

Olivet Baptist Church

3500 Edmondson Avenue, Baltimore, MD 21229

Wednesday Night Bible Study (7:00 pm)

Book of John – Facilitator: Rev. Alex O. Stone

Overall Theme: Jesus' Preparation of His Disciples (13:1–17:26)

- I. The Relationship of Believers to Christ (John 15:1-15:11)
- II. The Relationship of Believers to the Each Other (John 15:12-15:17)
- III. The Relationship of Believers to the World (John 15:18-15:31)

Chapter Review:

- John's Gospel reports more of the content of Jesus' instructions to His disciples than do the other three Gospels.
- **The disciples are given two divine assignments: spread the gospel and build the Church.**
- **Chapters 13–17** concentrate on His teachings on that fateful night in which He was arrested. Before the instruction, Jesus washed His disciples' feet and predicted His betrayal.
- **John 13:2–4.** At the evening meal before the Passover, **the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot ... to betray Jesus.** Jesus had predicted this (6:70–71).
- **John 13:34–35.** The 11 disciples would survive in His absence by obeying His example of **love**. The command is **new** in that it is a special **love** for other believers based on the sacrificial love of Jesus: **As I have loved you, so you must love one another**
- **John 14:1–2.** Each believer is responsible for the condition of his heart (cf. Prov. 3:1, 3, 5; 4:23; 20:9). By a firm trust in God the Father and Jesus the Son, they could relieve their soul-sorrow and be sustained in their coming tests.
- Death should not be a terror to them because Jesus was leaving **to prepare a place for them in heaven, the Father's house.**
- **John 14:5–6.** Jesus' words, **I am the Way and the Truth and the Life**, are the **sixth of Jesus' seven "I am" statements in the Gospel of John** (6:48; 8:12; 10:9, 11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1).

- Jesus is the “Way” because He is the “Truth” and the “Life.” As the Father is Truth and Life, Jesus is the embodiment of God so people can come to the Father (cf. 1:4, 14, 18; 11:25).
- By His words, **No one comes to the Father except through Me**, Jesus stressed that salvation, contrary to what many people think, is *not* obtainable through many ways. Only one Way exists (cf. Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5).
- **Jesus is the only access to the Father because He is the only One from the Father** (cf. John 1:1–2, 51; 3:13).
- **John 14:10–11.** The proof of the union of Jesus and His Father is threefold. They should **believe** Jesus
 - (a) because of His character (**I am in the Father and ... the Father is in Me**);
 - (b) because His words are the Father’s (**The words I say to you are not just My own** (cf. 7:16; 12:49–50; 14:24); and
 - (c) because the miracles reveal God’s working through Him (**the Father, living in Me ... is doing His work.... believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves**; cf. 5:36).
- **John 14:12–14.** **To ask Me for anything in My name means to ask according to His will** (cf. “in My name” in John 15:16; 16:23–24, 26). **The goal** of answered prayers is to **bring glory to the Father**. Also bearing fruit glorifies the Father (John 15:8).
- **John 14:15.** The disciples’ **love** for Christ is revealed in their obeying His commands (cf. vv. 21, 23; 1 John 2:3; 3:22, 24; 5:3). Christ has set the pattern of love and obedience (John 14:31); His disciples are expected to follow (13:15–16).
- **John 14:16–17.** This is the first of several passages on the Holy Spirit in the Upper Room Discourse. **The Holy Spirit is to be the Counselor (*paraklētos*)**; also used in 14:26; 15:26; 16:7; for its meaning see comments on 16:7).
 - **In a sense He has now replaced Jesus’ physical presence**; and He mediates God to believers. **The Spirit is in a believer forever** (cf. Rom. 8:9).
 - **He is also the Spirit of Truth** (lit., “Spirit of the truth”; cf. John 15:26; 16:13) and thus would guide the apostles.
 - He is invisible (**the world cannot accept Him because it neither sees Him nor knows Him**), yet He is real and active.
 - **The Holy Spirit is unnoticed by the unsaved who have no spiritual life.**

- **John 14:20–21.** Christian love is manifested as a believer **obeys** the Lord's words (cf. vv. 15, 23). **The rewards of loving Him are great:**
 - (a) the **Father** will show His love to him (cf. v. 23), and
 - (b) the Son **will love him and show Himself to him.**
- **One who believes and obeys Christ's Word is loved by the Lord. Saving faith results in obedience** (cf. "the obedience that comes from faith," Rom. 1:5).
- **John 14:25–26.** Three things were needed for the apostles to understand Jesus' person and mission:
 - (1) His death had to occur.
 - (2) He had to rise again to vindicate His claim and demonstrate His victory.
 - (3) **The Spirit had to come** (He would be sent by **the Father ... in My name**, i.e., in Jesus' place and for Him) **and interpret the meanings of Jesus' words and deeds.**
- The Spirit, Jesus said, **will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.** This verse is addressed to the apostles.
- The context limits the **"all things"** to the interpretation and significance of His person and work.
- **The Spirit worked in their minds, reminding them of His teaching and giving them insight into its meaning** (cf. 2:22; 7:39; 20:9).

CURRENT FOCUS: "I AM THE TRUE VINE" (15:1–15:17)

The Relationship of Believers to Christ

15 "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

⁵ “I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned. ⁷ If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. ⁸ By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

⁹ “As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. 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. ¹¹ “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and *that* your joy may be full.

The Relationship of Believers to Each Other

¹² This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. ¹⁵ No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. ¹⁷ These things I command you, that you love one another.

The Relationship of Believers to the World

¹⁸ “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before *it hated* you. ¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. ²⁰ Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. ²¹ But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me. ²² If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. ²³ He who hates Me hates My Father also. ²⁴ If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would have no sin; but now they have seen and also hated both Me and My Father. ²⁵ But *this happened* that the word might be fulfilled which is written in their law, ‘*They hated Me without a cause.*’

The Promise of the Holy Spirit

²⁶ “But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me. ²⁷ And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning.

Commentary: JESUS THE WAY TO THE FATHER (CHAP. 14:1-14:14)

E. The Vine and the branches (15:1–10)

Jesus now instructed His disciples on three vital relationships. Disciples are to be rightly related to Jesus (vv. 1–10), to each other (vv. 11–17), and to the world (vv. 18–16:4). Disciples have **three respective duties**: to remain (abide), to love each other, and to testify.

John 15:1. I am the true Vine (cf. v. 5). **This is the last of the seven great “I am” statements** in John (cf. comments on 6:35).

- Israel was God’s choice vine on which he lavished care and attention (Ps. 80:8; Isa. 5:1–7; Jer. 2:2; 6:9; Ezek. 15; 17:5–10; 19:10–14; Hosea 10:1; 14:8).
- He longed for fruit, but the vine (Israel) became degenerate and produced rotten fruit.
- Therefore **Jesus, as “the true Vine,”** fulfills what God had intended for Israel.
- The **Father is the Gardener** who cultivates and protects the Vine.

John 15:2. He (i.e., the Gardener, the Father) desires **fruit**, which is **mentioned eight times in this chapter** (vv. 2 [thrice], 4 [twice], 5, 8, 16).

- A progression is seen: **fruit** (v. 2), **more fruitful** (v. 2), and “much fruit” (vv. 5, 8).
- The fruit which God desired from Israel was *loving obedience, righteousness, and justice* (Isa. 5:1–7).
- **Every branch in Me that** does not bear fruit **He cuts off**. The phrase “in Me” does not mean the same thing as Paul’s words “in Christ.” Here it is part of the metaphor of the Vine and seems to mean, **“every person who professes to be My disciple (a ‘branch’) is not necessarily a true follower.”**
- A branch **that bears no** fruit is obviously dead. **Therefore, like Judas, it is cut off.** (See comments on John 15:6.)
- Every year in Palestine gardeners prune their vines. They cut off the dead wood which has no life in it and trim the living branches so that their yield will be greater.

John 15:3. The disciples had been cleansed by Jesus and His message, but one, Judas, was not cleansed (cf. 13:10–11).

John 15:4. Fruitfulness is the result of the Son's life **being reproduced in a disciple.**

- The disciple's part is to **remain**. The word **remain**, a key word in John's theology, is *menō* which occurs **11** times in this chapter, **40** times in the entire Gospel,¹ and **27** times in John's epistles. What does it mean to **remain**? It can mean,
 - **First**, to accept Jesus as Savior (cf. 6:54, 56).
 - **Second**, it can mean to continue or persevere in believing (8:31 ["hold" is remain]; 1 John 2:19, 24).
 - **Third**, it can also mean believing, loving obedience (John 15:9–10).
 - Without faith, no life of God will come to anyone.
 - **Without the life of God, no real fruit can be produced: Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me.**

John 15:5–6. A disciple's continual abiding with Jesus (**If a man remains in Me**)—and the indwelling of Jesus in a believer (**and I in him**)—result in abundant **fruit** (cf. v. 8). But those who do not believe face disaster.

- **A branch** without life is dead and cut off (v. 2). It is worthless and therefore is **thrown into the fire and burned**.
- What did Jesus mean by these symbolic words about vine branches being burned? These words have been interpreted in at least three ways:

¹ Blum, E. A. (1985). [John](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 325). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

(1) The “burned” branches are Christians who have lost their salvation. (But this contradicts many passages, e.g., 3:16, 36; 5:24; 10:28–29; Rom. 8:1.)

(2) The “burned” branches represent Christians who will lose rewards but not salvation at the judgment seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:15). (But Jesus spoke here of *dead* branches; such a branch **is thrown away and withers.**)

(3) The “burned” branches refer to professing Christians who, like Judas, are not genuinely saved and therefore are judged.

- Like a dead branch, a person without Christ is spiritually dead and therefore will be punished in eternal fire (cf. Matt. 25:46).
- Judas was with Jesus; he seemed like a “branch.” But **he did not have God’s life in him**; therefore he departed; his destiny was like that of a dead branch.

John 15:7–8. In contrast with verse 6, the emphasis in these verses is positive: **remain** with Jesus and **bear much fruit**.

- Effective prayer is based on faith in Christ and on His **words** remaining in believers.
- Christ’s words condition and control such **a believer’s mind so that his prayers conform to the Father’s will.**
- Since his prayer is in accord with God’s will, the results are certain—**it will be given you** (cf. 1 John 5:14–15 ² 1 John 5:14–15).

² Blum, E. A. (1985). [John](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 325–326). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

- **Fulfilled prayers** bring **glory** to the Father because, like Jesus, His **disciples** are doing the heavenly Father's will (cf. "Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth" [Matt. 6:10]).

John 15:9–10. A believer is motivated by the wonder of Jesus' **love**, which is patterned after the Father's **love** in its quality and extent. **Remain in My love** might seem to be mystical but Jesus makes it very concrete.

- **Obedience** to the **Father's commands** *is the same for a disciple as it was for the Son* (cf. 14:15, 21, 23; 1 John 2:3; 3:22, 24; 5:3).
- Active dependence and loving obedience are the proper paths for all of God's children.

F. Jesus' friends (15:11–17).

John 15:11. Jesus had great **joy** in pleasing His Father by living a fruitful life (cf. Heb. 12:2). **The purpose of His teaching is to give man an abundant life**, not a joyless existence (John 10:10). The commands for His disciples to obey are for their **joy** (cf. 17:13).

John 15:12. One primary **command** was given by Jesus to believers: *they must have mutual love* (**Love each other**; this is repeated in v. 17).

- **Christians grow by caring for and nurturing each other.**
- The standard for that love is Christ's example of humble sacrificial service: **as I have loved you.**

John 15:13–14. The most a person can do for his friend is to die for him; such a death is a clear demonstration of **love**. Jesus demonstrated His love (v. 12b) by dying **for His friends**, those who obey Him. Abraham was called God’s “friend” (2 Chron. 20:7; Isa. 41:8) because he obeyed God. Like close friends, Abraham and God communicated well with each other (cf. Gen. 18:17).

John 15:15–17. A **servant** (lit., “slave”) **does not** have a close relationship with his master, as friends do. Normally, a slave does what he is told without understanding **his master’s** mind or **business**. Since Jesus had opened Himself to His disciples, the title “slave” did not fit their relationship. (When Paul spoke of himself as “a servant ³ servant [lit., slave] of God” [Rom. 1:1], he had a different idea in mind. He meant he willingly and humbly served and obeyed God.) Jesus **called** His disciples **friends** because He had disclosed His Father’s revelation to them.

Jesus then reminded them that contrary to the common practice of disciples picking a teacher, Jesus had chosen them (cf. John 15:19). The purpose of His choosing was so that they would produce lasting **fruit**. He **chose** them for a mission, and His **Father** would answer their requests in order to accomplish that mission (**whatever you ask in My name**; cf. v. 7; cf. “in My name” in 14:13–14; 16:23–24, 26). Friendship with Jesus involves the obligation of brotherly love: **Love each other** (cf. 15:12).

³ Blum, E. A. (1985). [John](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 326). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

G. The world's hatred (15:18–16:4).

John 15:18. Friendship with God results in enduring the world's hatred. Conversely, being friends with the world is to be God's enemy (James 4:4). Jesus alerted His disciples to the fact of the world's hatred. **The world** in John's Gospel is the system of organized society hostile to God, which is under Satan's power (John 14:30). Believers might be surprised by this hostility (1 Peter 4:12–13), but they should remember that Jesus was **hated** from His birth (when Herod the Great sought to kill Him) to His death on the cross.

John 15:19. A fundamental reason for the world's hatred of a Christian lies in their differences (cf. 1 Peter 4:4; Rom. 12:2). A believer, having left the kingdom of darkness and having been transferred into the kingdom of God's Son (Col. 1:13), has a different joy, purpose, hope, and love. He now has certainty, truth, and a standard for life. Christians **have** been **chosen** (cf. John 15:16) **out of the world** system by Christ and they now belong to Him. Since they **do not belong to the world ... the world hates** them.

John 15:20–21. Jesus reminded His disciples of a statement He had made earlier: **No servant is greater than his master** (cf. 13:16). Previously He was referring to their need to imitate His ⁴ humble service. But the principle has other applications. Christians are to identify so closely with Jesus that they share in His sufferings (**they will persecute you also**). On the positive side, some people followed and **obeyed**

⁴ Blum, E. A. (1985). [John](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 326–327). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Jesus' **teaching**, so they **also** responded to the apostles' message. The root cause of the world's hatred against the disciples is their identification with Jesus. They hate Jesus because they are ignorant of God, **the One who sent Him**.

John 15:22–23. Jesus came as the Revelation of God. If Jesus **had not come**, their sin would not be so great. The statement, **they would not be guilty of sin** (cf. v. 24), must not be taken absolutely as 16:9 shows (cf. 3:19; 9:41). Before Jesus' coming people might have pleaded ignorance as an excuse for **sin** (cf. Acts 17:30). But now that the Light has come, those who willfully reject it **have no excuse**. The revelation in Jesus and by Jesus is so tied to the **Father** that to hate Jesus is to hate God (cf. John 15:24b).

John 15:24–25. These two verses amplify the thought in verses 22–23. Jesus' **miracles** were so distinctive that their import was unmistakable. The Jewish nation should have honestly confessed, "No one could perform the miraculous signs You are doing if God were not with Him" (3:2). But the nation as a whole rejected **both Jesus and the Father** because in their sins they loved darkness rather than light (3:19). The nation thought it was serving God in rejecting Jesus (16:2–3) but in reality it was serving Satan (8:44). Sin is basically irrational. Their hatred of Jesus was **without** any rational cause which also fits the pattern of hatred for righteous people, as seen in those who hated David (Pss. 35:19; 69:4; 109:3).

John 15:26–27. In the face of the opposition and hatred of the world a believer might be tempted to try to escape from the world or to be silent in it. Monasticism, extreme separation, and lack of witnessing have been too common in the church's

history. Jesus encouraged His disciples by the promise of the Spirit's work in the world. As the work of Jesus was to promote the Father and not Himself, so the Spirit will witness to Jesus as the Messiah (**He will testify about Me**). And what He says is true for He is **the Spirit of Truth** (cf. 16:13). As **the Counselor** (cf. 14:26; 16:7), He presents God's truth to the world. The Spirit is sent **from the Father** (cf. 14:26), just as the Son was sent from the Father. Yet this mysterious work of the Spirit is not done in isolation from the church. The apostles were to bear witness to the facts that they came to know: **You also must testify**. As the apostles witnessed, the Holy Spirit persuaded, and people were saved. The same combination of human obedience to the divine command (Acts 1:8) coupled with the witness of the Spirit is needed in every generation. Jesus as the Messiah (**He will testify about Me**). And what He says is true for He is **the Spirit of Truth** (cf. 16:13). As **the Counselor** (cf. 14:26; 16:7), He presents God's truth to the world. The Spirit is sent **from the Father** (cf. 14:26), just as the Son was sent from the Father. Yet this mysterious work of the Spirit is not done in isolation from the church. The apostles were to bear witness to the facts that they came to know: **You also must testify**. As the apostles witnessed, the Holy Spirit persuaded, and people were saved. The same combination of human obedience to the divine command (Acts 1:8) coupled with the witness of the Spirit is needed in every generation.⁵

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