



# International Bible Lessons Commentary

Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series

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## John 21:15-25 New Revised Standard Version April 15, 2018

The [International Bible Lesson](#) (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, April 15, 2018**, is from **John 21:15-25**. **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 21:15) When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs."**

After their breakfast, Jesus addressed Simon Peter using his official name (Jesus had earlier given him the name "Peter"), which indicates the seriousness of their conversation (much as we would use our full name in a court of law or in a marriage ceremony). Jesus' questions relate to Peter's denial of Jesus three times after Jesus was arrested and put on trial, and Jesus' formal questions before the gathered disciples (or at least in the presence of John) began the process of Jesus' restoration of Peter as an apostle of Jesus Christ, for Peter answered in the affirmative three times and Jesus commissioned Peter to serve Him three times by telling Peter to care for His sheep (His people). "These" may refer to Peter's occupation as

a fisherman: did Peter love fishing with his partners and making his living as a fisherman more than he loved Jesus and serving Jesus? Peter answered that he loved Jesus more than anyone, anything, and doing anything else.

**(John 21:16) A second time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Tend my sheep.”**

Three times Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him and three times Peter answered that he loved Him. Much as been made of the two different Greek words that Jesus and Peter used for the word “love.” Some commentators have argued that one Greek word for love (*agape*: *agapaō*) that Jesus used in His first two questions expressed a greater, deeper love than the other word for love (*philia*: *phileō*) which indicated a friendship type of love that Jesus used the last time He asked Peter if he loved Him. Others have argued for the exact opposite definitions or meanings for the two words. Some have said that *agape* love shows total commitment because the love involves the person’s heart, mind, soul, and strength; *agape* love is willing to sacrifice for another. God the Father and Jesus love us with a sacrificial love that Jesus expressed when He died on the cross. Others argue the reverse, that *philia* is the higher type of love; whereas, *philia* has often been defined by others as a lower type of love, a friendship type of love. Peter answered Jesus’ questions three times using the word *philia* for love. Some have argued there is no real difference in the use of these two words, and volumes have been written about the different Greek words for love. In any event, at that point in time Jesus accepted the type of love that Peter offered Him, and Jesus knew that Peter would someday express his sacrificial type of love for Jesus and His sheep by the way Peter would die.

**(John 21:17) He said to him the third time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” And he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.**

The third time Jesus asked Peter His question about loving Him, Jesus used the word *philia* for love and Peter answered with the word *philia* for

love. God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit love us with both *agape* and *philia* love, which is love in both the highest sacrificial total sense and love in the friendship sense. Peter only used the word *philia* every time he answered Jesus' questions, perhaps because he knew he did not love Jesus in the highest sense yet. There is much room for discussion of these verses. We can say with certainty that as believers in and followers of Jesus Christ, Jesus expects us to love Him and make Him our closest Friend, just as He loves us and is our Friend; and also, we are to love Him in the highest sense as He loved and loves us in the highest, sacrificial sense of love. We love God because God is worthy to be loved and because God first loved us.

Regarding Jesus' use of different words for "lambs" and "sheep," at the least Peter and all of Jesus' followers are to love Jesus' people (His lambs and sheep) irrespective of their age and other natural abilities and qualities. Regarding Jesus' use of the different words "tend" and "feed," at the least these words mean Peter and all of Jesus' followers are to make an effort to meet the real needs of Jesus' people as wisely as they can with Jesus' guidance and the resources that the Lord Jesus supplies for these needs.

**(John 21:18) Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go."**

After Jesus restored Peter to his apostleship, He told Peter how he would die. Peter would remain loyal in his commitment to care for Jesus' people and he would die as a faithful martyr in the cause of his Lord and Savior. When Peter died by crucifixion, tradition says that he requested to be crucified upside down because he knew he was unworthy to die on the cross as Jesus had died.

**(John 21:19) (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me."**

Jesus glorified His Father when He obeyed His Father and died on the cross to save His people from their sins and grant them eternal life. Peter

would glorify his heavenly Father and Jesus Christ when he died on the cross as an obedient friend and loyal servant of Jesus Christ. No matter what happened to Peter day-to-day or how he was to die, the important thing was faithfully following Jesus day-by-day and leaving the consequences with Jesus.

**(John 21:20) Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them; he was the one who had reclined next to Jesus at the supper and had said, “Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?”**

Peter turned and saw John following and listening to his conversation with Jesus, so John knew what the Lord Jesus had told Peter and how the Lord Jesus had restored him to apostleship after Peter had denied Him three times. The betrayal by Judas and the denial by Peter were both on John’s mind when he wrote these closing verses. Whereas Peter repented and showed he truly loved the Lord Jesus and wanted to serve Him, Judas, who also felt remorse for what he had done, chose to hang himself instead of seeking the forgiveness of God (see Matthew 27:5).

**(John 21:21) When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, “Lord, what about him?”**

Like many of us in similar situations, Peter naturally asked Jesus about what would happen to John, a fellow disciple. If he was going to die a martyr’s death, would John die as a martyr too?

**(John 21:22) Jesus said to him, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!”**

Hearing Peter’s question, Jesus turned the focus back on Peter’s relationship with Him as his Lord and Savior. Jesus told Peter, you MUST follow me! Jesus would decide how long one of His followers would serve Him on this earth. Jesus would decide what type of life and death His followers would go through; what type would best glorify Him and influence others to follow Him as their Lord and Savior. Jesus told Peter that what He chose for John to do and how He chose for John to live and

die was not a matter that should concern Peter; Jesus, not Peter, was the Lord of them both. Jesus insisted that Peter's concern MUST be about how he followed and served Jesus and Jesus' people daily regardless of the personal consequences to himself — that was more than enough for Peter to be concerned about. Someone else may be honored or blessed in ways that seem better than what we experience, but following and obeying Jesus should be our primary (if not only) concern — not what God is doing or planning to do through someone else.

**(John 21:23) So the rumor spread in the community that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?”**

Jesus did not say that John would be alive when He returned as He promised. Jesus said that if He wanted John to remain alive until He returned that should be of no concern to Peter. John was exiled to Patmos, where he wrote the Book of Revelation, and tradition says that John was the only one of the twelve apostles who did not die a martyr's death. John glorified Jesus in a different way from the other apostles; for example, John wrote a great deal of the New Testament as well as the closing book.

**(John 21:24) This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true.**

If my counting is correct, according to the *New International Version* and the *New Revised Standard Version of the Bible*, Matthew and Mark never used the word “true.” Among the Gospel writers, John used the word true the most often. Not counting the Book of Acts, Luke used the word true 3 times in the NIV and 1 time in the NRSV. In his Gospel, John used the word true 15 times in the NIV and 19 times in the NRSV. In the *New International Version*, Matthew used the word truth 1 time, Mark used the word truth 2 times, Luke used the word truth 1 time, and John used the word truth 28 times. In the *New Revised Standard Version*, Matthew used the word truth 1 time, Mark used the word truth 2 times, Luke used the word truth 3 times, and John used the word truth 26 times. John “testified” to the “truth” as in a court of law under oath with consequences for lying

(perjury); John is the one who wrote his Gospel. The truth and what is true was of vital and saving importance to John. Those who knew John also testified that John's testimony was true. The most important reason to become a Christian and a faithful obedient follower of Jesus Christ is because the Bible and Christianity are true. What the Bible tells us about God the Father, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit and everyone's possible relationship with them is true. As Dr. Francis Schaeffer said well: "The Bible is true in all it affirms."

**(John 21:25) But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.**

John accurately recorded what the Holy Spirit and he decided was of most importance about the ministry of Jesus Christ for our coming to believe the truth about Jesus and accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. In John 1:3, we learn that "all things came into being through Jesus;" therefore, the many truthful books that fill our world regarding creation and history, whether they mention Jesus or not, in some sense reveal His glory as the Creator and Sustainer of all that exists. An infinite number of books could be written about how Jesus Christ, throughout the millennia from the beginning of creation and time has blessed, cared for, healed, rescued, and saved His people from a countless variety of trials and tribulations as well as bless them beyond all expectations. He is our Creator and the One who came into our world to die and rise again to save us from our sins and grant us the undeserved gift of eternal life (not to mention the blessed honor to be asked to serve Him as long as we live). So yes, the whole world would not have room for all the books that could be written about Jesus.

### **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further**

1. What do these verses tell us about Christians who sin being given another opportunity to serve Jesus?
2. What did Jesus ask of Peter before He restored him as an apostle?
3. What type of love has Jesus shown for His people (His sheep)?

4. When Peter asked about the future of John, how did Jesus answer him?
5. What do you think was the most important declaration that John made about his gospel?

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