

in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people –

5-6 the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven, and about which you have already heard, in the true message of the gospel that has come to you.

In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world –just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace.

"Faith...love...hope" – foundational to the Christian life. Hope is solid confidence in God's goodness, which generates faith and love.

• For further study on these as central to the Christian life, see Rom. 5:1–5; 1 Cor. 13:13; Gal. 5:5–6; Eph. 4:2–5; 1 Thess. 1:3; 5:8; and as foundational, Heb. 6:10–12; 1 Pet. 1:3–8, 21–22.

"Growing throughout the whole world" – the gospel is inclusive, never limited to an exclusive group. Three decades after Pentecost the Good News was being told in every quarter of the Roman Empire.

7-8 You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

"Epaphras" – not the Epaphroditus of Philippians but the evangelist who started churches in Colossae, Laodicea and Hierapolis.

"Love in the Spirit" – the Holy Spirit is the source of Christian love, Romans 5:5, Galatians 5:22-23.

**IN PRACTICE** No one said living out the Good News of Jesus and His kingdom would be easy. But as the Deuteronomy reading says, it is not out of reach, either. It is far more attainable for us now, who can at any time turn to Jesus as Saviour, turn over our lives to Him and receive the enabling Holy Spirit. Now we can love God and love others in a way that comes from a new nature we didn't have before we were reborn spiritually – who we are in Christ Jesus. Our transformed lives impact others, one at a time, and get the attention of others – good fruit that changes the world.

**QUESTION** Are we trying to live a life worthy of the Lord, or allowing the Holy Spirit to change us and empower us to live for Him?

**PRAYER** Father, help us return Your unconditional love for us, by knowing and practising what You really want – especially in our relationships with others. To the glory of Jesus. Amen.

9 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives,

10-12 so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of His holy people in the kingdom of light.

"Live a life worthy" – lit. "walk worthy". Christian life is not just knowledge, but knowing God's will by the impartation of the Holy Spirit, v.9, and thereby being transformed, empowered and made fruitful in life, vv.10-12.

"Qualified... to share in the inheritance" – a qualification given by the Father, not earned. The inheritance was formerly Israel's, now extended to Gentiles as equal co-heirs with Jewish believers in Jesus.

13-14 For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

"Dominion of darkness" – not a territory but the dark ruling influence that blinds people to the reality of God, resulting in evil.

# The Living Word

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## The Bible readings for Sunday, July 14, 2019 with commentary notes

Revised Common Lectionary readings for Sunday, July 14, in Bible order

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

Theme: Good values are knowing and living what God really wants

Deuteronomy 30:9-14 — Keeping God's decrees brings spiritual prosperity

Amos 7:7-9 — Amos' plumb line vision reveals Israel's misalignment

Luke 10:25-37 — The Great Commandment is to love God and others

Colossians 1:1-14 — The Holy Spirit helps us know God's will and be fruitful

And also: Psalm 30

### Deut. 30:9-14 — Keeping God's decrees brings spiritual prosperity

What God expects is not too remote or difficult

9-10 Then the LORD your God will make you most prosperous in all the work of your hands and in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your land. The LORD will again delight in you and make you prosperous, just as He delighted in your ancestors, if you obey the LORD your God and keep His commands and decrees that are written in this Book of the Law and turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

"Then" – refers back to the Moab covenant, Deut 29:1, based on the Abraham covenant. The Lord was calling His people to "turn", "return" and He would "restore", all translating the same Hebrew word frequently used in this passage. God turns to Israel when Israel turns to God.

"Make you prosperous" – lit. 'remain over' or have more than enough.

11 Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach.

12-13 It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, "Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, "Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to

us so we may obey it?" "Not... beyond your reach... up in heaven" – the revelation of God is not kept by Him, but made accessible to us humans to be talked about, not like the "secret things" of Deut. 29:29.

• For further study, see how Paul uses these verses in Romans 10:6-8.

14 No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.

"Very near you" – keeping God's decrees is within easy reach, and Moses admonishes his people to make the right choice. This also anticipates Jeremiah's prophecy about God's law not just being obeyed but innate, written on the hearts of the people, Jer. 31:31-34

Amos 7:7-9 — Amos' plumb line vision reveals Israel's misalignment

Whatever is built that is not true, will be pulled down

7 This is what He showed me: The Lord was standing by a wall that had been built true to plumb, with a plumb line in His hand.

"True to plumb" – bricklayers use a weighted cord to build a wall exactly vertical. A leaning wall quickly collapses.

8 And the LORD asked me, "What do you see, Amos?"

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"A plumb line," I replied. Then the Lord said, "Look, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel; I will spare them no longer.

"A plumb line among My people" – to reveal whether they are in alignment with the Lord, or (in terms of this prophecy) dangerously out of true.

IN PRACTICE The political world we live in has many divisions but also is full of the language of treaties, trade agreements, pacts and coalitions. These are all ways of covenanting together for mutually beneficial partnership – which is what God has always intended for us to have with Him. What happens when one party to the agreement starts to act independently (a definition of sin)? There is a growing digression of intentions that causes damage and must be brought back in to alignment. When neglect of the garden risks beauty turning to wilderness, decisive weeding action is needed – and it's the same with our relationship with God!

QUESTION What in our church, community or personal life is God calling to be brought back into alignment with Him?

### Luke 10:25-37 — The Great Commandment is to love God and others

Showing love to those around us is foundational

25 On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

"Expert in the law" – or scribe, many of whom belonged to the Pharisee sect.

"He asked" – a common question in Judaism was about eternal life, which did not have the assurance we have in Jesus. He is also making a challenge to "test Jesus", similar to the different event of MaP. 22:34-40, Mark 12:28-34.

26 "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

"What is written?" – for Jesus the OT is the definitive standard of faith and practice.

27 He answered, " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' "

"Love the Lord... love your neighbour" – it was common to link texts based on the same phrase i.e. "you shall love". The first was part of a prayer every Jew repeated daily, and the second would have been understood from that context, as "love your people". Deut 6:5, Lev. 19:18.

9 "The high places of Isaac will be destroyed and the sanctuaries of Israel will be ruined; with My sword I will rise against the house of Jeroboam."

"High places of Isaac" – the name of Isaac, father of Jacob, represented all Israel. This refers to the temples and shrines of pagan deities not yet removed.

28 "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

"You will live" – or "live well". Jesus did not say that eternal life could be earned by loving God and neighbour, which would be a contradiction of every other reference to eternal life.

29 But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?"

"Who is my neighbour" – the general view of scribes and Pharisees was that the righteous alone were one's neighbours, and the wicked e.g. tax collectors, Gentiles, Samaritans, were enemies of God and to be hated. The man hoped Jesus would confirm his bias.

30 In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.

"Going down... to Jericho" – literally. A winding and difficult 17-mile descent in rocky desert which gave opportunity to robbers. Clothes were a valuable, saleable commodity.

31-32 A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

"Priest... Levite" – a priest was a descendant of Aaron who served in the Temple, assisted by Levites. Their main concern was being rendered unclean, and unfit for duty, by a man who might be dead, or dying.

33 But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.

"A Samaritan" – the contrast and reversal in the story would have been deeply shocking to the hearers. After the conquest of the northern kingdom of Israel, Assyrians intermarried with Israelites who remained in Samaria, leading to conflict and racial hatred when the Judeans returned from Babylon later. No Jew of this period could imagine a despised Samaritan helping a wounded Jew.

34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him.

"Oil and wine" – a traveller's first aid kit.

35 The next day he took out two denarii

IN PRACTICE We love to construct a religious system that sets out what things we have to do to be assured of eternal life, but faith doesn't work like that. What is needed is a new heart, of loving God and loving what He stands for. Out of that grows a new attitude of relating to others without judgment or condition because that is what God does. Jesus stood on two legs and walked from village to village, showing people what God was like. He wants us to be towards Him, and be towards others, like He is. He wants homage shown in the actual substance of our mercy, not just in the polished words of our rituals.

QUESTION Someone in your community whose lifestyle and beliefs you find difficult, experiences a crisis. How much do you judge, how much do you overlook, and how much generosity of spirit do you show?

### Col. 1:1-14 — The Holy Spirit helps us know God's will and be fruitful

Faith and love from the assurance the gospel brings, is changing the world

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, "Apostle" – not a title; the root meaning is one who is sent as a personal representative. Paul uses no description, or "servant", in other letters.

2 To God's holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ:

and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

"Two denarii" – two days' wages, and enough for a long stay.

36 "Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

"Which of these... was a neighbour" – to Jewish hearers, the idea of a sworn enemy being the neighbour who rescued the victim and paid for this care, while two esteemed religious officials would not, was offensive and humiliating.

37 The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

"The one who had mercy" – the scribe was enough of an expert to know that the law and prophets prioritised mercy. Jesus had changed his question from "Who is my neighbour" to "How can I be a neighbour?"

• For further study, read Hosea 6:6; also Isaiah 1:11-17; Amos 5:21-24; Micah 6:6-8.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father.

"Holy people" – a better rendering than the "saints" in some versions. The word refers to believers, all of whom are so described because by their own confession they belong to God – no religious overtones.

3-4 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith