



International Bible Lessons Commentary

Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series

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John 15:1-17

New Revised Standard Version

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The [International Bible Lesson](#) (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, March 19, 2017**, is from **John 15:1-17**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Lesson Forum](#).

(John 15:1) "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower.

Jesus Christ and the true Christians that compose the true Church around the world, just as true Christians compose the Body of Christ on the earth with Jesus Christ as the Head of the Body, is the true vine with branches. Congregations and individuals can be branches on the vine (consider a branch with many smaller branches feeding from it). The Father of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the Gardener, who tends the Church through Jesus Christ and God's involvement in human history.

(John 15:2) He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit.

Jesus Christ saves sinners and enables them to serve Him and others. We come to Jesus Christ to make Him our Savior and Lord, to be freed from sin and the devil's power, to be led and empowered to do His will in blessing others, to be cleansed from sin, to receive the indwelling Holy Spirit, to bear fruit, to be forgiven by God, to be pardoned and declared righteous by God on the Day of Judgment, to be raised from the dead, to enjoy eternal life with God, and numerous other reasons. Those in the Church who will not bear fruit, who will not look to God and seek to serve God and others, God the Gardner removes from the Church, the Body of Christ. God also removes from Christians in the Church those things, ideas, bad habits, or tempters that are preventing them from doing even more to serve Christ and others as God intends.

(John 15:3) You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you.

The apostles that Jesus was speaking to were the 11 disciples (Judas had already been cut off by the Gardener when Judas turned away from Christ and to the devil — see John 13: 21-30). The apostles were “already clean” because they had heard Jesus’ teachings (the Word) up to the level of their understanding at that point in time and they had totally committed themselves in faith to obeying Jesus and believing and doing all He said (though of course not perfectly; for example, Jesus had to later correct Peter for his denial of Him at His trial — see John 18:9-27 and John 21:15-23).

(John 15:4) Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.

Believers have choices: will they love Jesus, will they remain with Jesus, will they believe His teachings, will they obey His teachings, will they seek His will in order to do His will daily, will they share the truth of Jesus and His teachings (the Word in human flesh and the Word written)? Having called true Christians and having attached them to Himself, Jesus tells Christians to remain totally attached and committed to Him in order to receive from Him all that He has to give them moment-by-moment. True Christians are absolutely and totally dependent on God for the breath of life and the Spirit to serve as He chooses. Day-by-day, Jesus gives every Christian the choice to remain in Him. When they do not, they do not bear fruit or serve as Jesus intends. If they persist in unrepentant disobedience, they put themselves in a position to be pruned by the Gardener.

(John 15:5) I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.

Jesus Christ is the main and sole source of all our mental, physical, and spiritual powers and their right use for His service. True Christians will choose to remain connected to Jesus, ever seeking to know Him better as they prayerfully study the Bible to know and do His will in everything. Our ability to do more and more for Jesus depends on Him and His love, His gifts, His leading and His timing.

(John 15:6) Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

A person who professes faith in Jesus Christ but shows no evidence that He believes in Jesus, who will not trust his life and what he says and does to Jesus so Jesus can bring

life to him and through him to others, gives evidence that he may be spiritually dead — as dead as a withered branch that is only good for burning (perhaps to give warmth or cook a meal for others to enjoy for a little while). By the grace of God, the Gardner and Jesus can restore those who have broken away from Him; they can return to Him, repent, and resolve to love and serve Him as their Savior and Lord.

(John 15:7) If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

Jesus gives some conditions that believers must fulfill before He will answer all their prayers. First, the true Christian must remain attached to Jesus as His loving and obedient servant — to seek and to do only the will of God through Jesus Christ. Second, the true Christian must believe in, trust, and obey all the teachings of Jesus, at least up to the level of their knowledge and understanding from the Bible. If they fulfill the conditions revealed in this verse, the Holy Spirit will so guide them that they will not ask for anything contrary to Jesus' will and teachings. They will pray in humble submission, requesting that only the will of God be done. They will ask for those things that will help them reveal the love and truth of God, that will help them love, praise, and glorify God more each day, that will help them serve Jesus and others better.

(John 15:8) My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

Jesus wants true Christians to obey Him in everything so people will see that they are His disciples in speech and behavior. They should never do what Jesus, whose Spirit lives within them, would never do. For example, they should never “throw their pearls before swine” (Matthew 7:6). If they do what Jesus would never do, they need to repent and return to Jesus for renewal and forgiveness. Their words and deeds should be consistent with what might lead others to praise, glorify, and thank God, Who is the source of every good and perfect gift.

(John 15:9) As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.

Love motivated everything Jesus did for and taught His disciples from the beginning; love motivated what He would do for them and the world by His sacrificial death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven to sit at the right hand of God the Father. God the Father loved Jesus and the world enough to send His Son into the world to save the world, and Jesus expresses this same “Father-love” for all who follow Him as Lord and Savior. Jesus loves and blesses His disciples, and He commands all Christians to remain in His love, within His circle of love as members of His Body, the Church. By remaining

in Jesus' love, Christians can love as Jesus loves and enjoy the fruits of His love while they bless others too.

(John 15:10) 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.

Jesus expressed His love for His Father by obeying all His Father's commands and fulfilling all His Father's purposes in the world. True Christians will express their love for Jesus by obeying His commands and seeking His purposes for them. True Christians do not earn or merit God's love by keeping God's commands; for while we were still sinners Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). Indications that a believer loves God and Jesus are keeping their commands. An indication that a believer is not remaining in love with God and Jesus is the refusal to obey their commands — to refuse to do what God wants them to do so God can keep working through them.

(John 15:11) I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

Jesus' great joy came from always loving and obeying His Father. He came to live and die and rise again because He loved doing God's will and for the joy set before Him (Hebrews 12:1-2). His joy can be in every believer and every believer can bring God great joy from their loving obedience. Our joy will be complete when Jesus says to us: "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" (Matthew 25:23), and totally complete when we witness this personally: "Then I heard a voice from heaven say, 'Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them'" (Revelation 14:13).

(John 15:12) "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

Moses gave the law of God to Israel on stone tablets, with ceremonies and sacrifices that pointed toward the coming of Jesus the Messiah and Son of God. Jesus gave His law to His disciples, the law God made possible to fulfill when it was written on the hearts of born again Christians. In the New Covenant in His blood, Jesus' love, life, and teachings became the standard of behavior for all His followers. Christians should love one another as Jesus loved and continues to love them by seeking to wisely do to others what is best for them and all concerned, by being willing to make necessary sacrifices for others as the Holy Spirit leads, because we love them.

(John 15:13) No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.

Love motivates a person to do all they wisely can to help someone else. God uses love and wisdom whenever He does anything, even when helping His enemies and sinners come to saving faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus loved the rich young man who came to Him, and He told him what he needed to do to inherit eternal; then, Jesus did all He wisely could when He allowed him to walk away rather than follow Jesus (see Matthew 19). Jesus laid down His life for His friends, former sinners who became His disciples and eventually friends. Before He laid down His life for them, He especially wanted His disciples to know that He considered them His friends and He was going to lay down His life for them because He loved them and wanted them saved (inherit eternal life).

(John 15:14) You are my friends if you do what I command you.

If His disciples were truly His friends, then they would do what He asked; especially when they knew that He would never ask them to do what was wrong. Friends will do what they rightly and wisely can do for their friends. Jesus was obeying His Father and laying down His life because He loved His disciples and wanted to be their Friend. In return, He expected them to be a friend to Him and do what He asked; then, they would be loving friends with one another and bear much fruit.

(John 15:15) I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.

A servant or employee obeys his master or boss without always knowing why they want them to do a task, unless they obviously know they are being asked to do what is wrong or in violation of the Bible's teachings. For three years, Jesus' disciples (students and servants) had done what Jesus asked and accompanied Him without knowing all the reasons He and they did something. Now, at the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus assured them, and those who would hear them or later read what they wrote, that they knew what the Father wanted them to know and pass on to others. Out of love and friendship for Jesus, they would obey Him and pass on to others what He taught them: "Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age'" (Matthew 28:18-20).

(John 15:16) You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.

Jesus made a prophecy about what would come to pass. Jesus chose them (and later the Apostle Paul). They bore much fruit in leading many to salvation during their lifetime. God answered their prayers and performed miracles through them that substantiated the truthfulness of what they taught about Him. Their fruit has lasted for almost 2,000 years, and their writings are still leading people to believe in and obey Jesus and study their writings to learn more. What Jesus taught and subsequently what they taught is believed and obeyed by true Christians who love God and Jesus, who likewise tell others about Jesus and what He taught.

(John 15:17) I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.”

Those who love Jesus will obey Jesus. They will obey Jesus and love others in the Church. They will love their enemies and do whatever they wisely can do in order to promote the well-being and happiness of others. Doing all they wisely can may lead to sacrifice as the Holy Spirit leads them and God answers their prayers for guidance. As Jesus taught by example, sometimes they must let their enemies (and God's enemies) walk away, or even their former friends or family members walk away, as an expression of loving, prayerful wisdom as the Lord leads them.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. What does God the Gardner do with branches on the vine that bear no fruit?
2. What does God the Gardner do with branches on the vine that bear fruit? Why?
3. What are some of the responsibilities that branches on the vine need to fulfill?
4. What are some of the conditions that Christians must fulfill to receive whatever they ask or wish?
5. How can someone show Jesus that they are one of His friends?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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