

The following Scripture passages are offered to aid beginning fellowships. The readings and commentary for this week are more in line with what has become usual; for the following will most likely be familiar observations. The concept behind this Sabbath's selection is about *giving no offense*.

[Printable/viewable PDF format](#)

Weekly Readings

For the Sabbath of February 9, 2008

The person conducting the Sabbath service should open services with two or three hymns, or psalms, followed by an opening prayer acknowledging that two or three (or more) are gathered together in Christ Jesus' name, and inviting the Lord to be with them.

The person conducting the service should read or assign to be read 1 Corinthians chapter 10, verse 23 through chapter 11, verse 1.

Commentary: *Be imitators of me* [Paul], *as I am of Christ* — this verse has been used to justify more lawlessness than any other in Scripture, for careless readers have twisted Paul's words into permission to neglect obedience to God. But Paul, in his defense before Festus, said, "Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I committed any offense" (Acts 25:8). And Christ lived as an Observant Jew of His day. John wrote,

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may be sure that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. (1 John 2:1-6)

Sin is lawlessness, the transgression of the law (1 John 3:4). Sin is nothing more than disobedience. And a little disobedience—any disobedience—makes the person a sinner (Jas 2:10). Whereas every disciple was a son of disobedience (Eph 2:1-3), born into this world consigned to disobedience (Rom 11:32) because of the transgression of the first man (Rom 5:12), the person who has been born of Spirit as a son of God has been mentally set free to keep the laws of God. Sin no longer has dominion over this person (Rom 6:14). The person is under no condemnation, but has been set free from the

law of sin and death (Rom 8:1-2). Unfortunately, the flesh of the person has not been set free from sin and death, what Paul discovered about himself as he struggled to do what was right: his mind delighted in the law of God, but his hands and tongue were not always under the control of his mind so while his inner self served God his flesh served the law of sin (Rom 7:21-25). A real war was being fought inside him between obedience to the law of God and disobedience. He did not understand the reason for this war (v. 15), but from the perspective of nearly two millennia in the future, the reason is easily seen: spiritual growth comes by the development of obedience hung like muscles onto a skeleton of faith. The exercising of obedience, like an isometric workout of physical muscles, strengthens and builds up the son of God temporarily domiciled in the tent of flesh.

When all things are lawful (1 Co 10:23), the disciple has choice that was not previously available to the son of disobedience. Before being born of Spirit, no disciple could keep the commandments of God. Keeping the commandments simply wasn't possible because of being consigned or concluded to sin. The best the pious sinner could do was to break what this person deemed to be the least of the commandments—and this is usually the Sabbath commandment. First century Pharisees, though, anxious not to break the Sabbath commandment, broke instead the second of the great commandments, having love for one's neighbor. In their zeal for perfection, they transformed themselves into the greatest sinners in Israel, for they had the law and knew what the law said (Luke 10:25-28), but they made their pursuit of righteousness the idol they worshiped. True. They did not worship the Most High God, but worshiped themselves as they pursued righteousness through the work of their hands. Thus, they broke both of the great commandments through their lack of spiritual understanding ... their blindness has become legendary, but a legend that will be forgotten when the world recognizes how blind the Christian Church has been for two millennia.

The Apostle Paul, recognizing the blindness of Pharisees (he having been a Pharisee), stressed that disciples were not to seek their own good but the good of their neighbors (1 Co 10:24) ... how does one set about seeking the good of his or her neighbors? How much evangelizing to neighbors should the disciple do? If disciples are to be lights set on a hill, then disciples are seen but not heard. Disciples will not be protesting in front of abortion clinics, but will be fleeing fornication while providing for those of their household to the best of their abilities. Disciples will not be going door to door, house to house to handout religious tracts and unwanted copies of tabloid magazines. Rather, disciples will give ready answers when asked about the hope that lies within them; for it is not the disciple's prerogative to bring a person to God who has not first been drawn from this world by the Father. Therefore, disciples are to be ready to answer what is asked of them when asked, but disciples are to "evangelize" through the visible [outward] display of their obedience to God at all times and in all occasions. Only when a person lives as Jesus lived, lives as Paul lived will the person's light truly draw the "unconverted" to the Father and the Son and not to demons.

Did Paul eat unclean meats and commit no offense against the law of the Jews? How much pork could Paul eat before he committed an offense against the law of the Jews ... what if no Jew knew

what he ate? And how much unclean meat did Jesus, who said that it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles but what comes out, eat if any? Think about the question: the flesh is important only to the flesh. The new self or creature born of Spirit is not the flesh and as such cannot be defiled by what the flesh eats. Only the flesh, which remains consigned to disobedience and with which the law of God placed in the mind of the disciple wars, can be literally defiled by a physical substance, whether the touching of a corpse, an unclean animal, or by meats eaten. Those things that defile the born of Spirit son of God pertain to disobedience, especially as expressed by the tongue. And how might disobedience be expressed when it comes to eating meats? Certainly no disobedience is involved in eating the flesh of a lamb except on *Yom Kipporim*. But what if this lamb has been offered to Zeus ... who is Zeus other than a storytelling device used by the poet Homer: as Athena sprung from the forehead of Zeus as an embodied thought, Zeus sprang from the head of ancient storytellers as a referent for unassigned actions in an oral culture. If Zeus caused this or that to happen, then no person has to take the blame for whatever happened—Zeus and the Greek pantheon function as Native American trickster figures function in oral narratives told on the American continent.

If an idol is nothing but a fictional concept that permits unassigned action to be discussed in oral [as opposed to inscribed] cultures, then a sacrifice offered to an idol is meaningless except to the person who believes in the idol. Therefore, if the disciple is served meat offered to an idol and nothing is said about the source of the meat—regardless of what kind of meat it is—the new creature cannot be defiled by what enters the mouth of the tent of flesh in which this new creature dwells. However, if the new creature covets that which is not lawful for an Israelite to eat, then the new creature covets lawlessness and is defiled by his or her coveting before any meat or food enters the mouth. So it isn't what enters the mouth that defiles the born of Spirit son of God but the thoughts of the mind—the disciple who desires to eat ham at Easter to show his or her liberation from “Jewish legalism” is utterly defiled by his or her rebellion against God whereas the disciple who is served a pork chop when invited out to dinner and whose host makes no mention about the meat, is not defiled if he or she eats what is unclean and inappropriate for a disciple to eat. The liberty about which Paul addresses the saints at Corinth is seen in the separation between the inner new self and the tent of flesh.

So there is no misunderstanding: the disciple is not a son of disobedience even though he or she was formerly such a son. The disciple is the inner new self or creation that has come as the result of a second birth through receipt of the divine Breath of God, and this inner new self is “spirit” as opposed to being flesh. Therefore, those things that pertain to the flesh—ethnic origin, social status, biological gender—do not pertain to the new creature, born of Spirit. And because the inner new self is not flesh, those things that the flesh does cannot defile the new creature. Hence, what a person eats with the mouth cannot defile the son of God. But what the new creature thinks or utters through the mouth can defile the new creature. So the disciple who eats a grub that accidentally dropped onto the person's plate is not defiled by what has entered into the flesh through the mouth. But the new creature who searches for a grub—or orders lobster off a restaurant menu—has defiled the son of God before the

mouth is ever opened to swallow the abominable thing; for it is the lawlessness of the person's thoughts that has defiled the new creature.

Thus, whatever the new creature mentally chooses to eat or drink should be for the glory of the Christ. Otherwise, this son of God is a bastard by having adopted Satan as his father—and Christ receives no glory when a person eats that which physically defiles an Israelite, or drinks until drunk. The person who chooses to order clam chowder as the soup of the day commits great offense to Jews ... Paul said to give no offense to Jews, Greeks, or the Church of God (1 Co 10:32), thereby separating the Church from both Jews and Greeks.

How does a person give offense to Greeks? By not accepting their hospitality when it is extended. Ancient Greeks were combative by culture and proclivity. To mitigate the development of blood feuds, hospitality became the basis for construction of social networks that had hosts giving gifts to guests with the expectation of a reciprocal gift being given to someone coming from the host's family to stay with the guest when the guest had returned home. Therefore, to decline a Greek's offer of hospitality was tantamount to a declaration of war—so whatever a Greek placed before a guest was expected to be eaten by the guest. Only a great reason would be accepted by the host as justification for refusing to eat what was served. Unless the host gave this reason by stating that the meat was offered to an idol, the social contract between host and guest called for the guest to eat what was served. But for the host's sake, a disciple was permitted by Paul to use the worship of a differing deity as sufficient reason for not eating what would be offensive to a Jew or to the Church of God.

How does a person give offense to the Church of God? Today, by teaching what Paul taught ... in the early 1980s, disciples in the Church of God had placed before them the choice of holding to one of two apostles: Saul of Tarsus, renamed Paul, or Herbert W. Armstrong, who proclaimed that he, too, was an apostle and his opinions were also of God. Yes, Armstrong compared himself to Paul, and publicly stated that his opinion should take precedence over Paul's when it came to marrying. In many other matters, he placed his opinions ahead of Paul's but on most of these other matters he had the wisdom to keep silent when speaking publicly.

Today, much of the Church of God subscribes to Armstrong's explanations of the mysteries of God even when these explanations are seriously skewed. In this manner, the Church of God discloses that it is not ready for spiritual meat, but remains suckling the teats of division (1 Co 3:1-4), with some being of Armstrong but more being of White or of Dugger or some other human being. Offense is given by declaring oneself for this apostle or for that apostle ... the situation is a mess, and makes understanding ancient Greek mindsets easy.

Paul tried "to please everyone in everything" he did (1 Cor 10:33), but ended up giving offense to all so that none in Asia and few in Achaearemained with him while he yet lived. Jews and Jewish converts sought his life even though he did not seek his "own advantage, but that of many, that they

may be saved" (same verse). So did he do right in seeking to save many, with these many, having tasted of the goodness of God, returning to lawlessness? It is not disputable that he did the will of God, but the question of his effectiveness remains valid—and that question is ultimately the one every disciple must answer, for Jesus said that many would be called, but few would be chosen (Matt 22:14). Few would walk as Jesus walked. Few would imitate Paul as he imitated Jesus. Most would return to disobedience because it was easier to eat again what had been puked out than it was to elevate one's thoughts and begin to think spiritually.

If Paul could not prevail upon those whom he personally taught the principles of God to remain with him, then it should come as no surprise to endtime disciples that Armstrong and others did not continue with Paul in this era, but declared themselves apostles (*ones sent forth*) of equal or near-equal standing with Paul. However, the foundation that Armstrong laid is now charred rubble, his work having gone up in flames when tried by fire. Only work constructed on the foundation Paul laid will stand—and this work of *Philadelphia* is built on Paul and Christ Jesus. It will stand, and it will reach from the foundation Paul laid to the great endtime harvest, the ceiling and roof of the house of God that stands in heavenly Jerusalem.

*

The person conducting the Sabbath service should close services with two hymns, or psalms, followed by a prayer asking God's dismissal.

* * * * *

"Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright ©2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved."