

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 *support*.

## Weekly Readings For the Sabbath of December 1, 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.*

One year ago this Sabbath, the reading for December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2006, began as follows:

*The person conducting the service should read or assign to be read 1 Corinthians chapter 9.*

**Commentary:** The Apostle Paul will, in his second canonized epistle to the saints at Corinth, return to the subject of support, but disciples need to first understand what Paul wrote, for disciples must learn not to go beyond what is written that none become puffed up with ego (1 Co 4:6).

Paul asks the rhetorical question of whether he is an apostle? Or simply, is not he one who also has been sent forth by God?

The Lord had said of, then, Saul of Tarsus, that “he is a chosen instrument of [the Lord’s] to carry [His] name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15). If God chose Paul to do the work of carrying His name to the world, then is Paul not an apostle? And if Paul is an apostle, has not God committed Himself to supplying Paul with his needs? Jesus said, “If God so clothed the grasses of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all” (Matt 6:30-32). And there is the stickler: God knows that the flesh and blood bodies in which born of Spirit sons of God are temporarily domiciled need maintenance. These tents of flesh are actually high maintenance dwellings. They make demands that cause Gentiles [those of *the nations* of this world] to seek after food, drink, fine apparel, comfortable housing, reliable transportation, vacations at Disney World—those things upon which most of a North American’s income is spent.

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The subject of a Sabbath’s reading generally comes from questions or problems being addressed in e-correspondence with those who have recently written to the fellowship’s website. The subject of support has been privately addressed many times in the past six

months as this subject continues to be problematic; so it will again be discussed. A portion of one such e-correspondence will here be included with names omitted:

Dear Pastor —,

In his epistles to the saints at Corinth, Paul was responding to complaints about him and his ministry as well as giving instruction. Some were judging him and questioning whether he was genuine. The Circumcision Faction labeled him as false—and the Circumcision Faction seemed to have Scripture on its side, but this faction had no spiritual understanding. Thus, in his second recorded epistle to the Corinthians, Paul establishes a test for ministries: they are to work on the same terms as he worked if they are from him, whom God chose "to know His will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from His mouth" (Acts 22:14). It is Paul who laid the foundation for the spiritual house of God (1 Co 3:10-11). Therefore, those who build on the foundation that Paul laid will work on the same terms: they will not ask for support but will work with their hands to provide for themselves and their household. They will accept support when it is given, but they will not be beggars; they will not demand tithes even though they are entitled to be supported by those they teach—and it isn't the one who teaches that supports those whom he teaches but the other way around. Thus, Paul established a test and criteria for all who build and are built on the foundation that he laid. And this test is that even when in need, the genuine disciple asks God and not other men to supply that need. God then has the obligation to move men to intervene to supply the need; hence, God gets to see how responsive others are to the Holy Spirit. He already knows how responsive the one is who teaches.

If a ministry is of this world, or of Satan, the ministry will need to ask other men for support; for God will not support this ministry. And Paul established this as the test: those who ask others for support are of this world, all of them, for God does not supply their needs.

Paul left the matter up in the air so that those who are genuine would understand, while those who are not genuine would not understand. Paul did not give the logic for why he wrote what he did; he only gave the reason. The logic is simple: those who work for God place God under the obligation to supply their needs. They have no need to ask others even when they have the authority to ask. Those who do not work for God must ask other men for support (because they do not work for God, other men must be compelled by some means to support their ministries).

(Signed) —

The Apostle Paul did not ask the saints at Corinth for support: doing so would have placed a stumbling block before those saints. Today, to ask for support places a stumbling block before Sabbatarian disciples who know to tithe and give offerings, but who have been burned by so many charlatans posing as ministers of God that they are now reluctant to give anywhere but to "a good cause" that is by its nature *a project of this world*. Thus, those who know to give offerings end up spiritually cursed because of where their offerings are given. And this becomes the subject for this Sabbath's reading (last year's Sabbath reading remains [on-line](#) and available for review—and perhaps should here be reviewed).

Much of all that Paul wrote has been poorly understood: Peter said that Paul was difficult to understand, and the lawless twisted his epistles into instruments for their destruction (2 Pet 3:16). But, again, it is Paul who laid the foundation for the spiritual house of God; he is the type of the Zerubbabel whose hand shall complete that foundation; and he established the criteria for genuine ministries.

Paul writes, "And what I do I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms

as we do. For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness” (2 Co 11:12-15).

The *same terms* that Paul references is not taking support from the saints at Corinth when he was there teaching them the fundamental precepts of salvation—not even asking for support, meaning no co-worker letters pressing the urgency to sacrifice financially to overcome whatever crisis the “work of God” then faced; no pleas from the pulpit for “additional sacrifice” in this or that time of need; no competitions in “well-doing” to see which Feast site would have a higher per capita offering. And those disciples who have received such co-worker letters or have heard such sermon pleas will have experienced the intended guilt-trips that a distant administrative headquarters laid on disciples to give more and more until prosperity came to the disciple. A disciple was not giving enough but was “secretly” holding back tithes and offerings if the impoverished disciple was not being “blessed” financially, or so the message came through to those who had nothing, and had nothing more to give. And eventually those *secret sins* caused impoverished disciples to fall by the wayside: they quit tithing, quit attending services, and felt “free” for the first time in years. They also quit keeping the commandments and returned to disobedience—they quit on God when God was never the problem. A greedy ministry that would not work on the same terms as Paul worked was the problem.

The practice of Paul to not ask for support remains the determining criteria for those ministries that build on the foundation Paul laid.

Within the modern history of the churches of God, one particular ministry impacted the 20<sup>th</sup>-Century more so than any other: this ministry was that of Herbert W. Armstrong ... but the decade of the 1990s saw the Worldwide Church of God (WCG) self-destruct while visible Christendom watched from the sidelines, silently or not-so-silently cheering. Virtually every ordained WCG minister was “disfellowshipped” by some entity, with the splinters dividing into slivers so small that even when metaphorically caught under the fingernails of the world’s *Body Politic*, that single corporate entity known as spiritual Babylon, they did not fester enough to require extraction, but to this day, remain in place, caught by the world and barely visible.

The Worldwide Church of God, the successor to the Radio Church of God, was the organization that Herbert Armstrong built on the generous tithes and offerings of a hundred-plus thousand disciples, but this organization became chaff blown away by the winnowing Breath of God. The real property the organization purchased with tithes and offerings did not go to Armstrong’s theological successors but to his adversaries, one of whom wrote a book in which he bragged about his role in the deconstruction of Armstrong’s fiefdom. The bragging gained this spiritual bastard limited credibility within the Evangelical Church, but it also placed him on the wrong side of the schism he claims to have created.

It was not, however, the labor of one spiritual bastard and a handful of second generation skeptics that caused the demise of the WCG. No, not at all! Rather, Armstrong built the destruction of his work into the worldly foundation upon which he built, for he patterned his organizational structure after that of the top-down Roman Church. He did not trust either God or disciples to get things right—he had to have

control of every aspect of the work he built, and when this control ended with his death, the WCG could not continue on its own.

Jesus told Pilate that His kingdom was not of this world, nor from the world (John 18:36). Therefore, the organizational hierarchy of His kingdom is not of this world, nor from this world, nor even visible in this world. Disciples, when glorified, marry Christ, thereby becoming one with Christ as a man and a woman are one. Disciples, before the Tribulation begins, are one with Christ in that they form His spiritual Body—and among disciples, the only hierarchal relationship that is acknowledged in Scripture is that of a wife to her husband and members within a fellowship to the elders of that fellowship. One fellowship is not in subjugation to another fellowship. There is not a ranking of fellowships so that disciples in one pay tithes or give offerings to the leadership of another—the Apostle Paul says that he “robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve” the saints at Corinth (2 Co 11:8). The leaders of the fellowships of saints at, say, Portland, Oregon, where there used to be three large WCG congregations, robbed the saints at Portland when they directed these saints to send their tithes and offerings to Pasadena, California, or for a short while, to Tucson, Arizona. Likewise, leaders of fellowships in the United States robbed American saints when they sent the tithes and offerings of North American saints to “headquarters,” where these moneys were then sent on to, say, Africa to support work being done in that area of the world.

The above is not to say that one saint does not have the responsibility to ensure that another saint has food and shelter and those things basic to life regardless of where the saint resides; it is, however, to say that moneys given for ministry in Minnesota should remain in Minnesota where additional work needs done. It is to say that moneys given in Los Angeles should remain in LA for additional evangelistic work in LA. It is to say that where God draws one person from this world, there should be a bubble around this person where his or her efforts have produced local fruit for God. It is to say that these tiny “bubbles” of disciples will function as salt in the porridge of humanity.

Those disciples who dwell in the impoverished portions of this world will, if thinking carnally, regard the above as unfair: they might well believe that the “rich” of this world will become the “rich” of the kingdom of God, but such will never be the case, for it is not the *rich* of America that God has drawn from this world. Rather, it is (with very few exceptions) the American who financially struggles that God has drawn to Himself. It is the American who cannot afford good leather shoes, but who buys whatever Wal-Mart imports from China—the American who drives a vehicle at the end of its service life; who lives on Social Security; who wears secondhand clothes; who is the poor of the nation—that God has used to build for Himself a core of Believers faithful to Him ... when the former WCG **first** held Feast of Tabernacle services at Big Sandy, Texas, it was jokingly said that highways leading to Big Sandy were littered with parts that had fallen off disciples’ vehicles as they journeyed from across America to East Texas. Church parking lots then looked like wrecking yards. But within a few decades, Church parking lots looked like the lots of new car dealerships as prosperity came through giving. And it was when prosperity came that the WCG splintered into nearly microscopic slivers.

The prosperity given by this world to the former WCG had attached to it a very high price tag: the spiritual lives of approximately 135,000 of the (then) 160,000 baptized members, with these numbers not “official” but what is generally accepted by remaining disciples.

Some disciples became disillusioned with God and quit attending services anywhere. Some disciples accepted lawless as Grace, believing that the former WCG *never knew Christ*. Some disciples became fossilized in their beliefs and frozen in partial repentance—they will spiritually die if they have not already because they refuse to grow in Grace and Knowledge. Too many disciples rebelled against all authority, even that of local fellowships, and embraced rebellion as liberty. Only a few [a very few] remain spiritually alive, and even these few have been crippled by the splintering of the former WCG to the extent that they now do little or no work for God. They have buried their knowledge of God in issues such as setting the calendar. They might as well have buried their talents and the “money” [i.e., knowledge of God] Christ left with them in backyard gardens.

The fellowships that remain alive consist of two and three disciples here and there. If a fellowship has 12 members, it is now large; if it has 35 members, it is very large; whereas, three decades ago, fellowships of 200 were the norm. Fellowships of 300 to 400 members were common, and fellowships of 600+ existed near Pasadena.

It wasn't prosperity, however, that doomed the former WCG: it was its organizational structure and its acceptance of ungodliness and unrighteousness in its upper-tier ministry. Prosperity came as a result of disobedience and a return to the values of this world; prosperity came with spiritual death. And the disciple today who seeks the things of this world must, necessarily, have fellowship with unrighteousness.

Righteousness has no fellowship with unrighteousness; godliness has no fellowship with ungodliness. And the person who practices either is an enemy of Christ Jesus.

Among disciples, physical prosperity is not a sign of righteousness; prosperity is not a sign of God blessing the person because of the person's godliness. Rather, prosperity is the outward manifestation of inner compromises made with the world. And too many disciples within the larger slivers of the former WCG [i.e., UCG, LCG, PCG, RCG, and even CGI & CEM] attempt to continue the organizational model adopted by Armstrong in his 18 restored truths, of which few are true: Armstrong thought that he needed the tithes and offerings of many disciples to do the work for which he was called. He could not imagine an organization without a central bureaucracy. He apparently believed that Christ was the spiritual Head of the Church, and he was its physical head; thus, he was entitled to the tithes and offerings of saints, and entitled to spend these moneys however he deemed appropriate, including in collecting high-value antiques.

In the decades of the 1960s, and '70s, many disciples went without basic needs while Armstrong lived as he envisioned a king would live in the world tomorrow. His spiritual successors have kept his life-style legacy alive. They direct disciples to send tithes and offerings to a central headquarters—and in doing so they have sown the seeds of their own demise. Prosperity will temporarily come to them, but its price tag will be their spiritual lives.

Because disciples have the responsibility to ensure that the basic needs of other disciples are being met, a criteria needs to be in place so that this responsibility is fulfilled without it becoming a robbing of fellowships as was done by the former WCG and is now being done by its spiritual successors ... but without a centralized headquarters, how is a disciple in the United States to know if a disciple in, say, Kenya has genuine need when he says that he needs funds to feed starving children, a situation recently encountered by *The Philadelphia Church*? Should the disciple in the United States forego eating so the he or she can assist the one who says the children of his

orphanage are starving? God will certainly reward the one who foregoes eating if the need is genuine, but will God reward the one who foregoes if he or she contributes to his or her own defrauding by sending moneys without testing the spirits to see if they are genuine? When the one in the United States cannot go to Kenya to determine the need of the other, what is to be done? How can these spirits be tested?

A similar situation exists within the United States: a person who claims to have a school to educate Sabbatarian youth asks for donations and tithes from disciples around the nation. Will God bless the disciple who contributes to the one who begs moneys for his *school*, especially when the one has already defrauded his brothers and has agreed to a court-imposed settlement to repay a portion of the moneys received through his fraudulent acts? Will God bless stupidity? Gullibility? Good intentions that aid and abet lawlessness? Will God bless the person who innocently supports unrighteousness in a fellowship of which he or she is not a local member? Will sowing one's wealth into a sewer bring forth good fruit for God, and spiritual rewards for the one doing the sowing? Or will sowing into a field of ungodliness and filth only bring forth more filth?

Will sending moneys to Kenya to feed starving children in a phantom orphanage produce treasure in heaven for the one who sends the moneys? Ministers for the former WCG would have answered, yes, if that sowing went to Pasadena where *headquarters* could, in its wisdom, determine whether the need was genuine.

It cannot be said loud enough: righteousness has no fellowship with unrighteousness!

The disciple in Kenya who claims to have an orphanage either has an orphanage or is of Satan; the disciple who claims to have a school either has a school or is of Satan. The test of genuineness begins with whether what is claimed is so, but it does not end there. And the near impossibility of determining the genuine from the false at a distance apparently caused the Apostle Paul to develop the practice of keeping resources within the locality where they were collected except for the special circumstances of famine relief.

There is certainly a famine of understanding the word of God today, and there is a need to send teachers to neighboring fellowships to promote understanding. But those who receive the teacher need to support that teacher. Those who are taught the fundamentals of typology need to provide for the one who teaches them. If those who do not understand the unsealing of Scripture are unwilling to provide for a teacher, then they need to teach themselves, which is possible considering that the fundamentals of typology are broadcast worldwide over the Internet. Therefore, all are without excuse; all have knowledge and understanding available to them. It is only disbelief that resists the acquisition of understanding. And disbelief wears many faces.

The criteria Paul established protects both disciples and the ministries: those disciples who are served by a ministry know whether what is claimed is true or false. They know whether the ministry is genuine. And unlike in this world where moneys are pooled to form corporations that by their size can compete globally with other corporations, moneys do not have to be pooled in order for God to do His intended work here on earth. The small things of God are of sufficient power to wobble this world and topple unrighteousness.

The person today who despises small things will see that which was despised grow into the kingdom of God, but this growth will not come from pooled moneys or tithes and offerings sent to any church *headquarters*. The growth will come from preaching

righteousness one person to another person, an activity that does not need money but needs only repentance and faith. Thus, the person who despises small things today will, most likely, live to see the criteria Paul established bring forth what all ministries patterned after the Roman Church cannot: the completion of the house of God, capped by the return of Christ Jesus.

It will not be the larger slivers from the splintered WCG that stand on the foundation Paul laid and reach upward to support the ceiling and roof of the house of God. It will be tiny fellowships, some fully autonomous, some in theological federations, each preaching repentance as John the Baptist preached repentance, that make straight the way to God for the third part of humankind that will not be born of Spirit until the divine Breath of God is poured out on all flesh. Those organizations that ask for tithes and offerings to be sent to administrative headquarters are not of God even though genuine disciples are spiritually trapped within their belief systems.

So far, no criteria beyond what Paul established is evident in determining whether a Christian orphanage in, again, Kenya, should be supported by disciples in Kentucky, or whether an alleged school in Michigan should be supported by disciples in Mississippi ... actually, the criteria is in the same passage: Paul wrote, "When I was in need, I did not burden anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need" (2 Co 11:9). Needs are determined to be genuine or false by someone going to the other and ascertaining the need and supplying it. Thus, someone from a fellowship in North America needs to go to, again, Kenya, to supply needs. But if a fellowship cannot send someone to Kenya, then the fellowship also lacks the resources to supply needs—and to keep this example in the so-called real world, a pastor from Kenya came to the United States in June 2007 on a fund-raising trip. He visited a fellowship of *The Philadelphia Church*, and as Kenyan minister, he had more moneys available to him than *Philadelphian* fellowship had collectively. But the world's perception of America and Americans is that all are wealthy, and this perception is based in the reality of this world. But genuine disciples are not of this world. They are sojourners awaiting the coming of the heavenly city. It is only when they return to disobedience that they partake of the prosperity of this world.

The *Prosperity Gospel* in all of its forms is a doctrine of demons. Those who teach that God's promises of physical blessings made to physically circumcised Israel transfer directly to the Church are liars! Israel is today a spiritually circumcised nation; for what was physical becomes spiritual, blessings included. Disciples store up treasure in heaven in this era, but they cannot access this treasure while they remain in tents of flesh. Rather, all they can do is work for permanent rewards that will come to them in the world tomorrow, when they will be glorified. The fallacy contained within Herbert Armstrong's teachings about disciples living as kings in the world tomorrow is that they won't be living as human kings live, but as the King of kings lives, who in this world was mocked and maligned. It is enough for a disciple to be like his or her Teacher, mocked and maligned and criticized because he or she is financially unable and theologically unwilling to support *starving children* in a phantom orphanage.

Poverty is not confined to Third World countries. One persistent criticism the former Soviet Union had of the United States was the concealed poverty within the nation. A greater disparity exists between urban and rural wages than exists between what males earn and what females earn—and in the heart of most American cities is a rotten core where poverty was subsidized for half a century. So the smile of prosperity that the

world sees in America exists in a suburban half-circle between inner-city poverty and rural poverty as genuine disciples that are not part of this world struggle financially as do genuine disciples wherever they are geographically located. Faith is not a commodity that brings physical prosperity to the one possessing it.

Resulting from an initial lack of faith, disbelief fuels disobedience ... the prosperity seen within the former WCG in the decade before its demise came from increasing disbelief: the Church did not go to a physical place of safety in 1972; Christ did not return in 1975. Herbert Armstrong did not live to see the completion of the work of God; he was not the Zerubbabel who laid the foundation of the house of God [senior ministers taught that Armstrong was this endtime Zerubbabel]. The spellbinding orator, Gerald Waterhouse, was wrong in his claims about Armstrong's importance to God. Herman Hoeh was without spiritual understanding in what he preached and wrote about church eras, the lost tribes of Israel, and Armstrong's position in the kingdom of God. And disciples who eagerly assembled together from outlying areas to hear Waterhouse or Hoeh in the 1970s began to doubt what they heard as years passed without the coming of Christ. They drifted in currents of unspoken doubt until the junior Armstrong was defrocked and put out of the Body in 1978. The doubt then erupted into open disbelief as schisms within the Armstrong family caused senior ministers to wrestle with the question of who really has the authority to mark a disciple.

The widespread disbelief that manifested itself with the former WCG in the 1990s began much earlier and was not really observable except in the cars disciples began to drive; for the trappings of prosperity began to appear in the middle 1970s when Christ did not return as promised by the senior Armstrong. Some will certainly say that Armstrong never said that Christ would return in 1975, but that would be like ex-President Clinton saying he never had sex with that woman in the blue dress. If Armstrong did not dogmatically say that Christ would return in 1975, he certainly suggested that Christ would, thereby coming as close to setting dates as Clinton did in having sex with *that woman*. And both men stand condemned before God for their words that led to cultures of disbelief.

Here and there a disciple remains who believes that once he or she learns the lessons Christ is trying to teach the person, the disciple will physically prosper. This disciple will translate his or her experiences in the world into a doctrine of delayed prosperity. The disciple will usually be genuine, but a spiritual babe; for the prosperity of this world goes to the disciple who is dead or dying. Yes, Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times more in this time [era], and in the age to come eternal life" (Luke 18:29-30). Yet the writer of Hebrews says, "They [saints] were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth" (Heb 11:37-38). And the only way to reconcile these two passages of Scripture is that those things which saints receive in this era are not of this world but is treasure stored in heaven. They will not in the next age receive things but will receive eternal life. The things that they have received in this era will then be available to them for their use.

As the father of the faithful, Abraham lived in a tent as a squatter under the oaks of the Amorite Mamre, with the only land he owned being the field in which lay the cave where he buried Sarah. Jesus said to a scribe who would follow Him, "Foxes have holes,



and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (Matt 8:20 – also Luke 9:58). The disciple who is of the Body of Christ has no place in this world; has no accumulation of wealth in this world; has no claim to the riches of this world.

The righteousness that comes from faith will cause the disciple to believe that despite his or her physical impoverishment the person is the richest person in the world, for knowledge of God is precious, a pearl of more value than the wealth of this world. Genuine disciples in Kenya are by far wealthier than any American who has not yet been born of Spirit, and perhaps wealthier in heaven than those who have been born of Spirit for their struggles in the faith are many. They have not had the safety umbrella that the “Establishment Clause” affords every American. It might well be that instead of American fellowships sending disciples to Kenya to teach brethren there that brethren from there need to come to America to teach disciples in the United States the fundamentals of the faith—and the one who teaches is worthy of being supported by those whom he teaches, but he will not ask for that support.

The pattern of disciples sending tithes and offerings to a distant administrative headquarters is of Satan, not God. Those who hold to this practice are doomed to failure. The splintering of the former WCG should have been example enough to cause the model to be abandoned, but apparently not so. Apparently more disciples need to be burned; more disciples need the prosperity that comes from giving into a dead ministry, or to an imaginary school or phantom orphanage. Instead of doing a local work with local funds, those disciples trained by the senior Armstrong to send moneys to *headquarters* will, as if Pavlov’s dogs, continue to send their tithes and offerings to a far-removed headquarters, where good salaries have to be paid so that ministers can live as imagined kings.

John the Baptist is the shadow and type of the genuine minister who, today, before the second Passover liberation of Israel, makes straight the way to Christ—and John did not receive the tithes and offerings that went to the temple even though he had the right to be so supported.

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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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