fruit of the Spirit, I pray that your Holy Spirit would guide us, I pray that you would enable us to open up your word, that you would accompany us and that you would give us the ability again to make this a permanent part of our lives. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, we are wrapping up our study on the fruits of the Spirit. These nine qualities make up the essence of Jesus Christ and they're laid out as we've heard in Galatians 5:22: *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,*

faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. I've said it many, many times, these are not character traits that we seek to somehow improve our lives but rather this is the essence of who Jesus Christ is expressed in our lives for God's glory. I've compared the fruit of the Spirit to a grapefruit or an orange and that the whole fruit itself can be labeled "love," and when you open up that fruit you find that it's comprised of many different wedges, each of which we can look at as a fruit of the Spirit and that's what we've been doing for the last few months. And today we want to look at the big one, we want to look at the whole fruit. Really to be able to discuss adequately the fruit of the Spirit love would take years, and so I'm really just going to focus in on one small aspect and just try to describe that this morning as we look at the fruit of the Spirit love.

1 Corinthians 13:1-3 says this, it says: If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all that I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. Now, I would guess every one of us has heard that passage before and I would guess you all heard it mostly at weddings. In fact, it's part of what's called the "love

passage" and this really is part of the problem. You see, God's teaching on love is now almost always associated with romance and weddings. And what Paul was trying to explain in this passage is that love is the most powerful force not just in weddings and in marriage but in the life of a believer in Christ. It's a force that is very poorly understood, and this morning I want to look at the fruit of the Spirit love the same way that we've looked at the other fruits. We want to see what it is, we want to see how we get it and how we grow it.

And so to the first question: What is love? Well, many of us have heard that there are three different types of love. There is first "eros" which is self-directed love. This is a love that we pursue for our own sakes. There is "phileo" which is other-directed affection commonly thought of as brotherly love, and then there is "agape." Agape is a form of love so unique to Christianity that folks had to coin a new word to describe it. This is what Vines Dictionary says about agape love. It says: "Christian love, whether exercised toward the brethren or toward men generally, is not an impulse from feelings. It does not always run with our natural inclinations. Nor does it spend itself only upon those we feel affinity toward. This love seeks the welfare of all men and works no ill will to any." What it's saying is agape love is not love that you feel; it's love that you do. "It is not an impulse

from feelings." Agape love is not natural. "It does not always run with our natural inclinations." I don't know that we can accept such a definition. I don't know that we can accept it because it seems to run counter to everything we have been told. Love equals romance, romance equals love, and everything in our culture, our music, our literature, our movies, our entertainment, they all pound out the same theme: love is what you feel. That kind of love is not the fruit of the Spirit.

The kind of love that God wants to grow in us is radically different from romantic love. I mean, I think it's safe to say that God's love is genuinely a supernatural love. It's a supernatural love because our natural loves, that is, eros and phileo, they flow from our natures. They are self-directed. They are selfish. I mean, they have some wonderful characteristics about them but they're not the kind of love that we were designed for. And it all goes back to the Garden of Eden. You see, there before the fall, love was different because Adam and Eve were different. They were perfect. And between Genesis 2:25 and 3:7, there are six verses that describe a world of difference. *Genesis 2:25* says this, it says: *And the man and his wife we both naked and were not ashamed.* And then the next six verses describe them eating the forbidden fruit and then we got to verse 7 which says this, it says: *Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew*

that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. Well, here's a question. How can you possibly be naked and not know it? I mean, what verse 7 is actually demonstrating is the birth of self. After they had fallen, Adam and Eve for the very first time became self-conscious. You know, there's only two ways to be naked and not realize it. Number one, you can be psychotic, having lost all sense of who you are and your place in the world, or you have to have no sense whatsoever looking inward at self. Adam and Eve were certainly not psychotic, and they existed for however long, they were perfect in a state in which self did not exist. From the moment they fell onward, they began to experience a love that all of us have experienced from birth that was and is selfish love. I mean, the love may be sacrificial, it may even be noble, but in the end all natural love is rooted in me. That's how we love. When parents love their children, when brothers and sisters love each other, when friends care for one another, we are shocked to find out that God seems singularly unimpressed. It's not that that kind of love is unimportant or irrelevant, it's just that God considers it an effortless expression of self-centered love.

God says in *Luke 6:32*: "*If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them.*" In two sentences God carves the heart out of most of the

love we've ever given or received. Do you love your kids? Do you love your spouse, your friends, your relatives? God says you think that's something special? Even sinners do that. Matthew 5:46 substitutes tax collectors and pagans for sinners. It's like God is saying do you really think that kind of love is any kind of a big deal? Well, today in our culture it is indeed thought to be a very, very big deal. We live in a savage society. We live in a society where abortion and infanticide, no-fault divorce and same sex marriage, they're all part of the landscape. And so in this climate, any semblance of anything resembling love looks positively wonderful, even selfish love. So it cuts like a knife to hear God say what credit is that to you that you love those who love themselves? We might think, well, what kind of love is God expecting from us? I mean, is God turning up his nose at all that we hold dear? I mean, this is all the love that our culture knows and it's worth nothing? Even tax collectors do that, God says. You see, the problem is the world and often times the church cannot even fathom the love of God. Our love always comes with an agenda because it's rooted in the self that was born when Adam fell, and so we accept it as normal. We are all after something rooted in self, whether it's peace or contentment or joy or satisfaction or just simply to be loved in return. That's why we love. God wants a greater love for us than that. I mean, we do love our spouses, we do love our kids, and we do love our friends, but think about

it, what would you do if they all abandoned -- if they all betrayed you? God's love has been lavished on just such people. They hated, they scorned, they mocked, they betrayed Jesus Christ and that wasn't just his enemies, I mean, at the end of Jesus's ministry he made this statement in *John 16*, he said: "*Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me all alone.*" And his friends indeed all scattered. They left him to die alone. But this was not surprise to Jesus. He knew this from the start. He knew it his entire ministry and it didn't stop his love at all. This is the kind of love that God seeks to grow in us. It is a love with no agendas and no sense of self at all. You know, if you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? That's a challenge that goes right to the heart because it lays out what fruit bearing and the glory of God is all about. I mean, the agape love God wants to grow in us is altogether different than selfish love, and we love because he first loved us. So that's what it is.

So how do we grow it? Well, there's two parts to growing this love, there's the head part and there's the heart part, and both are absolutely crucial. I mean, the head part is based on the fact that to know Christ is to love Christ. The more you learn about the love of God in Christ, the more your heart's capacity to grow in that love, the more it will expand, the more it will grow.

There's a danger in limiting the knowledge of the love of Christ only to your head. I mean, truth be told, it is much, much easier to feed your head than it is to challenge your heart. And feeding our head feels good and it should. It's also far easier to make progress when you're just feeding your head. You can go to seminars, you can fill notebooks, you can study through this book or that book, these are all good things. The problem is it's possible to do all of those things and never change my heart. We can wind up like Isaiah's prophesy in *Matthew 15* which says: "*This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.*" You see, for many of us it's far easier to wrestle with ideas like predestination or creationism or the second coming of Christ than to question what kind of love it is that I'm really expressing. It's very easy to feed my head and ignore my heart, but it's extremely dangerous. It was J. I. Packer who said that the knowledge of scripture is the most dangerous knowledge there is and I've often put it this way, if the knowledge of scripture doesn't make you gooder, it's going to make you badder. If your knowledge of scripture does not draw your heart to God, it's going to swell your head and drive you from him. *1 Corinthians 8* says: *Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.* And we all tend to gravitate towards knowledge. And there's a reason we feed our heads rather than challenge our hearts. It's simple. It is much more expensive to challenge our hearts. You see, it costs to love with our heads and

our hearts, to love the way God expects. You see, it costs us something we hold more dearly than anything else. It costs us our egos, our identities, our sense of self, our very lives. Hence it is very expensive. It's one thing to know the love of God is a love with no agendas and no self. It's another thing to entirely pursue that love, to grow that love in our hearts. And it doesn't come without a fight. In fact, if we really want to know and grow God's love, we are going to find ourselves in a war, and the battle field is your heart. You see, every one of us has a little voice inside us. From the loudest bore to the shyest wallflower, it's a voice we inherited from Adam. It's a voice that pretends to be looking out for us. It tells me how important I am, how worthy I am. It complains bitterly no matter what the circumstances that I haven't gotten enough, not enough love, not enough respect, not enough attention, you name it, that voice will shout it. That voice told Cain that Abel was stealing his place with God. It told David that he had the right to steal another man's wife. It told James and John to ask Jesus for power and prestige over the other disciples. They asked Jesus in Mark 10 if they could sit at his left and right in his kingdom. It was a pure power play and the others were highly indignant. But you know why? They're upset because they had their own little voices as well.

You see, there's three things that we need to know about this

voice. Number one, it will never stop telling you how important you are. Number two, it is never satisfied. And number three, if you listen to it, it will destroy you. God goes much further than telling us not to listen to it, he tells us to kill it. He tells us to bury it. God says the only way to love with God's love is to learn how to shut down that voice inside us. In *John 12:24* Jesus said, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life."* Now you know if you've ever done any gardening, you'll notice there's a huge difference between the very impressive pictures of the flowers and vegetables that you see pictured on the packet of seeds and those dried up little tiny things that roll out of the pack when you open it up. Well, God is saying the same thing about us. He's saying you have no idea of the potential you have when you are willing to bury yourself. Our biggest problem is that we won't die to self because we are afraid to. We cling to that little voice that says, "You're number one." We sing songs about servant hood and more often than not we can sing it but we can't say it.

You know, I've heard, I've heard it said many times, the easiest way to know whether or not you have a servant's heart is to examine how you feel when you're treated like one. I have a vivid memory

of one such incident that occurred over 35 years ago. Again, I was back in San Francisco, I was working as a carpenter and we'd been fortunate enough to land a couple of very nice jobs in the nicest area of San Francisco known as Pacific Heights. We were remodeling the kitchen of a very wealthy woman named Ellen. She spoke like she had a bad case of adenoids. She was a caricature of a condescending rich person. She had two Irish wolfhounds that she called Sake and Tosha. We were responsible for entertaining the dogs as well as remodeling her kitchen. So she had a friend who had flown in from the south of France, and they came to the door of the kitchen, she's showing all the progress that's being made and we're working on it. As they're walking out the door, she turns to her friend and she says, "Go on upstairs, I'll have one of my boys bring up your bags." Okay. Well, there were four of us working in the kitchen at that moment as they left the room, and everybody stopped instantly, and we looked around at every single person and Dave was the first one, he was one of the fellows that was working, he just stood there and he went (shaking his head). Then I looked over a Tom, my partner, (shaking his head). Then it got to me, and I said (shaking his head). And then it got to a fellow by the name of John Robin. John Robin just shrugged his shoulders, and with a smile he picked up the bags and he carried them upstairs. You see, John Robbins' ego somehow never got the message that he was too important to do such a menial task. And not only did he do it, he

did it with a smile. You see, all of us had within us this little voice that told us that we had to fight to be loved, to be honored and respected and no self-respecting person is going to carry those bags. John Robin paid no attention to that little voice and surprise, surprise, he was always hands down everybody's favorite. When we gave out the work assignments in the morning, everybody wanted to work with John because he was just plain pleasant to be around, and he wasn't even a Christian. Sad to say, I was the only Christian but I was also one of those who shook my head no. No way am I going to bring those bags up. See now, my reaction to Ellen's order was perfectly normal but it wasn't God's way. I was operating the way the world operates. I mean, Ellen was treating us as servants, and I, just like everyone else, I wouldn't have it. She had dissed us by not showing us the respect we deserved, the respect we were entitled to. That's what the little voice was shouting in all of our ears: You matter! You count! Who does she think she is?

Well, it's commonly accepted today that the most important part of a person's personality is supposed to be their self-esteem, but God says this in *Philippians 2:3*, he says: *Let each esteem others better than himself.* John Robbins wasn't even a believer but somehow he got it and I didn't. I had let that little voice get the best of me. Well actually there's precedent for that happening

all over the world. There's precedent for that happening in scripture. In fact, it happened to the disciples. They got dissed but they got dissed by two of their fellow disciples, James and John. They took Jesus aside and tried to pull a fast one on the other disciples. This is *Mark 10:35*, it says: *Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him, saying, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask." And he said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?" They said to him, "Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory."* In other words, make us president and vice president of the new kingdom. Verse 38: *But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They said to him, "We are able."* Once again the little voice of self is heard telling them both, of course you can do anything. So Jesus said to them, *"You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with, you will be baptized; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared."* And when the ten heard it, they began to be greatly displeased with James and John. We know why they were displeased. They were unhappy because they had their own voices as well. And Jesus gets right to the heart of the matter in verse 42, he says: *But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers over the*

Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." See, Jesus tells them that in the kingdom of God greatness is available but it comes with a very high price tag. He says: *"But whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant."* All you have to do is give up your claim to yourself.

And why is that so hard? Why can't we love the way God expects us to love with no agenda and no sense of self? Well, the answer's very simple, the answer is: We are afraid to. That little voice inside me has convinced me that if I don't fight and if I don't kick and claw for my dignity and respect, for my self-esteem, then who will. I mean, as Christians, we already know the answer to that. The problem is practically speaking we just don't believe it. If I shut down that voice inside me, if I pay no attention to it at all, who's going to watch out for me? Who will keep me from being swallowed up into utter insignificance? Well, the answer is God will. *1 Peter 5:6* says: *Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God -- and here's the key part -- that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.* Now, whether that sounds like a profound and powerful

truth or just a religious cliché, it all depends on us. That's how we grow the Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit love, and how you see this will chart the course of your entire Christian life. You see, if you never humble yourself, if you never shut down that little voice, you will never experience him lifting you up. You'll never realize the potential and the power that you have in Christ. You see, you don't have to live bound to that little voice inside you. You are meant to burst forth and bear fruit like any other seed. But first you have to die. You have to be buried. Actually it's more than that, it's because we who do the dying and we who do the burying. And what stops us is fear that we are going to stay buried, that God is somehow not paying close enough attention and if I don't look out for number one, nobody else is going to. God says the love that we have to have is a costly love that empties itself of self, but nature abhors a vacuum, and so we have to have something to fill in that void. God says that he alone can do it perfectly. But our fear is that God is going to abandon us. And here's where the sovereignty of God is crucial. You see, if God is not totally sovereign not only over man's actions but over his thoughts and his will as well, we will stay buried. If God can exercise no control over the very thoughts and attitudes of his own creatures, then he's nothing more than an interested observer. You know, he can tisk and he might even bite his nails and perhaps maybe he's even willing to share in my sorrows, but if he doesn't

rule over every aspect of human freedom, then he is ultimately as powerless as we are. We say well, what about man's free will? I mean, surely God respects man's free will. Well, the question comes down to one of authority, of rulership, and the answer is that nothing, not even man's free will has authority over God. *Proverbs 21* says: *The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.* You see, if God didn't have supreme control even over the heart of man, then that same God also watches helplessly as my boss, as my neighbor, as my spouse, or my circumstance proceeds to bury me. God can only watch, then I've got to look out for number one because nobody else will. May it never be so.

I don't know how God does it, but God works through man's will so that his will always triumphs. Let me give you an example. When Moses first met God in the burning bush, God made a promise to him. He told Moses that the Jews would not only leave Egypt but as they left, they would plunder their captors. This is what God promised way back about Exodus 3, he said this: *"So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My wonders which I will do in its midst; and after that he will let you go. And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and it shall be, when you go, that you shall not go empty-handed. But every woman shall ask of her neighbor, namely, of her who dwells near her house,*

articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing, you shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians." Now God said that because 400 years earlier he had promised Abraham in *Genesis 15: The nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions.* So four centuries later we're seeing it unfold as Moses leads his people out of Egypt, and *Exodus 12* describes it this way, it says: *The Israelites acted on Moses' word, and asked the Egyptians for silver and gold jewelry and for clothing. And the LORD gave the people such favor in the Egyptians' sight that they gave them what they requested. In this way, they plundered the Egyptians.*

Do you get that? This is an astounding statement. The Jews plundered the Egyptians. That's what usually happens, the victor plunders the defeated. But this plunder is absolutely unique. God is saying here, I'm going to make the people want to give you this. I'm going to make them favorably disposed to you. God is saying I so thoroughly control the hearts and minds and wills of my creation that I can make them genuinely want to give you the plunder I've promised you. Well, that's precisely what God did. He worked within the wills of the Egyptians so that they wanted to give the Israelites their gold. Do you see the implications of that? You see, what that means is that someone really, really is in charge. I can let go, I can die, I can humble myself under God's mighty

hand because there really is a mighty hand to lift me up in due time.

Many years ago we had a mini crisis at our house. Actually it was a crisis of blessing. We have this little pond on our property and for some reason this year was overflowing with tadpoles and there was a pond place down the road that was selling them, they offered to buy them for a quarter apiece. Great idea. It started a little neighborhood war. So there was all kinds of issues that had to be dealt with. The issues were: Who owned the tadpoles, who divides the profits, what share do the neighbors get, you know the big kids had really big nets and the little kids, well they were only able to get a couple of tadpoles and so the whole thing became a gigantic mess. So I decided that we needed to have some rules, and I called a neighborhood meeting of all the kids, the little kids, and we all got together and I said, "First of all, it's my pond; it's my tadpoles." And one of my kids said, "It's God's tadpoles." So I said, "Okay, fine, they're God's tadpoles, but he's made me the boss of them, and this is how it's going to be." And then I proceeded to lay down the law, and things settled down immediately. And they settled down because they knew someone was in charge. I made the rules because I owned the pond. God makes the rules because God owns you and me and everybody and everything. *Psalm 47* says: *Sing a song of wisdom, for God is the king of all the earth.*

And the fact is, God is the boss of everything. And our key to loving with God's love is buying and owning the fact that God really, really is in charge. See, I can love others with no agenda and no sense of self only when I lose the fear that that love is going to kill me and that I will stay forever buried, that I will humble myself and stay humbled forever and that little voice shouts back at us constantly. It commands us to live as slaves to that fear. Well, the still small voice of the Holy Spirit says, *perfect love casts out fear*. And when you give up the fear of being buried, you find out that you've been a slave to that fear for most of your life. See, the lies shout and the truth whispers. At least we think so and the reason why we think it whispers is probably because we don't like what it says. It says: *"Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life."* So until we are able to love with no self and no agenda, we will not have loved at all. Again, *"If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them."*

All right. So how do we grow this love? How do we get it, how do we grow it? Well, we do it the same way we get all of the fruits of the Spirit: *"Abide in me and you will bear much fruit."* Now we can't learn to trust Christ until we know Christ. Jesus Christ was God in the flesh who came down from heaven, lived a perfect life,

and then offered up that life as a substitute for my life of sin. Romans 5:6 says: *For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person -- though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die -- but God shows his love for us in that we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* That's the kind of love we're talking about. Christ's love for us cost him his life. But we can't taste the power of his love until we are actually practically learning that he will never leave or forsake us. And we won't know that until we are actually in a place where being left and forsaken is a real possibility. Faith, hope, and love only become real when they are challenged, when learning how to die to self and how to bury that little voice has real life consequence attached to it. If you want a safe life and safe faith, then you want religion, you don't want a relationship. Religion is God, tamed and safe. Faith is God tested, tried, and found true. That's why God says in *Psalm 34: Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!* We frankly can't know Christ by only touching base once a week. That's what religion offers. Faith has to factor into the way I live my life every day of the week, and trusting in God's sovereignty is the key. My kids abided in my pond rules because they trusted in my authority and my power, but mostly they trusted me. And they trust me because they know me and it's really that simple, to know Christ is to love Christ and to

love him is to trust him.

So how do I grow in that love? Well, I put my love to the test. One way is to compare my love to the love that the Master gives. You know, we're all familiar with 1 Corinthians 13, it's the love chapter, everybody's heard it many, many times and it lays out the particulars of how this love really operates in daily life.

1 Corinthians 13:4 says: Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. Where's the little voice in that definition? You see, that little voice is dead, that little voice is buried. And God in this text is giving us a means of gauging how dead and buried that little voice actually is in our lives. Here's the test, you may have heard it before. Just take out the word "love" in that passage and insert your own name. You know, Tom is patient, Tom is kind. He doesn't envy, he doesn't boast, he's not proud. Tom doesn't dishonor others, he's not self-seeking. Tom's not easily angered, Tom keeps no record of wrongs. Tom does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. Tom always protects, Tom trusts, Tom hopes, Tom always perseveres. Tom never fails. I wish that was true but it's not, at least not

yet. It is a very humbling exercise to give your own flesh to those words, is it not?

Is your little voice dead? Is it buried? Or are you still afraid? Do you still think if you humble yourself God can't lift you up? This is what God longs to do in all of our lives. The love of God in Christ is the reason you and I were put on this earth. It is the supreme manifestation of the glory of God. It's supposed to be the number one distinguishing characteristic of the new birth.

1 John 3:14: We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. God's love is the only force this world has no defense for whatsoever. It doesn't know what to do with it. It is God's premier weapon, and the own thing that keeps us from using it is fear. But perfect love casts out fear. Jesus faced and conquered that fear the exact same way we can conquer it, and he did it by knowing and trusting in the sovereignty of God. In 1 Peter 2:20, we have a perfect example of Christ humbled, yielding Christ conquering. 1 Peter 2:20 says this: But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they

hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

See, in Christ there was no kicking, there was no clawing, there was no retaliation at all, just the sheer knowledge that his Father was in charge. *He entrusted himself to him who judges justly.*

Jesus humbled himself. He was, he is and will be lifted up, but first he had to die figuratively and literally. That's true for Christians. You know, we also can't look around us at the suffering saints all over the world and not know that some believers are going to remain humbled until they die. You know, God speaks of the heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11. He speaks of believers being beaten and broken, and starved, and chained in prison. That is by definition to be humbled. *Hebrews 11:39* says: *All these were approved through their faith, but they did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, so that they would not be made perfect without us.* Now the something better that he Jesus provided is his resurrection power that's going to redeem every single saint, old testament and new, and he speaks directly to those saints in *Matthew 5:11*, he says: *"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted*

the prophets who were before you." See what God is saying is that as surely as there are laws governing the physical universe, there are also laws that govern the spiritual. And one law with a guarantee from God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit is *Matthew 23:12: "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."* Now for some saints, life in persecution itself does the humbling. We just saw Saeed Abedini's wife describe how that happens. These folks see the love of Christ born out every day in their lives, but most of us in this country, we have to humble ourselves in order to grow the love of Christ in us.

So the question for us remains: Are you willing to do that? I mean, it's a challenging thing to trust God enough to love like he loves with no agenda and no self, but it is God's weapon of choice to conquer the world. So the question is will you let God's perfect love cast out your fear? Are you willing to shut down that little voice treating it as if it is dead and buried even though you know it's not going to go down without a fight? See, the love of God is like no other love on earth. It is supernatural. And the only way to get it is by abiding in the one who is the very source of that love, the Lord Jesus Christ. And the more you know him, the more you love him, the more you love him, the more you trust him. And the only way to grow that love is to by God's grace

shut down that little voice and trust in the living God who loves you far more than you will ever love yourself. Take the risk of burying that voice. Let God's sovereign power lift you up. *Taste and see that the Lord is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in him. Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God and he will lift you up.* Let's pray.

Father, I just thank you for the love that you have for us that is indescribable. And Lord we can try, we can kind of aim at it and try to get close, but your love is beyond comprehension. And Father, you want to give that love to us, you want to give us a supernatural love, a love that has no agenda and no sense of self, a love that is willing to risk being dead and buried, because we know we have a sovereign God who has the power, the love, and the will to raise us up again. Give us the ability to do just that, Lord, as we go through this week and we find opportunities where we hear in our minds that little voice shouting you're not being respected, you're not being counted, you're not being thought of enough, Lord, give us the ability to shut that voice down and to instead trust in your sovereign power to lift us back up again. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.