

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 the fate of the dead.

## **Weekly Readings For the Sabbath of December 22, 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.*

The fate of the dead, what is it? Is it heaven, hell, or the grave? Is there really an afterlife, or are Christians presently living in the kingdom of God? In Luke's gospel, Jesus is twice asked what a person must do to inherit everlasting life (*cf.* Luke 10:25; 18:18), and His response both times pertained to the law—asking what is required to “inherit” implies the person knows that he or she does not then possess what will be inherited. And if the lawyer and the rich young ruler knew that they did not (when they asked) have eternal life, when did belief in human beings possessing immortal souls enter Christianity or Judaism?

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*The person conducting the service should read or assign to be read Ecclesiastes chapter 3.*

**Commentary:** There is a time for everything, “a time to keep silent, and a time to speak” (*v.* 7); a time to believe God, and a time to quit believing those who pretend to represent God.

Israel's King Solomon had uncommon wisdom, but he was not born of Spirit. He did not understand spiritual birth. He was not a man after God's own heart as was his father, King David. So when he writes that God has put “eternity” or “the creation” [*Heb: olam – that which is everlasting but concealed by what is*] into man's heart so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end (*v.* 11), Solomon acknowledges that he realizes that there is more than he knows or understands. But what he knows is that,

I said in my heart with regard to the children of man that God is testing them that they may see that they themselves are but beasts. For what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts, for all is vanity. All go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all return. (*Ecc 3:18-20*)

Solomon understood that God tests men and women to show them that they are but beasts, and that they are like other beasts in life and death. God tests them against the

widely accepted belief of Egypt that men are born with immortal souls that place them in a different biological category from the beasts of the field; that the fate of, at least, the Pharaohs was to be stars in heaven. ... When God brought Abram [Abraham] outside and had him look towards the heavens to number the stars (Gen 15:5), God was working against the expectations of Egypt, a type of this world and the beliefs of all humankind. Abraham's descendants were to be like the stars. It wasn't the few Egyptian pharaohs that were to be stars, but the sons of Abraham. The angels of God—His sons—are called “morning stars” (Job 38:7). Lucifer is the fallen “Day Star” (Isa 14:12). The sons of Abraham are to be as numerous as the stars, but they are to be like the angels (Luke 20:36) in that they will be sons of God who do not die.

The fate of disciples will be to enter heaven as sons of Son. This is not difficult to understand, or to support from Scripture. But what will be the fate of those human beings who never heard the name of Christ Jesus?

The human body is a tent of flesh that is subject to corruption, decay, and death. Flesh and blood (the life of the flesh) cannot enter heaven (1 Co 15:50), for there is nothing about the body that can withstand the fire that separates the dimensions, fire typified by the “flaming sword that turned every which way” (Gen 4:24). There is nothing inherent about flesh that can withstand being tormented forever in the lake of fire. The body can be reduced to ashes in any crematorium. It will, otherwise, return to dust unless preservation by freezing or drying causes it to remain as lifeless meat and bone.

If the flesh can be burned to ashes or will return to dust, then the flesh lacks permanence. If the breath of humankind is the same as the breath of beasts, then as one dies so dies the other ... Solomon denies that human beings have immortal souls. He asks who it is that knows that the spirit [Heb: *ruwach* – breath] of man goes upward and the breath of a beast goes down into the earth (Eccl 3:21). And the answer is, No one knows this. And this is the point about which God tests the righteous and the wicked ... if God tests the righteous and wicked through what each believes about the fate of the dead, believing error has more serious consequences than has been previously taught; for the implication of Scripture is that the wicked will believe what the righteous will not.

The Apostle Paul said that eternal life was the gift of God, given by the God “in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 6:23). Eternal life does not come from a person's human father, but from God. It does not come through fornication in the backseat of a Chevrolet. It doesn't come through sin. It doesn't come in any way except through receiving the Spirit of God, which gives to the person a second birth, a birth from above as a son of God, a birth that changes the person from being like other beasts by making the person tripart: body [*soma*], breath [*psuche*], and spirit [*pneuma*].

But the wicked do not believe that eternal life is the gift of God.

When a person is born of a human father and mother, the person is a son of disobedience (Eph 2:2-3), consigned to disobedience (Rom 11:32) as a bondservant to sin (Rom 6:6-7). The person is not free to keep the commandments of God—even the most pious son of disobedience must break a commandment of God, and breaking one commandment makes the person a lawbreaker, a sinner (James 2:10). This person is numbered among the wicked of the world.

- For those individuals who claim to be Christians yet have not truly been born of Spirit, the one commandment most often broken is the Sabbath commandment.
- For pious Jews the commandment most often broken is the third commandment (rabbinical Judaism takes God’s name in vain through denying that the *Logos*, who entered His creation as the man Jesus of Nazareth, was the creator of all that has been made).

Jesus’ disciples had not yet received the Holy Spirit when Jesus sent the Twelve not to Gentiles, but “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt 10:6). Thus He told them to fear the One who can kill body [σῶμα – *soma*] and breath [ψυχὴ – *psuche*] ... what is translated into English as “soul” [*psuche*] is the life sustaining *breath* that all breasts of the field have, the *breath* that King Solomon said was the same for man and breast. Thus, according to Jesus, the Twelve consisted of or were only body [*soma*] and swallow breath [*psuche*] (v. 28). God says the life of breasts is in the blood (Gen 9:4-5; cf. Acts 15:20), which carries oxygen, received through the breath of the animal, to every cell in the animal. The life of physical beings is sustained by the cellular oxidation of sugars as the life of spirit beings comes from and is sustained by the Spirit of God, which is metaphorically named in Greek as *pneuma*, wind or deep breath [moving air, or an invisible force].

The son of disobedience who has a body of flesh [*soma*] has his or her physical life sustained by physical or shallow breath [*psuche*], but when this son of disobedience is born of the Holy Spirit [πνεῦμα ἅγιον], a second life sustaining force enters the person, the divine breath of God [πνεῦμα ἅγιον]. The person is now tripart as Paul identifies disciples when he writes, “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit [πνεῦμα] and soul [ψυχὴ] and body [σῶμα] be kept blameless” (1 Thess 5:23).

It is the wicked—those who have not experienced a second birth—that believe they have everlasting life without receiving this life from God.

- To teach that human beings have everlasting life apart from receiving it as the gift of God through Christ Jesus is to utter blasphemy against the Father and the Son.
- An immortal soul is everlasting life, and any teaching that a person is physically born with eternal life is contrary to Scripture.
- Everlasting life comes to human beings only as the gift of God, given when the person is born of Spirit.
- Prior to being born of Spirit, the person only has the life given to the first Adam, this life making the person a breathing creature, a nephesh, like other nephesh that are the beasts of the field.

It is vanity to believe that humankind, prior to being born of Spirit, have lives that differs from the lives of beasts; it is also not biblical. Nevertheless, Augustine of Hippo wrote,

This faith [Christianity] maintains, and it must be believed: neither the soul nor the human body may suffer complete annihilation, but the impious shall rise again into everlasting punishment, and the just into life everlasting. (*On Christian Doctrine*. Book 1: XXI. Trans. D.W. Robertson, Jr.)

Augustine was simply wrong! Whether he knew he taught a lie probably cannot be determined, but he neither well understood Scripture nor believed Scripture. The body is dust, the base elements of the earth. At death it returns to dust that is blown about by the winds of this earth. It is stone ground into fine flour; thus, the physical body is a shadow and type of cereal grains (that have inherent life within them) being ground into fine flour, with disciples typologically identified as the harvest of firstfruits, the early barley harvest, with Christ Jesus being the First of the firstfruits, the Wave Sheaf Offering.

Jesus said, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone, but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (John 12:23-24). Jesus was that grain of wheat—and the kingdom of heaven grows from this single grain of wheat.

Again, the Apostle Paul says that the wages of sin is death, “but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 6:23). Jesus said of the Twelve He sent out that they were *psuche* and *soma*, breath and body (Matt 10:28). These first disciples had not, when sent out, received birth-from-above in the form of receipt of the Holy Spirit; they did not have the Holy Spirit. Hence, they were not of tripart composition. They lacked having the Spirit [*pneuma*] of God. They lacked having eternal life. Jesus, Himself, lacked having the divine Breath of God (πνεῦμα [τοῦ] θεοῦ – Matt 3:16) prior to it descending upon Him as a dove.

The person who dies without having been born anew is not today, though, in hell, writhing in pain, roasting in flames not quite hot enough to burn the person to ashes. That teaching is criminal considering the harm it does, and has done to Christ; for it has been used by the Roman Church as justification for forced conversion of pagan tribes and peoples, and used by Evangelical Christians as the reason for their missionary efforts that destroyed aboriginal cultures worldwide (the Roman Church adopted aboriginal beliefs and holy days as Catholic stepchildren; whereas Evangelicals rooted out these beliefs with few exceptions, Halloween being perhaps the most notable). The person who dies without being born of Spirit in the person’s physical lifetime—and this will be most of humankind—awaits resurrection from the dead in the dust of the earth. Salvation lies ahead of this person, not behind.

The Apostle Paul writes,

For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law ... when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.  
(Rom 2:12, 14-16)

The person who does not have the law of God written on the person’s heart and mind is a person *without the law*. This person will perish without the law, or will be saved by having done what the law requires—and what the law requires isn’t legalistically keeping the commandments day by day, but exercising justice and mercy and love toward neighbor and God. The person who does not know God—the Chinese peasant who died centuries before Christ Jesus was born—nevertheless knew to exercise justice and mercy and love. Whether that Chinese peasant did or didn’t exercise justice and mercy will be

known when he or she is resurrected in the great White Throne Judgment. The peasant will then be like one of the two thieves crucified with Christ at Calvary (Luke 23:39-43).

- Every person who has drawn breath will be like one or the other of the two thieves crucified with Jesus.
- The disciple, today, either wants Jesus to save his or her physical life, or the disciple is willing to die for his or her sins, asking only that Jesus remember the person.
- Most disciples want to live as Gentiles but be remembered as Christians—

Most disciples want to save the lives they had as sons of disobedience while receiving the promise given to the ones willing to lay down their lives for Christ and live as spiritual Judeans.

Again, the world is today divided between those human beings who have been called by God and born of Spirit as fruit ripening out of season, and between those who remain as sons of disobedience.

Before a disciple is born of Spirit, the person was consigned to sin (Rom 11:32) as a son of disobedience (Eph 2:2-3). The person had no choice about whether he or she would transgress the laws of God; for the person was born as the bondservant of sin, condemned to disobedience because of one man, the first Adam. And this concept of being consigned to disobedience separates Western Christendom's understanding of free will from both Eastern Christendom's and Rabbinical Judaism's ... in both the Greek Church's and Judaism's understanding of sin a person can, through good works, prevail upon God to accept the person, thereby making Calvary an interesting but not needful phenomenon; whereas in the Roman Church, Calvary was absolutely necessary for the forgiveness of sin, and the redemption of the inherently sinful nature of humankind. The Western Church held the doctrine of "total depravity," meaning that there was nothing good in human beings. Although this doctrine is flawed (for when Adam and Eve ate forbidden fruit, they took to themselves knowledge of good and evil), it is nevertheless useful: while Paul's "consigned to disobedience" and Catholicism's "total depravity" are not two faces of the same dogma, the concepts are theologically linked, thereby making "original sin" a useful term.

Many disciples will see good or evil in someone they love. When "good" is seen in a person who does not profess to be a disciple of Christ Jesus, the "good" is too easily dismissed by legalists, or too easily accepted as evidence of salvation by liberal disciples. Neither is true. This "good" person will not enter heaven upon his or her death, nor will this "good" person be condemned to hell. Judgment has not yet come upon this person, for this person is not a part of the household of God (1 Pet 4:17). Thus, this "good" person will wait in the dust of the earth until he or she is resurrected in the great White Throne Judgment where this person will be as one of the two thieves—yes, this person is a sinner despite the "good" that he or she has done.

What is more sad is when disciples have a loved one who seems unable to not sin ... Martin Luther made the observation that the law seemed to exist to prove that it couldn't be kept—and it cannot be kept by those who remain consigned to disobedience. They are not free to keep it. And being redeemed from sin is all about being born of Spirit so that the liberated person can keep the commandments.

Sin or iniquity is, simply, the transgression of the law (1 John 3:4). The person who breaks the law in one point breaks the law (James 2:10), and is a sinner, having presented him or herself as a willing or unwilling servant to sin (Rom 6:16). In analogy,

sin is the mental landscape through which a disciple must journey—as Israel journeyed through the Wilderness of Sin/Zin after being liberated from bondage to Pharaoh—between being born of Spirit and entering into God’s rest, represented in type by Sabbath observance. Sin is the mental landscape that completely surrounds a disciple and that is ever able to kill or capture the disciple if he or she ceases following God.

The antithesis to original sin is a second birth by Spirit, with this new creature born free, sin having no dominion over this new creature (*cf.* Rom 8:1-2; Rom 6:14). The redemptive work of God is not a regeneration of immortal souls doomed to hell, but the “renewing” of the creature through a second birth, the creation of a new life within the tent of flesh of the old self. And because sin has no dominion over these new creatures in their fleshly tents [i.e., human beings who have been called-out of this world], these called-out ones are today under judgment, with their judgments to be revealed (1 Co 4:5) upon Christ’s return ... Jesus said those who hear His words and believe the One who sent Him do not come under judgment, but pass from death to life (John 5:24). He also said not to be surprised when some are called forth from death to life, and some are called to condemnation (*vv.* 28-29). For the new creature that returns to sin when sin has no dominion over this new creature spurns the mercy extended by a second birth, and thereby mocks both the Father and the Son.

There is “no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1). This person has been set free from disobedience [the law of sin and death], and can now live by the commandments of God, which before, while the person was consigned to disobedience, was not possible. The person was not previously able to present his or her members to God as instruments for righteousness (Rom 6:13), for sin had dominion over the person (*v.* 14). And again, this is what many disciples see in siblings, in sons or daughters, in parents—sin has control of the person, who might well want to do what is right but just cannot.

What about the loved one who is a drunkard, a drug addict, a habitual thief, an addicted gambler? Is this person automatically doomed to the flames of hell? No! This person will have paid the penalty for his or her sins with the person’s physical death. When he or she is resurrected in the great White Throne Judgment, the character of the person will come under judgment, not the acts of the flesh for which the death penalty has already been paid. And the character of the person will be like one or the other of the two thieves crucified with Christ at Calvary. Some will want to hang on to what it was that made them who they were. Others will be so repulsed by who they were, they will welcome being set free from the shackles that bound them to sin. It will be those who condemn themselves that might thereby escape being condemned by God, but that is His call.

The redemptive work of God is about setting free human beings who have been consigned to disobedience because their father (however many times removed) is the first Adam, but this work is not that of human beings. No person can force the Father to draw a person from the world and give to this person a second birth. And unless the Father draws the person, he or she remains consigned to disobedience.

The dogma of visible Christendom would have the born of Spirit disciple free from having to keep the commandments of God, thereby making this disciple an unwitting bondservant of sin, whereas the “law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:2) sets a person free to keep the commandments of God. Christendom’s prevailing dogma is exactly opposite of what the Apostle Paul taught. Disciples are not set free to transgress

the law, but set free to keep the law. Obedience equals life. Disobedience is sin, which equals death. Disciples have been set free from sin and death so that they can choose life, which comes through obedience by faith to God. ... The fate of the disciple who chooses death—who chooses to take sin back inside him or herself when liberated from sin—is the lake of fire, where the person will be reduced to ashes. After all, even the fate of the anointed cherub in whom iniquity was found [Satan] is to become ashes under the feet of the saints (Ezek 28:18-19).

The expression in Greek that is translated as everlasting or ever-burning fire means from “age-to-age,” or “until the end of the age” fire. The disciple who has done evil will be cast into the lake of fire when Christ returns—and when Christ returns is at the end of this present age. So the disciple will not be long in the flames of hell, but will perish quickly. Likewise, the person resurrected in the great White Throne Judgment will be resurrected just before the coming of the new heavens and new earth. The person judged unworthy when the books are opened in the great White Throne Judgment will not be long in the flames of hell, for this person will also have been resurrected at the end of the age to begin with Christ’s millennial reign.

The redemptive work of God is simple: Jesus said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matt 5:17). One reason He came was to demonstrate that when a person is not born into bondage to disobedience [Jesus’ Father was *Theos*, and was not a descendant of the first Adam], the person can live by the commandments of God. And when liberated from bondage to sin, the person is liberated from death.

Twice born means that the person has two lives, one that animates the flesh [the birth by water], and the other that is of Spirit that has come from heaven as a type of the man Jesus coming from heaven. The mystery that the Apostle Paul did not understand (Rom 7:15) is that the flesh remains in bondage to disobedience until the Second Passover. The new creature born of Spirit and domiciled in the tent of flesh is born liberated from disobedience and is born free to keep the law of God, but the tent of flesh does not enter the womb a second time (Nicodemus’ question) to be born again. The tent of flesh remains as it was when the new creature is born into this tent—the new creature is neither male nor female, Jew nor Greek, bond nor free (Gal 3:28); yet the tent of flesh remains male or female, Jew or Greek, bond or free. *The new creature is not the tent of flesh*. Nor is this new creature the regeneration of an already existing immortal soul dwelling within the person. Rather, this new creature is what Paul claimed it was, a son of God, born of Spirit (composed of Spirit), that has come from heaven and will return to heaven at the person’s death as a human being’s physical breath returns to being wind at death.

The above is a hard analogy to initially understand: a person is born with no life other than that which comes through physical breath. Everlasting life is the gift of God (Rom 6:23), and not something inherited from a physical father. Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden before they ate of the Tree of Life. So no person has indwelling eternal life prior to receiving it from God the Father through Christ Jesus; for Jesus told Pharisees that God raises the dead and gives them life (John 5:21), with the Pharisees then hearing Jesus speak being counted as dead. So when a person is drawn from this world by the Father (John 6:44, 65) and called by Jesus (John 15:16), the person receives a second birth in the form of receiving the Holy Spirit, the divine Breath of God [ $\pi\nu\epsilon\acute{\upsilon}\mu\alpha\ \acute{\alpha}\gamma\iota\omicron\nu$ ], which has come from heaven to raise the person from the dead,

or from lifelessness. Jesus must still give life (again John 5:21) to the person to whom the Father has already given life, with this second giving of spiritual life coming when the mortal flesh puts on immortality. So being born of Spirit will not automatically get a person into heaven; rather, being born of Spirit simply means that a new creature, composed of Spirit, now dwells within the mind and heart of the person. And judgment is on the new creature (1 Pet 4:17) who is of the household of God. Judgment is not today on the sons of disobedience for they have no life in the heavenly realm, and in this earthly realm they are subject to the magistrates of this world. Only when these sons of disobedience are resurrected from death through a second birth in the great White Throne Judgment (Rev 20:11-15) will they come under the judgment of God. At that time, “all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law” (Rom 2:12), whereas those “who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires ... show that the work of the law is written on their hearts” (vv. 14-15) so that their consciences will accuse and excuse them when “God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus” (v. 16).

Again, no person is born physically with an immortal soul. The teaching that human beings possess immortal souls entered Christendom as a borrowed concept from Greek paganism, but this concept is now so ingrained into the psyche of Western Christendom that it cannot be easily returned to paganism. Therefore, it will become a “test” concept used by the Antichrist to separate genuine disciples from false Christians when the world professes to be “Christian.” It has all along been a “test” used by God to separate the wicked from the righteous.

Today, the new creature dwelling in a tent of flesh must wrestle against the tent as if fighting its way out of a paper bag. It must strive against the indwelling law of sin and death (Rom 7:21-25), and it must ultimately prevail. Grace covers those times when this new creature loses battles to indwelling sin. But if this new creature will not or does not fight against this indwelling sin, this new creature will perish in the lake of fire.

The fight into which the infant son of God is born can be won, and has been won by Christ Jesus. But a disciple gives Christ’s victory to Satan when the disciple makes him or herself a willing servant of sin.

In conclusion, the fate of disciples—remember many are called but few will be chosen—who are under judgment today is determined by whether they will be one with Christ as Christ is one with the Father: disciples are one with Jesus when they walk as He did (1 John 2:4-6), and they will imitate Paul (Phil 3:17), who, according to his testimony, committed no offense against the law or the temple (Acts 25:8). They will live as spiritual Judeans.

The fate of the sons of disobedience is to be resurrected in the great White Throne Judgment where they will, in about the same length of time as it took the two thieves at Calvary to establish their fate, choose life or death by uttering what comes from their hearts and minds, with the ones who condemn themselves acknowledging that they deserve death. This is what the second thief did, in addition to acknowledging that Jesus is Lord (Luke 23:40) and believing that the Father would raise Him from the dead (v. 42). Until then, all who have died as sons of disobedience await resurrection in the dust of the earth.



*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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