

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 baptismal requirements.

Weekly Readings For the Sabbath of August 8, 2009

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 Acts chapter 16.

Commentary: At the Jerusalem Conference (Acts chap 15) the party of the Pharisees lobbied for a decision holding that to be Christians Gentile converts must be physically circumcised and ordered to keep the Law of Moses [the Torah], thereby becoming physical Jews before becoming spiritual Jews. But the party of the Pharisees did not get the decision they wanted: the decision made was that Gentile converts were to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from meats that had been strangled, and from blood. For Hellenists living in Asia Minor, abstaining from these four things effectively represented their cessation of living as Greeks. To do these four things required Gentile converts to make a spiritual or mental journey of faith that was equivalent in length to Abraham's physical journey of faith when he set out from Ur of the Chaldeans with his father (*old man*) and journeyed to Canaan.

Peter said that God knew the heart and made no distinction between Gentiles and themselves, Jewish converts (Acts 15:9), which actually was the party of the Pharisees' point: there should be one law for native and convert (Ex 12:49). But Peter went on to say that God cleansed the hearts of Gentile converts by the converts' faith. And it is this point that gets overlooked; for every heart that will be circumcised (Deut 10:16; 30:6; Jer 9:25–26; Rom 2:28–29) must be cleansed by faith, with God doing the circumcising after the Israelite, native or convert, makes a journey of faith equivalent in length to Abraham's physical journey of faith.

Although the party of the Pharisees did not get the ruling they sought, shortly after the Conference Paul had Timothy circumcised; so there wasn't a ruling against circumcision and keeping the law of Moses as is often taught. There was a ruling against causing offense; against placing stumbling blocks before converts. And if Timothy, known to be uncircumcised because his father was a Greek, would have entered the temple or synagogues as an uncircumcised male, Timothy would have caused offense (and would have likely got himself stoned). Therefore, so as not to offend Jewish converts, Paul had Timothy circumcised.

To be a Christian, a person must believe that Jesus is Lord and that the Father raised Jesus from the dead. Natural Jews must, by faith, profess that Jesus is Lord; they must “convert” just as Gentiles must “convert.” So being a Christian goes beyond outward circumcision and keeping the Law of Moses; for the “Christian” is not the outer man, the fleshly body that the world sees, but is the living inner nature or inner self that was not before alive. A *Christian* dwells within the fleshly body of a disciple, but is not the fleshly body. Hence, outward circumcision is of no value, nor is being male or being free; for the *Christian is not male or female, Jew or Greek, bond or free* (Gal 3:28). The *Christian* is not the flesh, and this cannot be said strongly enough nor often enough.

What the party of the Pharisees did not understand and apparently never understood is that receipt of a second breath of life, the breath of God [πνεῦμα θεοῦ], did not make alive what was already alive (i.e., fleshly body), but made alive what was dead, as in Jesus saying that disciples are to “leave the dead to bury their own dead” (Matt 8:22). A physically dead human being doesn’t bury another physically dead human being; a physically living human being buries the dead of his or her household. Thus for what Jesus said to make sense, the physically living must also be “dead.” And this is where the party of the Pharisees lack of understanding began and where endtime Christendom’s lack of understanding betrays the visible Christian Church; for being born of God is not a regeneration of a humanly received immortal soul but is the *dead* of this world—the *dead* that govern this world, that design mini laptop computers, that attend conventions and pageants and win fishing tournaments, that fight wars to promote democracy in the far corners of this world—receiving life, not a second life but life as the man of mud [Adam] received life when *Elohim* [singular in usage] breathed into his nostrils and this previously lifeless corpse became a *nephesh*, a breathing creature. The previously lifeless old nature or old self becomes a son of God.

The inner nature—human nature—given to all human beings is not “open software,” but is “closed” when human birth occurs. As received, human nature doesn’t permit additions to this operating program, and doesn’t repair itself when damaged. It is not, itself, a living organism ... it would be scary if the nature of a person evolved as it encountered stimuli. Behavior would not be predictable. So it is human nature’s resistance to change that has allowed psychology to develop as a field of study; with Freud’s quirky observations forming a boundary permitting individual deviation from this boundary to be discussed.

Even at the end of this age, difficulty exists when trying to explain that the *Christian* isn’t the fleshly body of a disciple, but is the inner nature that has been made alive through receipt of a second breath of life. This inner nature or self is invisible; its status cannot be directly observed. Whether it is alive or dead [open or closed] cannot be determined by observation or measurement. Whether Christ dwells within the person cannot be determined by photographic evidence. All that can be seen is the acts of the fleshly body; not even the thoughts of the body can be seen. Only the electrical impulses producing the thoughts are visibly determinable.

Because too many conmen and women have been dressing the king in new clothes for most of two millennia, endtime Christendom’s spiritual nakedness has become accepted attire. The cultural expectation is that endtime Christians do not cover themselves with the garment of obedience, either Christ Jesus’ obedience (i.e., grace) or individual obedience.

When using word phrases such as *circumcision of the heart*, the Christian uses words metaphorically, knowingly using a word that would usually mimetically represent “a thing” in this world to describe a non-real (as in non-physical) thing that pertains to God and the heavenly realm; hence Jesus only spoke to His disciples in figures of speech (John 16:25). He could speak to His disciples in no other way, with spoken Greek better permitting words to be used with mimetic/metaphoric duality than Hebrew, a language that had been in use to discuss the things of God for long enough that it resisted the separation of icon [signifier] from object [signified].

Today, Christians talk about grace, but with no understanding of what grace means or is. For example, Paul writes, “Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it [spoken words] may give grace [χάρις] to those who hear” (Eph 4:29) ... the *grace* that the spoken words of disciples give one another isn’t forgiveness of sin although disciples have been given authority to forgive sins or withhold forgiveness of sins (John 20:23). This grace that disciples give one another is for building up one another, and the grace that Christ Jesus gives to His younger brothers is for building up His younger brothers. It isn’t to regenerate an immortal soul. It is to help the younger brother to grow; thus, the reality of grace escapes endtime Christians, for grace is the garment of Christ (Gal 3:27) or the mantle of Christ Jesus’ righteousness that covers the nakedness of disciples until these disciples can cover themselves with their own obedience when they are liberated from indwelling sin and death at the second Passover.

Most Evangelical Christians believe themselves to be under the new covenant, but they do not have the Torah (from Jer 31:33) written on their hearts nor placed in their minds. Their neighbors and brothers do not *Know the Lord*. There is no evidence of the new covenant having been implemented anytime after the writer of Hebrews said that the first covenant was “becoming obsolete and growing old” and “ready to vanish away” (8:13) ... what is ready to vanish away has not vanished away, but still remains in effect.

Without carefully reading Scripture; without thinking about what they say, *Christians* mindlessly repeat the manta that they are under grace under the new covenant, but grace would not be needed if they were truly under the new covenant, for under the new covenant sins will be remembered no more (Heb 8:12; Jer 31:34)—the new covenant supersedes grace or the mantle of Christ Jesus’ righteousness, for this “covering” of Christ Jesus’ obedience is the necessary addition to the first covenant so that disciples could receive indwelling eternal life in Christ Jesus. When sins are no longer remembered by covenant, there is no need for a covering for sin: the covenant itself is the covering ... the new covenant raises the barre, stepping behind sin being transgression of the law or lawlessness. Under the new covenant, simple unbelief will keep a person or an angel out of the kingdom of the heavens. So grace that today covers innocent transgressions of the law as well as transgressions for which repentance has occurred will no longer be needed when it isn’t the transgression that matters, but whether the person or angel believes or doesn’t believe God.

All of the above is spiritual knowledge that the party of the Pharisees lacked in the 1st-Century and that most of endtime Christendom lacks in the 21st-Century:

- Until the second Passover liberation of Israel, the first covenant remains in effect regardless of how much Evangelical Christendom wants to be under the new covenant.

- Under the first covenant (the Passover covenant), sin was made alive when the added commandments were given at Sinai—and once made alive, sin slew Israel;
- Paul writes, “For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me” (Rom 7:11).
- Once made alive, sin needed to be “covered” by obedience to the commandments that brought sin to life.

If the commandments had not been given under Moses, death would have continued to reign over all men “even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam” (Rom 5:14); for death is the lawful wages of sin (Rom 6:23), earned by all those who practice sinning. Yet sin is not reckoned against the person where there is no law (Rom 5:13); so despite the person not under the law being condemned to death because of his or her sinning, the sins of this person are not counted against the person, an apparent oxymoron.

If sin is separated from death so that the sins of the person are not counted against the person, the person is under a “natural state” of grace even though the person does not have “life.” And this was the state of Gentiles prior to conversion. The party of the Pharisees, though, couldn’t imagine the sins of Gentiles (who were not under the law) not being counted against them ... by the 1st-Century CE, Judaism was borrowing concepts pertaining to the afterlife from Greeks; for the promises of Scripture made to Israel pertained to long life, physical prosperity, and peace. But as the lawyer and rich young ruler knew (Luke 10:25; 18:18), Israel could “inherit” eternal life, with their questions about what they must do to inherit eternal life disclosing that both knew they did not have indwelling eternal life in the form of an immortal soul. Both knew that *inheriting* eternal life was possible; both knew how to inherit was in Scripture; but how to inherit wasn’t plainly spelled out although when Jesus asked the lawyer how he read Scripture, the lawyer answered correctly: love God with heart and mind, and love neighbor as self (Luke 10:27). According to Jesus, the lawyer only had to apply what he read in Scripture; for Israel had a law [covenant] that would have led to eternal life if pursued by faith (Rom 9:31). The lawyer, however, asked who was his neighbor? His question made visible his lack of love for *those people* who were not like himself.

If correctly reading Scripture is finding in Scripture the command to love God with heart and mind, and to love neighbor as self; and if being born of spirit [πνεύματος] is to make alive the inner nature of a person, how long does it take to bring a person to the point where he or she is ready to take judgment onto the person ... if a person is not drawn by the Father from this world (John 6:44, 65), the person can hear Christ preached, can be persuaded that Jesus is Lord, but this person will not keep the commandments for this person remains hostile [ἔχθρα—*enmity*] against God. And this is the present state of Christendom, which is persuaded that Jesus is Lord but which remains hostile to God and unwilling and unable to keep the commandments or even to cover itself with the garment of grace (i.e., Christ Jesus’ righteousness) given for the building up of the inner self.

Should such people be baptized? No!

Have such people been baptized? Indeed, millions of them. And today, they define Christianity for those few disciples who have been genuinely born of God.

If a person “feels” a need to serve God, Father and Son, the person inevitably involves him or herself in some Christian ministry that assures the person the law has

been abolished; that Christians are not under the law but under grace; that to even attempt to keep the commandments negates grace and makes the person a Judaizer — and what could be worse than being a Judaizer? How about being denied by Christ when judgments are revealed (Matt 7:21–23)? That would be worse, wouldn't it, especially if you have done great works in the name of Christ Jesus.

When Paul took Timothy to be outwardly circumcised, was not Paul being a Judaizer? He was, wasn't he? For Paul had Timothy circumcised to make sure he committed no offense against the temple. Paul says of himself, “Neither against the law of the Jews, not against the temple, nor against Caesar have I committed any offense” (Acts 25:8). Yet Paul also says about himself, “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ... For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing” (Rom 7:15, 19). So when Paul said he had committed no offense against the law of the Jews, he was not saying he was without sin but that he had lived as an observant Jew, one who purified himself in the temple (Acts 21:26).

If Paul lived as an observant Jew—and this is truly the case—then what is to be made of Paul telling the Gentile converts at Corinth, “I urge you, then, be imitators of me” (1 Cor 4:16). Is Paul not telling these converts who were only required to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from meats strangled, and from blood before entering into fellowship that they needed go beyond what was required of them when they first came among disciples and to inwardly keep the law of Moses; for when James renders the decision of the Jerusalem Conference, he adds to the minimum four requirements the following: “For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues” (Acts 15:21).

Gentile converts enter into Christian fellowship over a very low barre, but the expectation was once they were in fellowship, they would learn what else they needed to know by hearing Moses read every Sabbath ... let's test Christianity by the standard established by the Jerusalem Conference: does sexual immorality exist with today's Christian fellowships? How many cohabitating couples are in fellowships? When did cohabitation cease being open sexual immorality? Paul writes, “To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am. *But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion*” (1 Cor 7:8–9 emphasis added). Those who cohabit cannot exercise self-control so they should marry, but far too many pastors permit cohabitating couples to attend services for Christ came to save sinners not the righteous.

A cohabitating couple is living in sin; they should marry when they profess that Jesus is Lord and desire to enter into Christian fellowship. Their sins when they had no interest in God are not counted against them. But because they say they are *Christians*, their practice of sinning will not be forgiven them for they are like Pharisees who say that they see (John 9:41). So let them marry — and insist that they marry or separate before they enter into Christian fellowship.

A couple that lives as man and wife without being married will, when they marry, enter into Christian fellowship without stigma. But according to the Jerusalem Conference, they are not to enter into fellowship while stilling living in a state of sin—and yes, cohabitation is sin. Not a popular thing to say today, but neither is saying that those who make a practice of sinning are children of the devil (1 John 3:8, 10). The Christian pastor who holds services on Sunday morning makes a practice of sinning, and

is by John's definition, a child of the devil. This Christian pastor along with our cohabitating couple can protest all they want; can insist that they have a solid relationship with Jesus; can squeal like hogs in a slaughterhouse; but they have no relationship with Christ Jesus. They deceive themselves. And it really doesn't matter what they do until they repent of their ongoing practice of sin. Salvation lies beyond their reach.

When Paul and Silas were asked by the Philippian jailer what must he do to be saved, the jailer knew why Paul and Silas had been imprisoned; he knew that Paul and Silas were not like other men for they had not tried to escape when the earthquake opened the doors. So when Paul and Silas said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:31), the jailer believed. For less than an hour, Paul and Silas instructed the jailer in the precepts of Christianity before baptizing him and his household (vv. 32–33).

Our cohabitating couple doesn't take two years' worth of instruction before they are baptized; they take believing God, with this belief manifested in marrying among other things.

If our lawless pastor and cohabitating couple truly believed Jesus, or believed in Jesus, would they not apply what Jesus said in His Sermon on the Mount to themselves?

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. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matt 5:17–20 emphasis added)

Having the law but not keeping it (John 7:19), the scribes and the Pharisees were hypocrites—and because they claimed to be spiritually enlightened, their sins will not be forgiven them (again, John 9:41). And so will it be for Christian teachers of lawlessness (again, Matt 7:21–23).

It should not take an endtime teacher of Israel longer than it took Paul and Silas to instruct the Philippian jailer before this endtime teacher baptizes a convert who needs to understand that growing in grace and knowledge is a maturation process foreshadowed by human growth and maturation, with this process rooted in hearing Moses read every Sabbath. A fellowship that places two years' worth of hoops and obstacles before the convert is guilty of spiritual malpractice, with this guilt bringing into question this fellowship's salvation.

Paul left the Jerusalem Conference, parted company with Barnabas over whether John Mark should go with them, chose Silas as his companion and set out through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches there. He then had Timothy circumcised so that neither he nor Timothy would cause offense among Jewish converts outside of Judea.

Apparently both Paul and Silas had Roman citizenship (Acts 16:37–38) even though they were Jews, which was probably the reason Paul chose Silas and possibly why Paul and Silas were not spiritually permitted to preach in Asia.

Paul and Silas' problems at Philippi began when Paul lost patience with the demon-possessed girl who followed them for many days, and he cast out her demon, thereby

causing her owners to lose the benefit of her fortunetelling. The accusation made by the owners of the girl was that Paul and Silas advocated customs that were not lawful for Romans to accept or practice; yet, both Paul and Silas had Roman citizenship, thereby setting up tension between state citizenship and God. What these customs and practices were will be explored at a later time as will be why were Paul and Silas forbidden to preach in Asia. Was Christianity not to come to Asia? Or was there already so much contention in Asia about what Christianity was that God had written the region off; for in his second epistle to Timothy, Paul says that all in Asia had left him (2 Tim 1:15).

Acts chapter 16 is important, for those who would baptize infants use verse 31 as justification for doing so ... there is no mention of how old those of the jailer's household were, so the assumption that within the household were infants has no scriptural support. Those who were with Cornelius and said to be of his household were relatives and close friends (Acts 10:24), with no ages given but with it being extremely unlikely that children were present when the spirit was given. Likewise, it would have been unlikely that small children were awakened when the jailer brought Paul and Silas home to tend their wounds and feed them. It is much more likely that the jailer's "family" was adult relatives.

Where Scripture is silent about a point, no shadow exists. If no shadow of baptizing infants exists, then no reality exists—and when baptism is properly understood to be the death of the old self or nature, then it is understandable why no infants are seen in Scripture being baptized.

What is clearly present in the chapter is that very little instruction is needed prior to baptism ... the person who believes God and thinks that he or she needs to be baptized should be baptized as soon as possible.

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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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