



International Bible Study Commentary

Verse-by-Verse Bible Lessons Thru the Bible

L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

John 15:1-9 Commentary New Revised Standard Version

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

follow the verse-by-verse [*International Bible Study 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 Study 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 Study Forum*](#).

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

The Old Testament pictured Israel as a vine. In Psalms 80:8-9, we read, “You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land.” The LORD expected His vine to be a kingdom of priests and faithfully represent the true God before the nations of the world. In Exodus 19:5-7, the LORD told Israel through Moses, “Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all

the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites.’ So Moses came, summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him.” But Israel did not obey God’s commandments or do what the LORD required, for in Jeremiah 2:21, we read, “Yet I planted you as a choice vine, from the purest stock. How then did you turn degenerate and become a wild vine?” The people of Israel did not become a degenerate and wild vine because they had an incompetent vinegrower! The LORD did everything necessary for Israel to faithfully represent the true God before the nations. He gave them no reason to become a degenerate and wild vine. But their heart became false, as Hosea 10:1-2, reads, “Israel is a luxuriant vine that yields its fruit. The more his fruit increased the more altars he built; as his country improved, he improved his pillars. Their heart is false; now they must bear their guilt. The LORD will break down their altars, and destroy their pillars.”

When Jesus came into the world, the nation of Israel was no better than it had been. Jesus summed up the situation in John 15:24, saying, “If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not have sin. But now they have seen and hated both me and my Father.” Not only did they hate Jesus and the Father, but the chief priests also plotted to kill Jesus and Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead (see John 12:9-11).

After three years of ministry with His disciples, Jesus told them, “I am the true vine.” Once again, Jesus used “I Am” in a way that claimed He is God; then, He added He is the TRUE vine (unlike the people of Israel who had become degenerate, immoral, and unfaithful). Jesus Christ is the True Vine. The true branches that bear fruit on the True Vine are the loving, true, and faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. As we learn from the Apostle Paul, the true disciples of Jesus, the true Christian Church, compose the Body of Christ on the earth. To mix a metaphor, Jesus Christ, who is the Head of the Body, is the True Vine with branches attached; that is, the Church. Those in the Church bear much fruit or refuse to bear fruit.

Congregations and individuals can be pictured as branches on a vine. Think of a vine and a branch with many smaller branches growing from each branch, and each branch producing fruit or failing to produce fruit. To help His disciples better understand, Jesus pictured the Church using a vinegrower, a vine, and branches to illustrate the work of the Father and Jesus and the work expected of disciples. The **invisible** Church includes Jesus and every true disciple who bears fruit (the Church within the church that only the Father, Jesus, and the holy angels see). The **visible** church includes Jesus, true and faithful disciples who bear fruit, but also false and unfaithful disciples who bear no fruit (that God and people see). Sometimes Church means invisible Church, while church means visible church. Among Jesus’ twelve disciples, one was a false and unfaithful disciple. His disciples would remember Judas as

Jesus taught about the vine and the branches. Next, Jesus will tell His disciples what the Father will do to care for the vine and the branches, and why and how He will do so. As you study these verses, consider the close relationship between the Vinegrower, the True Vine, and each branch that the Vinegrower attends to carefully and personally so the True Vine and every true branch will bear much fruit.

(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 God 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. The Father, the Vinegrower, will remove from the visible church those in the church who will not bear fruit, who will not look to God and seek to serve God and others, who will damage the Church by their presence. God will also remove from the lives of true Christians ideas, bad habits, hot tempters, and other sins that prevent them from doing 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.

Jesus was teaching the 11 disciples, for Judas had already been cut off by the Vinegrower (Judas had turned away from Christ and had turned to the devil—see John 13: 21-30). The apostles were “already clean” because they had heard Jesus’ teachings, His gospel message, “the word,” up to the level of their understanding when they 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). Remember how Jesus only needed to wash Peter’s feet because He had already made Peter clean and he did not need to bath again (see John 13:10).

(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 make many daily choices. Will they love Jesus? Will they remain close to Jesus? Will they believe Jesus’ teachings in the Bible? Will they obey Jesus’ commandments? Will they seek His will to do His will? Will they share the truth of Jesus and His teachings—the Word in human flesh and the Word of God written? Will they seek to help people become disciples of Jesus? Will they bear the fruit that God expects them to bear? Will

they use the gifts that Jesus gives them? Jesus calls disciples, and Jesus wants to make them true disciples by attaching them to himself. Disciples help new believers understand what Jesus expects of His true disciples. To receive from Jesus all that He has to give His disciples moment-by-moment, Jesus tells His disciples to remain completely attached and totally committed to Him. True disciples 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 disciple the choice to remain in Him. When they do not, they do not bear fruit or serve as Jesus intends. If a disciple persists in disobedience, they put themselves in a position to be pruned or cut off by the Vinegrower. The pruning of the Vinegrower will be best for all concerned, but it can also be painful. Persistent, unrepentant disobedience by a disciple can result in removal from the True Vine.

(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 disciples 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—and the pruning of the Vinegrower.

(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.

Only God can see the human heart and work with perfect timing when He draws someone to true faith Jesus Christ. But 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 in danger or already spiritually dead—as dead as a withered branch that is only good for burning (perhaps to do a little good, to give a little warmth or to cook a little meal). Only the Vinegrower knows a dead branch from one that has enough life to be pruned so it can bear fruit. Though a mystery to us, by the grace of God, the Vinegrower and Jesus can restore and reattach to Jesus those who have broken away from Him. The Holy Spirit can help them turn from their sins, return to Jesus, and resolve to love and serve Him as their Savior and Lord—that they might bear fruit to the glory of God.

As encouragement and a warning, give some thought to what the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 11:17-24: “But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the rich root of the olive tree, do not boast over the branches. If you do boast, remember that it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you. You will say,

‘Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.’ That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand only through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe. For if God did not spare the natural branches, perhaps he will not spare you. Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness toward you, provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. And even those of Israel, if they do not persist in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. For if you have been cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these natural branches be grafted back into their own olive tree.”

(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 His disciples must fulfill before He will answer all their prayers. First, the true disciple 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 disciple must believe in, trust, and obey the teachings of Jesus (the Holy Spirit being their Helper) at least up to the level of their knowledge and understanding from the Bible’s teachings—for we pray and learn more daily—we are not yet perfect. If true disciples of Jesus fulfill the conditions revealed in this

verse and similar verses, 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 blessings and gifts 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, that will help them bear fruit for Jesus.

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

Jesus wants true disciples 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 love, glorify, and thank God—the Giver of every good and perfect gift. Jesus wants His disciples to become *true* disciples and bear much fruit in ways described in the Bible. The Father prunes true disciples so they will become better disciples, and they will never be cutoff and burned. False, harmful, and useless disciples who refuse to abide in Jesus risk becoming withered, cutoff, and destroyed.

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

From the beginning, divine love motivated the Father and everything Jesus taught and did for His disciples. The love of God 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—from where He answers the prayers of His true disciples. 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. Today and every day, Jesus loves and blesses His disciples, and He commands all His disciples to remain in His love—within His circle of love as members of His Body, the Church. By remaining in Jesus’ love, disciples can love as Jesus loves and enjoy the fruits of His love while they bless others too. They can enjoy and bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit as He works within them. They can show forth “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23). Imagine the love that the Father has for His only begotten Son. Jesus promised that He loves His disciples as the Father loves Him. With such encouragement, Jesus draws disciples to the Father and himself, and encourages them to live and remain in His infinite love.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. What is the relationship between the Father and the Son and Jesus and His followers as Jesus described it in these verses?
2. What do the Father, Jesus, and His followers do?
3. What can branches do if they do not remain in the vine?
4. What happens to branches that do not remain in the vine?
5. What did Jesus say about the consequences of abiding or remaining in the vine and what did He mean?

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Contact: P.O. Box 1052, Edmond, Oklahoma, 73083 and lgp@theiblf.com.