

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 *Scripture, itself*.

Weekly Readings For the Sabbath of August 5, 2006

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

The person conducting the service should read or assign to be read 2 Timothy chapter 3, verses 10 through 17.

Commentary: Scripture or the Sacred Writings to which the Apostle Paul referred was not the Bible that 21st-Century Christians read. Rather, it was the Old Testament in, probably, Greek [i.e., the Septuagint] although by when Paul wrote to Timothy, these Sacred Writings might have included the Gospel of Matthew and/or Mark. They certainly didn't include Paul's epistles, for Paul would have been guilty of extreme hubris to consider his letters to the various fellowships in Asia Minor on the same plain as the *Torah*. It was for those who came behind Paul, beginning with Peter, to elevate Paul's epistle to the status of Scripture.

But those who came behind Paul came centuries behind him—

For some centuries, the Roman Church taught the first canon of Christian Scriptures was produced by Pope Damasus I during the Council of Rome in 382 CE. Most of the Imperial bishops were, that year, involved in a third synod at Constantinople because the previous year Emperor Theodosius I had appointed Nectarius as Patriarch of Constantinople—and this appointment was opposed by Western bishops. Thus, when these bishops arrived in Constantinople to receive a letter inviting them to a council at Rome, they respectfully declined to go, and sent only Syriacus, Eusebius, and Priscian with a letter from the synod. And it was only long afterwards that this Council at Rome under Damasus gained historical significance. According to a document attached to some manuscripts—this appended document called the *Decretum Gelasianum* and first connected to this 382 CE Council of Rome in 1794 by Fr. Faustino Arevalo—this Council of Rome convened under Damasus produced the earliest Biblical canon, two years before publication of the first installment Jerome's *Vulgate*. But alas, examination of the *Decretum Gelasianum* early in the 20th Century revealed that Augustine's writings of about 416 CE are quoted, making this "important" appendage a literary production from the 6th Century or thereabouts. And scholars had to return to what Augustine wrote concerning the Biblical canon.

In *On Christian Doctrine* (ca 396 CE), Book II, Sec. VIII [D.W. Robertson, Jr. translation], the learned Augustine wrote:

[from 12.] But let us turn our attention to the third step which I have decided to treat as the Lord may direct my discourse. He will be the most expert investigator of the Holy Scripture who has first read all of them and has some knowledge of them, at least through reading them if not through understanding them. That is, he should read those that are said to be canonical. For he may read the others more securely when he has been instructed in the truth of the faith so that they may not preoccupy a weak mind nor, deceiving it with vain lies and fantasies, prejudice it with something contrary to sane understanding. **In the matter of canonical Scriptures he should follow the authority of the greater number of catholic Churches, among which are those which have deserved to have apostolic seats and to receive epistles. He will observe this rule concerning canonical Scriptures, that he will prefer those accepted by all catholic Churches to those which some do not accept; among those which are not accepted by all, he should prefer those which are accepted by the largest number of important Churches to those held by a few minor Churches of less authority. If he discovers that some are maintained by the larger number of Churches, other by the Churches of weightiest authority, although this condition is not likely, he should hold them to be of equal value.** [emphasis added]

13. The whole canon of the Scriptures on which we say that this consideration of the step of knowledge should depend is contained in the following books: the five books of Moses, that is, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy; one book Josue [Joshua], one of Judges, one short book called Ruth which seems rather to pertain to the beginning of Kings; then the four books of Kings and two of Paralipomenon [Chronicles], not in sequence, but as if side by side and running at the same time. These are made up of history and are arranged according to the sequence of time and the order of things; there are others arranged in a different order which neither follow this order nor are connected among themselves, like Job, Tobias, Ester, Judith, two books of Machabees, and two books of Esdras. The last two seem to follow the ordered history after the end of Kings or Paralipomenon, Then there are the prophets, among which are one book of the Psalms of David, and three books of Solomon: Proverbs, the Canticle of Canticles, and Ecclesiastes, are said to be Solomon's through a certain similitude, since it is consistently said that they were written by Jesus son of Sirach. Nevertheless, since they have merited being received as authoritative, they are to be numbered among the prophetic books. The remainder are those books called Prophets in a strict sense, containing twelve single books of Prophets joined together. Since they have never been separated, they are thought of as one. The names of the Prophets are Osee [Hosea], Joel, Amos, Abdias [Obadiah], Jonas, Micheas, Nahum, Habacuc, Sophonias, Aggeus, Zacharias, and Malachias. Then there are four books of four major Prophets: Isaias, Jermias, Daniel, Ezechiel. The authority of the Old Testament ends with these forty-four books. The New Testament contains the four evangelical books, according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; the fourteen epistles of Paul the Apostle, to the Romans, two to the Corinthians, to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, to the Philippians, two to the Thessalonians, to the Colossians, two to Timothy, to Titus, to Philemon, to the Hebrews; two Epistles of Peter, three of John, one of Jude, and one of James; a book of the Acts of the Apostles, and a book of the Apocalypse of John.

The Bible, with the Apocrypha, as received by endtime disciples is contained in the list made by Augustine in 395 CE, but the disciple should note that no central authority existed within the Christian Church to establish by weight of that authority's declaration something as important as what books should be canonical. The Church was democratic. No papacy existed. Instead, the Church was organized much as the Orthodox Church exists today. Thus, the first thing that endtime disciples need to jettison is any idea that the Roman Church is invested with any power not of the spiritual king of Babylon.

The endtime disciple should also note that even with a listing of books contained in endtime Bibles, the list was not finalized or canonical. The Bible wasn't established as a completed work, but an ongoing collection of texts representing the words of God. Therefore, at the end of the 4th-Century CE, the Bible was not subject to the elevated status afforded it when *solā scripturā* rang as the Reformed Church's rallying cry in the 16th-Century ... when Protestant reformers rejected the icons and idols of "the old church," these reformers turned the Bible itself into an icon that functioned in very much the same way that plaster statury of Mary functioned in *the old church*. Indeed, the Great Bible in 17th-Century English Protestant Churches was accorded the same reverence and a similar position within the building that a statue of Mary would have been accorded in a Roman Church.

An argument made by the Orthodox Churches that cannot be answered from Scripture alone is the collection of texts that disciples know as the Bible came from the traditions of the Asia [Minor] Churches that had all left Paul and his teachings within the Apostle's lifetime (1 Tim 1:15). The Orthodox Church has been careful to preserve the traditions of these Asian fellowships that ceased building on the foundation Paul laid (1Co 3:10-11). They built on a different foundation, one that incorporated the neo-Platonic teachings of Hellenistic converts—and they only used those portions of the epistles of Paul that supported their anti-Semitism.

Here is the rebuttal to *solā scripturā* [from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia's article on the "Eastern Orthodox Church"]:

The Orthodox Church considers itself to be the continuation of the original church started by Christ and his apostles. For the early years of the church, much of what was conveyed to its members was in the form of oral teachings. Within a very short period of time traditions were established to reinforce these teachings. The Orthodox Church asserts to have been very careful in preserving these traditions. When questions of belief, or new concepts arise the Church always refers back to these early beliefs and those truths that have been built on them. They see the Bible as a collection of texts that sprang out of this tradition, not the other way around; and the choices made in forming the New Testament as having come from comparison with already firmly established belief. The Bible has come to be a very important part of "Tradition", but not the only part, in contrast to Protestantism which generally relies upon the Bible as the ultimate doctrinal authority (*sola scriptura*).

Is not the above statement true considering what Augustine of Hippo wrote at the end of the 4th-Century CE? If a disciple were to accept as canonical the texts that the larger Churches accept, or the texts that the greater number of Churches accept, then, indeed, the traditions of the Churches determine which texts are considered canonical; for if a text did not agree with the Church's tradition, the text would be rejected as false. Three and four centuries of tradition went into determining the Bible's canon. Thus, an extremely interesting juxtaposition becomes apparent: only those texts that were so

foundational that they could not be excluded by tradition could possibly be considered as canonical. Any text that was not absolutely spiritual milk [and watered down milk at that] would be rejected by the divergent traditions as Western Churches began to separate themselves from the Eastern Churches, with the lawlessness of these traditions having caused God to send the entirety of the Church into Babylonian captivity from which only a remnant would leave twelve centuries later [325 CE – 1525 CE]. And this remnant would leave by sliding behind the decrees of the Council of Nicea—

The spiritual journey of the remnant that left spiritual Babylon in the 16th-Century CE as Ezra and Nehemiah left physical Babylon by order of Cyrus, king of Persia and Babylon, has been backwards through time. The journey isn't over physical geography as was the journey of the physically circumcised remnant of Israel. Rather, the journey has been through ideas and traditions to again find the foundation the Apostle Paul laid in the heavenly city of Jerusalem. Therefore, this spiritual Anabaptist remnant had to literally trek back across the traditions of the 3rd-Century CE Church to come to the traditions of the 2nd-Century Church, when God was two, not three. And this trek across barricades of traditions was long and difficult. Many disciples stopped to build houses for themselves along the way—and so endtime disciples find Mennonite fellowships whose founders stopped in 3rd-Century traditions to plant fields and build barns. Their faith was enough to get them started out of Babylon, but not strong enough to get them all the way to the heavenly city. So now they hope to find a shortcut around keeping the precepts of the law (Rom 2:26), but no shortcut exists. All they will find is a lake of fire because this present generation of Mennonites and Brethren have grown weary of well-doing and weak in faith.

Some of the Brethren returned to keeping the 7th-day Sabbath as a remnant of the remnant continued the spiritual trek across the traditions of the 2nd-Century Church. This remnant of a remnant returned to looking forward to Christ Jesus' return [the Advent movement of the first half of the 19th-Century] as had fellowships in the 2nd-Century CE. Thus, early into the 20th-Century, the stage was set for a splinter of this remnant of the remnant leaving spiritual Babylon to return to keeping the annual Sabbaths of God.

What some Roman Church theologians have seen as the 480 year-old fruit of Protestantism and *sola scriptura* (i.e., the countless, literally, demoninations with their nullifying doctrines) is the casualties and litter of the return trek of spiritual Israelites from when the spiritual king of Babylon officially took the Church captive [ca 325 CE] to the heavenly city where the Apostle Paul laid the foundation for the spiritual house of God. And yes, the stench of the dead and dying corpses is terrible! And will continue to befoul all of Christianity as the pillars of the house of God are stood in the 21st-Century on that foundation Paul laid so long ago.

Disciples need a moment to smell the stench of the corpses; i.e., to digest the significance of the myraid of Protestant denominations that too often deny that anyone but themselves is genuinely of God. Jesus said, immediately before saying the teachers of lawlessness would be denied in their resurrection, that His disciples were to, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves” (Matt 7:15). He then went on to say, “You will recognize them by their fruits” (v. 16) ... suppose this is why Pope Damasus I’s alleged list of canonical texts did not include the Apostle Paul’s second epistle to the Corinthians? Suppose the tradition of the bishopric of Rome didn’t like what Paul wrote about false apostles, deceitful

workmen, servants of Satan disguised as ministers of righteousness? Probably, for the Bishop of Rome certainly didn't work on the same terms as Paul did (2Co 11:12-15), in that the Bishop of Rome didn't then and doesn't today earn his livelihood with his hands, while freely preaching what he has received free from Christ Jesus.

Disciples shall recognize other disciples by their fruits, the foremost of which must be love. The disciple that swindles other disciples, as has happened in the Body of Christ, is not truly a brother, but a deceitful workman. A disciple whose fruit is *intentionally vague* by the disciple's own words bears the rotten fruit of the Adversary—this disciple is worse than a teacher of lawlessness, for he [or she] does greater harm to the Body. The spoilage caused by *intentional vagueness* in a business deal taints every disciple who comes into contact with this worthless person. Every disciple! Not this one or that one. But every disciple in contact with such a spiritually maggot-infested person is ruined and is soon themselves filled with maggots that devour good intentions as the apple maggot devours an orchard, which is why the Apostle Paul said to turn such a person over to Satan for the destruction of the person's flesh. And so shall *The Philadelphia Church* deliver, and will continue to deliver such a person to Satan.

The fruit of Protestantism is worm infested, blight covered, and rotten before ripening. It is small wonder that the Roman Church and the Greek Church mock *sola scriptura*, seeing in *independent, non-denominational, bible-only, fundamentalist churches* the antithesis of Christianity being a light to the world. Well, they see correctly as far as the see. But they fail to see into the supra-dimensional heavenly realm where the remnant trekking to Jerusalem reached the foundation that the Apostle Paul laid, and has now cleared away the debris and has started construction on the house of God that will become the Bride of Christ. Guests have been invited, but many are busy proving how physically-minded they are. So like the Imperial bishops attending the synod in Constantinople in 382 CE who declined to attend Pope Damasus' Council of Rome held the same summer, the invited guests are sending Christ Jesus their letters of apologies as they sift through the dust of the earth for the endtime nation of Israel.

The remnant of spiritual Israel that left Babylon in 1527 CE began work in 2002 CE on the pillars of the temple of God, hewing these pillars off-site so that no sound of an iron tool will be heard on the temple mount. The work continues without significant interruption—and part of this work is building the traditions that will be bodily carried into the Millennium, for *sola scriptura* contains merely the milk of the word of God, and by itself, is for still-nursing disciples who are too spiritually young to digest even Pabulum (ICo 3:1-3 & Heb 5:11-14).

Now, for a list of New Testament Scriptures that would seem to support *sola scriptura*:

Matthew 2:23; 4:4; 15:2-6

Mark 7:5-13

Luke 4:4; 8:4-15; 24:26-27

John 17:17

Acts 17:11

Galatians 1:8

1 Thessalonians 2:13

1 Timothy 3:14-15

2 Timothy 3:15-17

Hebrews 4:12
2 Peter 1:20-21; 3:15-17
Revelation 22:18-19

The reader should now read each of the above Scriptures.

Commentary: There is not much of a case for *sola scriptura* made by the above passages. In fact, there isn't a case in all of the passages together, for each contains a qualifier that limits the passage's application, as in the Revelation citation: "this book" is not the Bible, but the Apocalypse itself. The passage in Paul's second epistle to Timothy doesn't refer to New Testament works, but the Old Testament. And in several of the passages, Paul refers to the traditions of the fellowship that stem from what he orally taught the fellowship. Plus, the Matthew 4:4 and Luke 4:4 passages refer to the Old Testament, without providing a limiter for the words uttered by God.

The case against *sola scriptura* is made in the following New Testament Scriptures:

Mark 3:14; 16:15
Luke 10:16; 24:47
John 20:30; 21:25
Acts 15:27; 20:35
1 Corinthians 11:2
Ephesians 5:14
Colossians 1:5-7
2 Thessalonians 2:15; 3:6
1 Timothy 3:14-15
James 4:5

The reader should now read each of the above Scriptures.

Commentary: In the Colossians and the 2 Thessalonians citations a stronger case is made for tradition than made for *sola scriptura* in many more passages, but as will be seen next Sabbath, there is an even stronger case that can be made for typology; i.e., for Scripture being the visible record of the invisible Book of Life.

From within the United States has arisen a Christian organization that adds one, two, three more texts to Scripture by the same authority that it ordains it ministry and baptizes for the living and for the dead. This organization, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, will become a far more formidable adversary than disciples who today practice *sola scriptura* can imagine. Once the seven endtime years of tribulation begin, many disciples will become what they cannot now imagine being, for *sola scriptura* does not prepare disciples for the logic of another testament of Christ. The argument for *sola scriptura* is too weak to withstand real hunger pangs when food is available for accepting another testament of Jesus (but a testament not written in the voice of Christ Jesus).

Now is a proper time to discuss whether the disciple truly believes the Bible is the word of God. This should be an open discussion so that disciples hear themselves voicing what they believe and what they doubt.

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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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