

spiritually immature, easily falling back into the ways of the old pre-Christian selfish nature.

"Milk... meat" – Paul had given them the Good News of Jesus, who He was, and what He had done for them through His death and resurrection. He questions whether they have grasped the fundamentals enough to receive the 'meat' of more doctrinal teaching about the kingdom of God.

3-4 You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere human beings?

"Still worldly... acting like mere humans" – quite a rebuke to people who had made a commitment to Christ, with Paul saying that no one could tell the difference. The evidence is in the rivalries and conflicts and the following of personalities instead of allegiance to Christ alone.

5-6 What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe – as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow.

REFLECTION Jesus has died, and has risen, the Spirit has been poured out, and gatherings of people following the Way of Jesus have sprung up all across Palestine and Roman Asia. Now there are churches even in Macedonia and Corinth – a very different culture. These Greek converts found new life in Jesus, and were excited to discover the empowering of the Spirit. However, it was a mixed-up kind of progress because they still carried a lot of their old way of life, their rivalry and rhetoric, and wanted to put their leaders on pedestals instead of exalting Jesus as Lord of His church. *A lot changes when we give our lives to the Lord and become Christians, but we all bring some baggage with us; growing up in the Lord is learning to recognise the hindrances, and knowing how to let them go.*

QUESTION *We all know something of the the way our selfish nature fights with the spiritual nature. What helps you to grow spiritually?*

PRAYER Thank you, Jesus, that You came to be the fulfilment of the Law and give us a much better way to live for God – by belonging to You. Empower us by Your Spirit to draw others to Your light, by our showing how much we love God by living in His way of love. Amen.

"Only servants" – Paul, a church-planting apostle, had started the church and Apollos exercised a significant ministry after he left. But Paul calls them just servants who the Lord has assigned to their task. The implication is, that they are answerable to Him, not to critics.

7-8 So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labour.

"One purpose" – apostles and teachers share the aim, to proclaim and teach the gospel and equip people to mature. But it is "only God... makes things grow" – all salvation and growth is God's work of grace, so the glory goes not to any servant, but to Him.

9 For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building.

"God's field, God's building" – faithful farmers recognise that the crop growth that follows planting is from God; a reliable builder constructs according to the architect's plan and specifications.

The Living Word

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Bible readings for Sunday, February 16, 2020, with explanatory notes

Bible study on the Revised Common Lectionary passages for **February 16**
Prepare by reading the Bible passages beforehand – read again to reflect on the pulpit teaching

Theme: What it means to be a worshipper of God and a disciple of Jesus

Deuteronomy 30:15-20 – Choose to love God and choose life

Matthew 5:21-37 – The spirit of the law is fulfilled in Jesus

1 Corinthians 3:1-9 – New life in Jesus is life in the Spirit, not the flesh

Also read: Psalm 119:1-8

Deuteronomy 30:15-20 – Choose to love God and choose life

The way of life that works is single-minded worship of God

15 See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction.

"I set before you today" – close to entering the Promised Land, Moses reminds the Israelites to choose for God, in ways that "are not too difficult for you... a word... that is in your heart so you may obey it."

"Life and... death" – stark opposites: one way bringing God's blessings of life, the other the withholding of divine blessing, Psalm 1:6, 23:6.

+ **Good News for us: This points to Jesus' offer of His own way to enable us to make a choice for life, Matt. 7:13-14, John 5:24, John 14:6.**

16 For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to Him, and to keep His commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess.

"To love the LORD your God" – paraphrasing the foundational Shema saying, Deut. 6:5, Matt. 22:37. Loving God results in walking in obedience.

17-18 But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are

drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.

"This day" – don't delay responding to God's call, it is dangerous to assume that there will be another chance: Moses' point.

19-20 This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to His voice, and hold fast to Him. For the LORD is your life, and He will give you many years in the land He swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

"Now choose life" – applying first to the Israelites successfully settling their new land, but also echoing down the centuries, through Jesus's words and to us today.

+ **Good News for us: Psalm 36:9; Micah 6:6-8; John 11:25-26, John 17:3; Galatians 2:20**

REFLECTION The covenant the Jewish nation enjoyed with God had many facets, but they all came down to one thing, the Shema saying (Deut. 6:4-5) that every Jew recited every day: "The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength". This passage

is a paraphrase and a reminder of that. Their success, property and peace came from choosing to trust God. Their love and respect of Him would show by living and relating in the way He wanted. It's a very simple principle we'll see unfolded in the way Jesus taught people the real meaning of the law, and Paul exhorting the early church in Corinth to raise their game and live, not selfishly, but as spiritual people. *God created us, and loves us, and all those years ago He simply asked people to catch His heart - as He is asking us today.*

QUESTION *What does loving the Lord your God mean? How would you show it?*

Matthew 5:21-37 – The spirit of the law is fulfilled in Jesus

Disciples know how God's law works and don't look for ways around it

21-22 "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

"Anyone who murders... anyone who is angry" – taking the sixth commandment, Jesus says that unresolved hatred or anger, and murder of reputation, is just as serious. "Raca" – Aram. "immoral and empty-headed".

23-24 "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

"First... be reconciled" – first, before offering sacrifice in worship. God welcomes offerings only from those who act justly.

• **For further study**, Genesis 4:4-7; Proverbs 15:8; Isaiah 1:11-17; Jeremiah 6:20; Amos 5:21-24.

25-26 "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do

it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

"Settle matters quickly" – "Make friends quickly" (NASB), "Don't lose a minute – make the first move, make things right with him (The Message). Jesus emphasises being proactive.

"The judge... prison" – a debtor with no means to pay could spend their life working it off in prison. It also alludes to the Judge of all, and to hell, v.30 below.

"You have heard... it... said" – Jewish teachers were fond of adding "But I say..." and adding some rules of their own. Jesus does this to untangle well-known commands of the law, teaching that the true spirit of the law needed much more than external obedience. Jesus does not correct the OT but addresses misunderstandings commonly held at that time. The Pharisees considered they had kept this law – not killing anyone – yet were angry enough at Jesus to plot His death.

27-28 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

"Anyone who looks... lustfully" – Jesus uses the word from the tenth commandment, about coveting a neighbour's wife, linking this with the seventh which prohibited adultery. Adultery of the heart, i.e. the intention, is equivalent to the action.

29-30 If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for

your whole body to go into hell.

"Right hand... right eye" – overstatement to make a point: the right hand stands for immoral actions and the right eye represents immoral intentions.

"Hell" – the place of eternal punishment for the Devil and those who die without receiving Christ, a banishment associated with the final judgment. Hell is characterised by despair and anguish, Matt. 25:30, and awareness of the total absence of God, Psalm 88:3-5. Jesus was clear about the reality of not "choosing life" in Him, re Deut. 30:19 above.

31-32 "It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

"Divorce" – in Jesus' day there were two main Pharisee positions, both requiring divorce for marital infidelity (Joseph's quandary over Mary, Matt. 1:19). Rabbi Shammai permitted remarriage for sexual infidelity; Hillel permitted divorce for "any good cause." Some Pharisees were taking "a woman who

REFLECTION Jesus' teaching for the followers gathered on the hillside linked the Old Covenant and His kingdom life. The legal framework from Moses with all its commands and prohibitions was directive. It tempted formality-lovers like the Pharisees into a legalistic way of thinking, where living well was about doing more of the right things, and not doing the wrong things - and adding more and more to the list. Jesus brought people back to the heart of how God intended His people to live - forgiving, reconciling, honouring, above all, His way of loving - and the new and freer way of being His disciples. *This was a lesson, for them and now for us, on learning to live, not by rules, but by making good judgments as followers of Jesus.*

QUESTION *Why is it that making good life choices as those who live for Jesus can seem harder than having a set of rules?*

1 Corinthians 3:1-9 – New life in Jesus is life in the Spirit not the flesh

The church isn't about people's preferences but God's plan

1-2 Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly - mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready.

"As people who live by the Spirit" – literally "as

becomes displeasing... indecent", Deut 24:1, as allowing divorce for trivial 'failings'. Here and in Matt. 19:3-9, Jesus reflects God's original intention that marriage should be a permanent union of a man and woman as "one flesh", Mark 10:8.

33-35 "Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.' But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King.

"Swear an oath" – there were oaths as guarantees in the OT, but Jesus needed disciples to have such integrity that their word was its own assurance.

36-37 And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

"Do not swear by" – anything God has made, and so risk being like the Devil who tried to usurp authority that is God's alone.

spiritual people". Paraphrased as "Right now, friends, I'm completely frustrated by your unspiritual dealings with each other and with God" (The Message).

"As people who are still worldly" – "you are still carnal" (NKJV), "people of the flesh", (ESV). They were not like "the person without the Spirit" of 1 Cor. 2:14; they were Christians, who had given their lives to Christ and were indwelt by His Spirit, but they had not grown and were still