

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 *keeping the Law and the Sabbath*.

Weekly Readings For the Sabbath of July 14, 2007

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.

Those who are of *Philadelphia* will be occasionally asked why they keep the Sabbath rather than worship Christ on Sunday. The easy answer is that disciples are to walk as Jesus walked (1 John 2:6), and Jesus lived and walked as an Observant Jew. Inwardly, disciples are to live and walk as Observant Jews; for it is not the tent of flesh that now makes a person a Jew but circumcision of the heart by the Spirit (Rom 2:26-29). A Jew is now the new creature that is a son of God, born of Spirit, domiciled in a tent of flesh that can be of any color or structure, with indoor or outdoor plumbing, mortgaged or owned free and clear. What Calvary was about was the cessation of the importance of the flesh. The covenants of promise (Eph 2:12) from which the nations [Gentiles] were alienated were not dependant upon the strength of the flesh but upon the "will" of God; they did not cease when a generation of physically circumcised Israel died but continued on through the next generation. Likewise they did not cease when the covering sacrifice for Israel died physically while living spiritually but continued on with a generation born of Spirit, a holy nation that was not before a physical people. And this is what the visible Christian Church has never understood and is actually incapable of understanding; for the vast majority of those attending the visible church that claim to be born again or born of Spirit are liars. They are the synagogue of Satan for they remain bondservants to disobedience as evidenced by their transgressions of the Law. They will not keep the Sabbath commandment even when the error of attempting to enter into God's rest on the following day is presented to them; they are actually unable to keep the commandments (Rom 8:7). And their lawlessness is not now being counted against them, for judgment is today only on the household of God (1 Pet 4:17), those disciples who have truly been born of Spirit.

If a person is unable to keep the commandments because the person remains the bondservant of sin, then efforts to "evangelize" this person will only prove futile in the short term. But those whom the Father has drawn from this world do not come with hospital nametags identifying them as infant sons of God. They can be anyone. Therefore, all need to hear the message of repentance, a message akin to the message preached by John the Baptist. And in the person who has been drawn by God, this message of repentance will bear fruit.

Therefore, the easy answer of why a person keeps the Sabbath might be the best answer, for this answer keeps the focus on Jesus and not on the person being asked the question or even on the question. But there will be times when more of an answer is required of the *Philadelphian*. And this Sabbath's message will go outside of Scripture a short ways to provide some summary information that will challenge anyone who advocates Sunday worship.

The historians Eusebius (ca 260-340 CE) and Epiphanius (ca 315-403 CE) both record that until the siege of Hadrian (135 CE) the Church in Jerusalem and later at Pella, the congregation that would have been considered the headquarters church for Christendom, consisted of converted Jews who were physically circumcised, and was administered by 15 successive bishops, all circumcised. So it needs to be first recognized that the Jerusalem Conference (Acts chap 15) did not end circumcision *per se*, for immediately after the Conference, the Apostle Paul had Timothy circumcised (Acts 16:3). The issue at the Jerusalem Conference was “stumbling blocks,” and for Gentiles, circumcision was a stumbling block. For Jews, lack of circumcision was a stumbling block. Paul had Timothy circumcised so that Timothy's “uncircumcision” would not be a stumbling block that prevented Jewish converts from coming to Christ. So post Jerusalem Conference, cultural expectations become a factor to be considered; for, again, the new creature that is a son of God is not the flesh, but only lives in a tent of flesh.

Justin, in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, wrote that in his day, Jewish-Christians were not divided over Christological issues, but by opposing teachings concerning Gentile Christians, with some making no demand of Gentiles to be circumcised or to keep the Sabbath, and with others demanding that Gentiles converts live in all respects according to the law given by Moses. And here it must be remembered, the Body of Christ was already dead by Justin's day. It was crucified with Christ; it had lost its divine Breath [*Pneuma 'Agion*]; and the question would be whether it remained visibly dead on the cross or whether it was buried by Hadrian in his destruction of Jerusalem and all things that appeared Jewish.

If the Jerusalem Conference did not end circumcision and participation in temple worship [as seen by Paul fulfilling a Nazarite vow – Acts 21:23-26], or even end the debate over whether Gentiles had to be compelled to keep the so-called law of Moses, then when did these things of which Christ is the substance (Col 2:17) end? When the temple was destroyed (ca 70 CE)? No. When Hadrian razed Jerusalem and rebuilt over it *Aelia Capitolina*, a pagan Roman colony? No. They ended when the Body of Christ was buried and no longer visible to anyone. And this might not be on a fixed date, but be a “rolling” date like a tide rip that moved eastward with the incoming lawlessness.

It is probable that the mystery of lawlessness began in the western capital of the world, Rome, with this mystery openly manifesting itself through Sunday observance there first. In 49 CE (possibly as early as 41 CE) when the Emperor Claudius expelled Jews from Rome because, according to Roman historian Suetonius (ca 70-122 CE), they riot constantly at the instigation of *Chrestus*, Roman authorities did not distinguish between Christians and Jews [Aquila and Priscilla were expelled at this time – Acts 18:2]. To Roman authorities, both Christians and Jews were “Jews” for both attended the synagogue. But when Nero, 14 years later, began to persecute Christians, a clear distinction existed.

In the 14 years between when Aquila and Priscilla were expelled from Italy and when Nero accused Christians of being arsonists, both Jews and Christians had worked to project separate identities—by the mid 60s CE, outside of Judea Christians could no longer be regarded as a sect of greater Judaism. The mystery of lawlessness that the Apostle Paul references had created an unbridgeable schism.

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The person conducting the service should now read or assign to be read 2 Timothy chapters 1 through 4.

Commentary: Paul tells Timothy that God’s firm foundation bears the seal, “‘The Lord knows those who are his,’ and, ‘Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity [unrighteousness]’” (2:19) ... *iniquity* [Gr: ἀδικία] is wrong doing; it’s sin or lawlessness. The one who professes to be a Christian must resist evil-doing, must resist transgressing the law though knowing ahead of time that he or she will come short of perfection (1 John 1:8). The Apostle Peter wrote,

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. *For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.* ... For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from their former sins. (2 Pet 1:3-9 emphasis added)

The former sin of every “son of disobedience” was disobedience, the transgression of the law of God. Every disciple was at one time *a son of disobedience* (Eph 2:2-3). **No person is born a Christian. Every person is born consigned to disobedience** (Rom 11:32), **imprisoned in lawless, a bondservant to the prince of this world.** Therefore, no second-generation Christian is born saved or righteous. Every second or third or however many generation Christian is born as a son of disobedience who must make a spiritual journey of faith that is equivalent in length to the patriarch Abraham’s physical journey of faith. And this is what the early Church never understood. This is what neither the Roman Church nor Protestant Reformers understood in the 16th Century. This is what the Radical Reformers did not understand then or now.

Because every person must make a journey of faith equivalent to Abraham’s journey of faith, the first generation of the Church that does not make this journey dies spiritually, dies from loss of breath. The first generation that does exactly what its parents did dies spiritually. And every generation that continues on without making a journey of faith—that continues the traditions and practices of its parents—remains spiritually dead. Hence what is seen is that although the early Greek and Latin Churches taught that the Apostle Peter [Πέτρος] was the rock [πέτρα] upon which Jesus would build His Church, and Jesus saying that “the gates of Hades will not overcome it” (Matt 16:18) meant the Church would not die, what actually happened was that Peter died. The “little rock” [πέτρα or *petra*] upon which Jesus would build the Church which was “of him” died about 70 CE, presumably in Babylon. But the gates of Hades will not prevail

over Peter or over the Church anymore than these gates prevailed over the physical body of Christ Jesus. As Jesus was resurrected to life, so too will Peter be resurrected to life as will be the Church.

Jesus and His first disciples all taught that the flesh would die and was dead, and that the spirit would live and was life. The flesh served as a shadow and copy of the spiritual. So the Apostle Peter could only be a type of the One upon whom the Church is built; for the Church is built on the foundation that the Apostle Paul laid as a master builder (1 Co 3:10-11), and this foundation is Christ Jesus. He is the “Rock” about whom Moses wrote (*cf.* Deu 32:4; John 5:46-47).

In his second epistle to Timothy, Paul writes that all in Asia had left him ... to which one of the fellowships in Asia would a person... look, after all left Paul, for instruction in the ways of Christ? How about in Italy? In Greece? A person cannot look to any of them. The person can only look to what is recorded in Scripture—and what’s recorded is that Paul as a master builder laid the foundation for the spiritual house of God (1 Cor 3:10-11), which is not a work of men’s hands. All who would build on this foundation must first locate heavenly Jerusalem, where Paul laid this foundation, a city without geographical coordinates but with theological coordinates. So the person whose theology differs from what Paul taught cannot build on the foundation Paul laid, and Paul went into the Jerusalem temple to purify himself shortly before he was taken into custody.

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The person reading should now read Acts chapters 22 through 26.

Commentary: These chapters address the accusations against Paul by the Jews and Paul’s defense against these accusations.

Note how Paul describes Ananias, the disciple to whom Jesus sent Paul (*cf.* Acts 9:1-19; 22:12-16): “a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there.” If Ananias was a devout man according to the law, Ananias, a disciple trusted by the glorified Christ, was not keeping Sunday, but was living according to the law, meaning that he was keeping the Sabbath commandment.

Also note, in all of the accusation brought against Paul, not one of these accusations pertained to Paul breaking the commandments. The accusations pertained to the hope of the dead (Acts 23:6; 24:21), and going to Gentiles (Acts 22:21-22). Keeping the law was never an issue.

Also note, Paul tells Felix that he came after being away years to bring alms to his nation and to present offerings (Acts 24:17), saying, “While I was doing this, they found me purified in the temple, without any crowd or tumult” (v. 18). So as the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul was still observing the laws and practices of his nation, Israel. And two years later, when Festus succeeded Felix, Paul defends himself saying, “Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I committed any offense” (Acts 25:8). Continuing on, before King Agrippa, Paul said that he “declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance ... saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass” (Acts 26:20, 22). So to argue that Paul kept Sunday rather than the Sabbath, and that he taught those in Jerusalem and Judea to keep Sunday is ludicrous.

No one can seriously argue that the Apostle Paul taught either Jewish converts or Gentile converts to abandon the Sabbath and begin to worship God on Sunday. Christian disciples in the 30s and 40s were regarded as a sect of Judaism.

When Paul was on trial before Felix at Caesarea, Tertullus accused Paul of being a ringleader for “the sect [αἰρέσεως] of the Nazarenes” (Acts 24:5). Paul answered that he was indeed of *The Way* that the Jews called a sect [αἵρεσιν] (v. 14). The Sadducees were also described as a sect [αἵρεσιν] (Acts 5:17), as were the Pharisees [αἰρέσεως] (Acts 15:5 – αἵρεσιν was used by Paul in Acts 26:5). So the early Church functioned as a competing sect of Judaism within greater Judaism, and its assemblies were meetings of a newly formed synagogue.

That Jesus breathed on ten of His disciples, thereby directly transferring to them the Holy Spirit, is not insignificant; for according to the Mishnah, a new synagogue could be formed anywhere by ten male Jews. Thus, the ten upon whom Jesus breathed (plus others) were a newly formed synagogue that “with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer [προσευχῆ]” (Acts 1:14 – cf. Acts 16:13, 16). The Greek word used by Luke is also the word used for the regular prayer assemblies of the synagogue. So linguistically, the disciples of Jesus were (and functioned as) a synagogue within greater Judaism. And now it is more easily understood why the Apostle Paul identifies disciples as the temple of God; for the new creatures that are sons of God [these sons forming a holy nation and a royal priesthood] dwell within tents of flesh as the Levites whose turn it was to serve dwelt within the temple. Hence, disciples are to serve continuously.

Only when the one who was restraining the lawless one and the mystery of lawlessness (2 Thess 2:6-7) allowed the prince of disobedience to temporarily appropriate His name does Sunday worship enter into Christendom. But then, this prince of disobedience has served a useful function, for this prince by usurping the name of Christ created his synagogue, an assembly that has kept knowledge of the man Jesus alive as the Jews, to whom God entrusted His oracles, have kept the Scriptures that Paul used to preach Christ to both Jews and Greeks. Neither the synagogue of Satan or physically circumcised Israel has the Holy Spirit. Both are blind functionaries performing tasks as if they were Pavlov’s dogs.

This is an unfinished subject that will be revisited in the near future. For now it is enough to show that neither Paul nor the Jerusalem Church held practices that conflicted with the law, meaning that they had to be keeping the Sabbath and not Sunday throughout the first two decades after Calvary. Christianity was not an evolving religion; when Jesus said, “It is finished” (John 19:30), *the Way* to salvation was complete. The only thing evolving was the initially suppressed mystery of lawlessness.

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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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