

...Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.

"Steal no longer but... work" – stopping something harmful, starting something positive instead, and a changed lifestyle that all can see, is evident repentance.

29-30 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

"Only what is... building others up" - a practical guideline. The opposite of obscene language, gossip and slander which like a rotten fruit spreads and corrupts, damaging individuals and community.

"Grieve the Holy Spirit" - showing the Holy Spirit to be a person, sensitive to any harshness of attitude.

31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.

"Bitterness...anger" – resentment and malice have no place in people who have been forgiven of much – and so morally cannot withhold from others that same

IN PRACTICE The new life which comes through asking Jesus to be Lord of our lives is - new. 'The old has gone, the new has come,' in Paul's words elsewhere. Foul language and petty dishonesty doesn't seem clever any more. A lot of our more selfish traits lose their hold on us. But there's still old-life baggage we need to lay down. Paul sets out some three-part choices for us - a 'don't', an alternative positive action, and the spiritual principle involved. We can still behave according to the old nature, harsh and critical of others; our behaviour doesn't align with our new spiritual identity. This 'mixed message' destroys our witness and more seriously, offends the Holy Spirit. His nature is love, therefore He is sensitive to unloving attitudes which cause Him to distance Himself. The remedy is to let Him enable us to grow more Christlike and loving.

QUESTION Out of the "get rid of" things listed and the challenge to love unconditionally, like Christ - which speak to you particularly?

PRAYER Father God, as we come to You in Jesus we are so grateful for the new life You hold out to us. Jesus, You are the Bread of Life! Help us to take hold of You, eagerly, and with the help of Your Spirit, to live so that all can recognise how You are transforming our lives. Amen.

grace. Failure to forgive results in the anger, clamour and malice which follow logically in the sentence.

32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

"Be kind" – be kind, chrestos, because of Christ, Christos.

"Compassionate... forgiving - opposite to the bitter attitude. God's forgiveness of us is the standard we apply to others: "Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors, Matt. 6:12.

• **For further study**, compare with Hosea 3:1, Colossians 3:13.

Eph. 5:1-2 Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

"Follow God's example" – more literally, "Be imitators of God". Believers have been exhorted to learn about Christ, and not to grieve the Spirit, Eph 4:20-21, 30. Now we are challenged to adopt God's values, showing them to the world around us.

"Walk in the way of love" – summarises the section. Christ's demonstration of loving us was fragrant, i.e. acceptable to God; our fragrant

The Living Word

The Bible readings for Sunday, August 12, 2018 with commentary notes

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Church calendar readings for Sunday, August 12, in Bible order

Prepare for Sunday by reading the Bible passages beforehand - read again to reflect on Sunday's teaching

Theme: Pride is a killer but humbly accepting Jesus is salvation and life

2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15, 31-33 - Absalom dies in self-condemnation

John 6:35, 41-51 - Jesus says He is the bread of life, our salvation

Ephesians 4:25-5:2 - Paul urges living renewed lives in transformation

2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15, 31-33 » Absalom dies in self-condemnation

Absalom is put to death after defeat in the battle of Ephraim Forest

5 The king commanded Joab, Abishai and Ittai, "Be gentle with the young man Absalom for my sake." And all the troops heard the king giving orders concerning Absalom to each of the commanders.

"Be gentle" – whether out of fatherly love or a sense of guilt towards Absalom is not clear.

6-8 David's army marched out of the city to fight Israel, and the battle took place in the forest of Ephraim. There Israel's troops were routed by David's men, and the casualties that day were great - 20,000 men. The battle spread out over the whole countryside, and the forest swallowed up more men that day than the sword.

"Forest of Ephraim" – not in Ephraim but an area east of the Jordan in Gilead, settled by the tribe. The larger army were unable to move effectively in a forest, and fell prey to David's experienced force.

9 Now Absalom happened to meet David's men. He was riding his mule, and as the mule went under the thick branches of a large oak, Absalom's hair got caught in the tree. He was left hanging in midair, while the mule he was riding kept on going.

"Riding his mule" – as king's sons did, 2 Sam. 13:29.

"Absalom's hair" – what he gloried in, 2 Sam. 14:25-26, became the instrument of his downfall. As in life he had exalted himself with his own monument, 2 Sam. 18:18, in death he was thrown into a pit heaped up with rocks, like stoning, and a monument of shame.

15 And ten of Joab's armour-bearers surrounded Absalom, struck him and killed him.

"Joab's armour-bearers" – David's senior officer and close support had conflicting feelings about the leader of a bloody rebellion. The narrator stresses e.g. verse 5 David's order to spare Absalom, but Joab had fallen for his deception before, 2 Sam. 14:1-24; perhaps with the king's safety in view, acted against David's instructions.

31 Then the Cushite arrived and said, "My lord the king, hear the good news! The Lord has vindicated you today by delivering you from the hand of all who rose up against you."

"Cushite" - "man from Ethiopia", NLT.

32 The king asked the Cushite, "Is the young man Absalom safe?"

The Cushite replied, "May the enemies

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of my lord the king and all who rise up to harm you be like that young man."

33 The king was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said: "O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you - O Absalom, my son, my son!"

IN PRACTICE The story of Absalom's death, caught in a tree by the long hair he so gloried in, brings with it a reflection on his way of life. He ingratiated himself with others, gained a following over and against his father, and even built a monument to himself just outside Jerusalem. It is a story of pride that leads to a fall, of man-centred values that can never play out well; a story of self-condemnation. In our sinful state apart from God, it's how we all start. We can recognise the desire to be something for ourselves, and the rebellious streak. This is the 'how not to' example that brings out the new life in Jesus, and the life of the Holy Spirit that empowers us to make positive choice and live differently - not needing people's attention to boost our egos, but able to live for Jesus and even look a little bit like Him.

QUESTION Reflecting on Absalom and his death, what is the lesson for you?

"If only I had died" – David had lost Absalom's love and respect, and now he had lost his son and any possible reconciliation. From the tone of David's exclamation, it appears he is seeing that what Nathan prophesied, 2 Sam. 12:10-11, is now happening. His sin with Bathsheba, for which he has repented, still plays out with consequences.

John 6:35, 41-51 » Jesus says He is the bread of life, our salvation

Some have faith to recognise Christ and His mission to save, others refuse to see

35 Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to Me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in Me will never be thirsty.

"I am" – there are a number of statements where Jesus refers to Himself using the words "I am", purposefully making His hearers think of God's audible words to Moses in Exodus 3:14, and speaking through Isaiah e.g. Isaiah 43:25. This is the first of seven such sayings recorded by John.

"The bread of life" – the crowd had said in verse 34, not getting it at all, "Always give us this bread" or 'keep on giving us free food'. So Jesus makes it very clear He is speaking of Himself.

41-43 At this the Jews there began to grumble about Him because He said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." They said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can He now say, 'I came down from heaven'?"

"Stop grumbling among yourselves," Jesus answered.

"Began to grumble about Him" – The complaint recalls the attitude in the desert which caused the delay in entering the Promised Land. The crowd are showing the same inflexibility of thought and expectation – and lack of faith – as their ancestors who grumbled about the provision of manna. After all, they 'know' He is the son of Joseph! And a miracle worker and political figurehead.

They struggle to see Him as the Son of the Father.

• **For further study**, read Exodus 16:8, Numbers 14:27 and the recollection in Psalm 95:8-9.

44-45 "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day. It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from Him comes to Me.

"No one can come... they will all" – 'can' is dunamai, with the fuller meaning of 'no one is able'. Jesus also quotes Isaiah 54:13 – His bigger vision is all being saved and coming to a knowledge

of the truth, also the new covenant prophecy of Jeremiah 31:31-34. A balanced view holds these tensions of God's election "no one can come... unless the Father... draws them" and "they will all" in man's freewill in responding to the tug of the Holy Spirit, in tension. This is a process of grace from God to us, to which we are divinely enabled to respond as the Holy Spirit works in our hearts. Scripture emphasises in different places God's initiative of grace, and our responsibility of responding, in the initial spiritual transformation we call salvation or becoming a Christian.

46-48 No one has seen the Father except the One who is from God; only He has seen the Father. Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life.

"No one has seen... the one who believes" – as in John's prologue, John 1:18. If we simply accepted

IN PRACTICE The crowd who heard this teaching from Jesus didn't grasp it immediately. Many of them had known Jesus for 30 years - now, they had seen miracles of healing and provision and heard Him explain about His divine identity. Some had faith to see Jesus the Messiah; others struggled. It's the same with us. Every encounter with God tests two things: our need of God, depending, and taking Him at His word - John prefers the action word, believing, to 'faith' and 'trust'. Jesus, not our efforts or good deeds, is the source of empowered life now; Jesus is the way to life eternal. He chooses us, reminding us what He has done out of love for us, and holds out an offer. When we trust Him for that offer, everything changes.

QUESTION How would you explain to someone else simply, what Jesus had done out of love for them, and how they might respond to that?

Ephesians 4:25-5:2 » Paul urges living renewed lives in transformation

The hallmark of those who belong to the Lord, is that they walk in love like Him.

25 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbour, for we are all members of one body. "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry...

"Each of you must" – redeemed by Jesus, empowered by the Holy Spirit, we are now enabled to live like this. Five instances follow, each with a 'do not', a positive alternative, and a spiritual principle.

"Put off falsehood" – twisting of the truth comes

what we could see, that would not be faith. We have to go out on the line, putting our trust in the goodness of someone we have not physically seen.

49-51 Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

"Ate the manna... yet they died". Manna gave them food; Jesus, the Living Bread, gives enduring life.

"This bread is My flesh" – i.e. 'this bread is Me'. Jesus is the living bread who satisfies the spiritual hunger of those who believe in Him. He becomes this 'bread' in a physical way by the sacrifice of His body – "My flesh" – to death on the Cross.

with anger and bitterness. The emotional response of anger (like any emotional response of the moment) is not of itself sin. Anger that takes root, i.e. carries over to the next day and beyond, forms a resentful, bitter and often slanderous attitude, evidently unforgiving – and that denies the gospel.

27-28 ...and do not give the devil a foothold...

"A foothold" – sin gives the devil legal rights to oppress us. Unresolved conflict nurturing the sin of unforgiveness is perhaps the most common strategy the devil uses to gain a measure of control over our thoughts and lives. Sin is the foothold needed.