

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 faith.

Weekly Readings For the Sabbath of May 3, 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 services should read or assign to be read Romans chapter 3, verses 19 through 31.

Commentary: How is a person saved if not by faith? Citing the prophet Joel, Paul writes elsewhere that “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Rom 10:13 — cf. Joel 2:32), then adds, “But how are they to call on him [the Lord] in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?” (Rom 10:14-15).

There is a problem within Christianity, a problem of divisions and schisms resulting in tens of thousands of competing denominations, sects, and fellowships, some large enough to receive representatives from national governments. But heresy knows no size limit. Heresies as if northern pike in an Arctic lake feed in theological pools, devouring living creatures smaller than themselves. One heresy is not safe from another heresy; for all heresies are of this world and its prince who has sent forth armies of servants disguised as ministers of righteousness (2 Cor 11:14-15). And today, Christians have heard of Jesus not from those who have been sent by the Father and the Son to preach, but from Satan's disguised ministers of righteousness so they do not believe in the Jesus who said, “Do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished” (Matt 5:17-18). Has all been accomplished? Does everyone know God? Or is there still a need to teach brother and neighbor to *Know the Lord*? If there is—and this is the justification for Christian ministry—then not all has been accomplished.

But salvation is by faith ... faith is not a New Testament concept that originates with Paul or even with Jesus. The underlying dictate of the Moab covenant, by which Israel is offered life or death (Deut 30:15-20), is faith; is returning to the Lord when in a far land (vv. 1-2), which is the active implementation of faith. If, instead of adopting the gods of the nation that took Israel captive, the people of Israel when captives far from Judea turn to the Lord, acknowledging their sin, and begin to love the Lord with hearts and

minds, keeping the commandments and all that is written in the book of Deuteronomy (v. 10), God will give to Israel circumcised hearts (v. 6).

The New Testament is about receiving circumcised hearts, for Israel is no longer a nation outwardly circumcised by hands (Rom 2:28-29), a nation that the Lord says He will punish because it is merely circumcised in the flesh (Jer 9:25-26), but a nation inwardly circumcised not by the letter of the law but by spirit (Rom 2:26-29; Col 2:11)—Israel is that nation which is defined by hearts cleansed by faith (as if faith were alcohol or wine cleansing the head of the penis) being circumcised by the soft breath of God, thereby causing this holy nation to walk as Jesus walked (1 John 2:4-6) ... understand the above: the Israel that is now the holy nation of God is not a nation circumcised in the flesh, nor is it a human nation or house such as the ancient house of Israel or house of Judah (1 Pet 2:9-10). It is, instead, a nation consisting of sons of God, drawn from this world by the Father placing in each a second life, a second breath, a new life dwelling in the same tent of flesh as dwells/dwelt the old “nature” or self, crucified with Christ. This Israel is delineated by circumcision of hearts on what is equivalent to the eighth day of human life. When born of spirit, the new creature undertakes a journey of faith that cleanses the heart so that it can be circumcised—and it is circumcised when it enters into God’s presence as Israel under Joshua crossed the Jordan to lead the children of the nation that left Egypt into the Promised Land, with the outward disclosing of having entered into God’s presence manifesting itself through Sabbath observance.

Today, in a land far from Moses or from Paul, calling upon the name of Jesus Christ for salvation takes, unfortunately, no or very little faith: the person falling from a cliff will call upon the name of Jesus for help, as will the person who has fallen overboard in the Bering Sea. So too will the soldier facing incoming fire call upon Jesus for salvation. All will call upon Jesus as the first thief to speak called upon Jesus to save his, the thief’s, life (Luke 23:39). Jesus becomes the personal savior of those under immediate threat of death, and Christendom uses the name of Jesus as a magic word that allows sinners to escape perceived condemnation when judgment is not now on these sons of disobedience.

In Western cultures and especially in America, few true atheists exist—and even fewer true Believers exist: most everyone is somewhere in-between, desiring salvation but lacking the faith necessary to order his or her life so that the person will walk as Jesus walked (again, 1 John 2:6). The person begs God for mercy when facing death, then forgets about God as soon as the danger has passed. Or at least forgets to walk as Jesus walked as soon as the threat to life has abated. Inevitably, the person who might now identify him or herself as a Christian will continue to walk as a Gentile, and will not walk as Jesus walked.

Are you such a person? If you are, you are certainly not alone.

A few hundred people will read this message within the next day or so. More will read sometime in the future, but within the scope of humanity, this message will go unknown, unread, and unable to produce fruit because so many “Christians” have believed a message that begins with, “For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from the works of the law” (Rom 3:28). Then, the person delivering the message jumps forward in Scripture to make faith simply believing that “if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom 10:9).

Has Scripture been misquoted or made to say what it doesn't say? What about Paul writing, "Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law" (Rom 3:31).

If by faith, a disciple will uphold the law—what Paul writes—then is not this "Christian" in the same theological position as the Israelite who, when in a far land, by faith returned to the Lord and began to love the Lord with heart and mind, keeping the commandments and everything written in Deuteronomy? Will not the Gentile who dwells in a far land by habit and the Israelite who has been exiled to a far land because of unbelief that became disobedience both now come before God by faith so that both can receive a circumcised heart—a heart cleansed by faith—and will not both keep the commandments as the reasonable expression of their love for the Lord? Paul writes, "But the righteousness based upon faith says" (Rom 10:6) and he goes on to cite Deuteronomy 30:11-14. So the law that Israel had that would have led to righteousness if pursued by faith (Rom 9:31-32) was the Moab covenant (Deut chaps 29-32), a single law that was neither far from Israel nor too difficult to keep (Deut 30:11).

The prophet Isaiah says in verse,

Ah, the proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim,
and the fading flower of its glorious beauty,
which is on the head of the rich valley of those overcome with wine! ...
In that day [the day of the coming of the anointed one] the Lord of hosts
will be a crown of glory,
and a diadem of beauty, to the remnant of the people,
and a spirit of justice to him who sits in judgment,
and strength to those who turn back the battle at the gate.
These also reel with wine
and stagger with strong drink;
the priest and the prophet reel with strong drink,
they are swallowed by wine,
they stagger with strong drink,
they reel in vision,
they stumble in giving judgment.
For all tables are full of filthy vomit,
with no space left.

To whom will he [the Lord] teach knowledge,
and to whom will he explain the message?
Those who are weaned from milk,
those taken from the breast?
For it is precept upon precept, precept upon precept,
line upon line, line upon line,
here a little, there a little.

For by people of strange lips
and with a foreign tongue
the Lord will speak to this people
to whom he has said,
"This is rest;
give rest to the weary;

and this is repose”;
yet they would not hear.
And the word of the Lord will be to them
precept upon precept, precept upon precept,
line upon line, line upon line,
here a little, there a little,
that they may go, and fall backward,
and be broken, and snared, and taken (28:1, 5-13)

The drunken priests of Ephraim taught the house of Israel through precept upon precept exegesis, here a little, there a little, thereby causing this people to fall backwards, be broken, snared, taken, and lost in history—and lawless Christian pastors, taking from Scripture a little here and a little there, a verse here and a verse there, have caused the Christian Church to stumble, fall backwards and be ensnared by the Adversary, with a prime example being the two passages from Paul’s epistle to the Romans (Rom 3:28 & 10:9). These Christian pastors, appearing as servants of righteousness but really being deceitful workmen (again, 2 Cor 11:13-15), pick verses from here and from there to make Scripture say what it doesn’t say—

First, Peter says of Paul’s epistles:

Therefore beloved, since you are waiting for these [the signs of the day of the Lord being revealed], be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do other Scriptures. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. (2 Pet 3:14-17)

The son of disobedience who ventures forward at a Billy Graham Evangelistic Crusade to give his or her heart to the Lord, believing Dr. Graham that the person is now saved, has not been adequately forewarned that the ignorant and unstable twist Paul’s epistles into instruments of their own destruction; thus, this son of disobedience is carried away by the error of lawless people, losing his or her stability. This son of disobedience, by simply being who the person is, comes before Christ spotted and blemished—and whichever podium speaker issued the altar call has not renounced disgraceful, underhanded means of bringing disciples to Christ, but practices cunning and deceit, tampering with the word of God, making it say much less than it does by taking verses out of context, verse after verse, until the one who should repent of his or her disobedience feels good about continuing in disobedience, voluntarily remaining a bondservant to sin and the prince of this world. ... The one who issued the altar call just gave this infant son of God a spiritual cyanide pill with instructions to swallow it if anyone teaching disciples to keep the commandments comes near this son of God. Paul said the end of such a one will correspond to the person’s deeds (2 Cor 11:15), and this end cannot come any too soon, considering the damage being done to spiritual babes by these teachers of lawlessness.

Heresy comes wearing blue or brown suits as well as cardinal red robes: cloaked in piety and ordained by the prince of this world, heresy masquerades as righteousness,

but is often identifiable by the cross, wood [for humility] or metal, hung around the neck of the servant of Satan ... if Jesus would have been killed by an AK47, would His ministers hang a miniature AK47 around their necks? If not, then why would a genuine minister of Christ hang a replica of the actual murder weapon used to kill Jesus of Nazareth from around his or her neck unless the person wishes to identify with the prince of this world, the one who directed Jesus' execution; for the cross represents death, not life. The empty cross does not well represent or signify Jesus' resurrection, but is the reliable and solid symbol of His death as well as the death of every living human being—and it is faith in Jesus' resurrection that causes a person to live, not faith in the factual reality of His death. Even nonbelievers are willing to accept that Jesus lived and died nearly two millennia ago.

Although arguments can be made that what a symbol does or doesn't represent to one person is not necessarily what the symbol represents to another, the problem with disciples using the cross to represent Jesus' resurrection lies in reading the mark of the beast: $\chi\xi s'$ [Strong's #5516], the name and number of a man and a symbol that can be read as the *tattoo* [s' — *stigma*] of Christ's [χ — *chi*] cross [ξ — written phonetically in Roman letters as *xi*], with *chi* [χ] being the customary abbreviation for *Christ* as seen in *Xmas* for *Christmas*, and *xi* representing the cross into the 4th-Century CE. The *cross* identifies to God those who are of the Antichrist as Sabbath observance identifies to Satan those who are of God. So it really doesn't matter that the cross signifies Jesus' resurrection to its wearer; for to the Father, it is the mark of death, the mark of disobedience. And think about the above for a minute: does any denomination or sect employing the cross as a symbol of Christ with whom the disciple is familiar teach disciples to keep the commandments of God? The answer will, almost certainly, be, No! These denominations and sects teach disciples that because Jesus kept the law so that disciples do not have to do so; they teach that disciples do not have to attempt walking as Jesus walked. They teach, rather, that all a disciple must do is invite Jesus into the person's heart and Jesus having kept the commandments will be counted to the disciple as personal obedience. Pause and consider: if Jesus kept the commandments and if disciples are to walk as Jesus, imitating Paul as he imitates Christ (1 Cor 11:1; Phil 3:17), and if Paul committed no offense against the law (Acts 25:8), then what logic will permit disciples not to attempt to keep the commandments, all of them, especially the Sabbath commandment, perhaps the easiest commandment to keep?

Peter warns every disciple beforehand that Paul's epistles can be and have been twisted into instruments of destruction by lawless people; they have not been twisted into instruments of destruction by those who teach that "if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision" (Rom 2:26), and teach that "all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law" (Rom 2:12). Those ministers—all ministers—who have been sent by God to preach the good news of Christ will preach a message of obedience to the law, thereby denying the law power over the person—and when the law has no power over the person, the person is not under the law but under grace for this person will have presented his or her members to God as instruments for righteousness as opposed to the person who remains under the law presenting his or her members to sin as instruments of unrighteousness. Paul asks, "Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are

slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness” (Rom 6:16).

The person who is under grace will present his or her members to God as instruments for righteousness, and will not present him or herself to sin as its obedient servant. The person under grace will serve “obedience” to Christ, to the Father, and to the commandments of God as the reasonable expectation of a son within the household of God; whereas the disciple who remains under the law will give sin unmerited dominion over the person by presenting him or herself to sin as its willing slave, with the most observable transgression of the law being this person’s attempt to enter into God’s presence on the 8th day instead on the 7th.

The second thing concerning Paul’s epistles that must be remember is that Paul tells the saints at Corinth, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1), and tells the Philippians, “Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us” (Phil 3:17). And how did Paul walk? Paul testified in his own defense, “Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I committed any offense” (Acts 25:8). And John, as referenced earlier in this reading, writes,

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin [sin is the transgression of the Law — 1 John 3:4]. 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)

Today, the person who follows “the mystery of lawlessness” (2 Thess 2:7) already at work in the 1st-Century Church does not walk as Jesus walked; nor will this person imitate Paul as he imitated Jesus. Rather, this person will serve lawlessness as disobedience’s willing slave. And though a person will claim to be under grace, this person is a liar! This person remains under the power of the law, for this person recreated the record of debt that had stood against the law before this record of debt with its legal demands was canceled by Christ’s death at Calvary ... what sort of foolishness does a person tell him or herself that permits the person to willingly serve sin after being set free to serve obedience to God? Who but Satan could concoct such a lie that good will come from enacted evil?

The allegedly *born again* skipper of a crab boat fishing in the Bering Sea who works through the Sabbath—the common practice of the fleet—does not know Jesus, nor is this skipper in Christ. In invoking Jesus’ name, this skipper makes himself a liar, a pious rebel against God, a hypocrite that knows to keep the Sabbath but loves the world and all that the world offers too much to submit to God.

For endtime disciples, the Christianity of this world—those denominations and sects that advocate lawlessness—can be likened to the Pharisees and Sadducees in 1st-Century: they are **not** under grace, but under the law for they willingly serve sin, which is the transgression of the law (1 John 3:4).

The oracles of God cannot be taught by taking a verse from here and a verse from there, following precepts from one context to another, ignoring the context in which the precept occurs: a topical Bible is, perhaps, the worse tool that has every been produced for Bible study. Pause and consider: Paul wrote that the gospel had come to Gentiles “so as to make Israel jealous” (Rom 11:11, also v. 14), and what Observant Jew will be made jealous by Christians worshiping God Sunday morning? Not one, nor should one be jealous of flagrant disobedience. What Observant Jew will be jealous of Christians eating ham on Easter? Not one. But they will be jealous when physically uncircumcised men keep the weekly and annual Sabbaths of God.

The person who employs Paul’s epistle as justification for disobedience has not been sent by God, but is a disguised servant of Satan, regardless of how pious the person appears or how large an organization the person represents. And the person who does not preach repentance in this era utterly lacks spiritual understanding. Many are called to be disciples, but few will be chosen (Matt 22:14) for few disciples are willing to serve obedience when doing so causes them to be ridiculed by visible Christianity. The “many” are man-pleasers, lovers of the things of this world rather than lovers of God.

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

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