

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 *supporting a ministry*.

## **Weekly Readings For the Sabbath of December 2, 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 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 Cor 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 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.

When Elijah fled before Jezebel's threat to kill him, he ran to Beersheba, the land of Judah, left his servant there, then went another day's journey into the wilderness and asked God to die (1 Kings 19:3-4). God supplied Elijah's need for food and water by having an angel bake a cake on hot stones and place the cake and jar of water beside his head while he slept under a broom tree (*vv.* 5-6). The angel came to Elijah a second time and delivered food and drink. On the strength of that food, Elijah went forty days and

forty nights to Horeb, the mountain of God (*vv.* 7-8). Elijah went without eating or drinking as Moses has done twice, and as Jesus did once.

But Elijah was not a stranger to having God supply his physical needs: after Elijah declared to Ahab that there would be a drought in the land, he hid himself by the brook Cherith and ravens brought him bread and meat in the mornings and in the evenings until the brook dried up (1 Kings 17:3-7). Then, on the command of the Lord, he dwelt with the widow at Zarephath, and the nearly empty jar of flour and jug of oil never ran out, according to the word of the Lord (*vv.* 8-16).

So when Paul asks if he is not an apostle, with the saints at Corinth the seal of his apostleship, he begins his defense before those who would judge him. And his defense begins with a series of questions that are intended to clarify the relationship between himself and the fellowship at Corinth ... when he asks if he does not have the right to eat and drink (1 Cor 9:4), he asks the fellowship if it is an instrument of God, usable to supply his needs as God has used ravens and angels to supply Elijah's; he also asks if the fellowship wants him dead.

God the Father has committed Himself to supply the fleshly needs of His sons. These needs will get met for as long as the child of God requires the use of the earthly tent in which this son resides. When the tent is no longer needed, the maintenance agreement ends: the tent dies even though it might well want to continue living. And it is here where problems arise, where the physical concerns of Gentiles [of the flesh] pervert faith. The writer of Hebrew says,

And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong in weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection. **Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They 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 11:32-38 emphasis added)

By faith, the minds of those flogged, stoned, sawn in two; by faith, the minds of those destitute, afflicted, mistreated overcame the demands of the flesh. And so will it be required of all disciples of Christ Jesus when the seven endtime years of tribulation begin, for the student is not greater than his [or her] teacher and the servant is not greater than his [or her] master (Matt 10:24-25). It is enough for the disciple to be like Christ Jesus, who promised His disciples because the world persecuted Him, the world would persecute them (John 15:20). It is enough for a "Christian" to die as Christ died. Therefore, the Father's promise to supply the needs of the flesh includes persecution.

The person who would say, "My God would never require that of me," serves Satan.

The so-called *Prosperity Gospel* is a teaching of the Adversary, for Christianity requires separation from the world and its material wealth. This does not mean that no *Christian* will ever be wealthy, but it certainly means that material wealth is what

Gentiles seek after, that the disciple who stores up treasure in heaven has little or no time to accumulate treasure here on earth, that the disciple who looks for the coming of a heavenly city whose creator is God is not looking for the stock market to long endure. This is why the wealth of this world usually prevents the rich man [or woman] from entering the kingdom of heaven: no person can serve two masters (Matt 6:24). No disciple can serve God and money.

Nevertheless, God has committed Himself to supplying the needs of every disciple, and certainly the needs of those whom He has called to do a work—and to supply these needs, He will directly engage agents that can vary from disciples to ravens to adversarial kings. Therefore, when Paul asks whether a soldier serves at his own expense or if a farmer does not eat of his fruit and herds, he asks if the saints at Corinth are not agents of God that will supply those who brought them into the faith of God with the material things needed to sustain the flesh (1 Cor 9:11).

Elijah was not commissioned to make disciples [i.e., to make additional Israelites], but was called to do a work of rebuking and reproving an errant king and an erring nation. Likewise, the Elijah to come (Mal 4:5) both in type as John the Baptist was [who dwelt in the wilderness, eating locust and honey] and in type at the end of the age does not plow in hope or thresh in hope of sharing in the crop; for the restoration of all things (Matt 17:11) does not necessarily produce disciples ... the two witnesses, whose ministry begins with the coming of the seven endtime years of tribulation, are commissioned to strike the earth with plagues and droughts. They are commissioned to rebuke a lawless world, not to make disciples; for they will be “a torment to those who dwell on the earth” (Rev 11:10). They will be hated by the world, but hated most of all by those disciples who rebelled against God early into their ministry (2 Thess 2:3). Therefore, as the Lord supplied Elijah’s needs, God will supply the needs of these two witnesses.

But most individuals God has called work to make additional disciples for the Lord—and these additional disciples are to make additional disciples of all whom the Father has drawn from the world.

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*The reader shall read Luke chapter 19, verses 1 through 27.*

**Commentary:** The parable of the pounds [minas] should be kept in its context, that of Zacchaeus telling Christ that he would give half of his goods to the poor and if he had defrauded anyone [the likelihood of which was high], he would restore fourfold. Jesus told Zacchaeus that salvation had come to his house that day; that the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost (*vv.* 8-10). So seeking and saving what was lost is through salvation coming because the sinner acknowledges Christ Jesus, turns from his or her lawless ways, restores what he or she has wrongfully acquired, and freely gives to those who are in need.

When the disciples heard what Zacchaeus said and Jesus’ response, Jesus told the parable of pounds to address His disciples’ supposition that the kingdom of God was to appear upon Him entering Jerusalem. Jesus needed to firmly establish the concept that considerable time would pass between when He entered Jerusalem on the 10<sup>th</sup> of the first month of that year and when He would again enter Jerusalem on a white horse (Rev 19:11) on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the first month. And in the parable, He is the nobleman who went into a far country to receive a kingdom. He gave ten servants a coin each, and He told them to engage in business until He came again. But His citizens—the inhabitants of heavenly Jerusalem—would not have Him rule over them. They rebelled.

And endtime disciples see in the history of the Christian Church a repeat of ancient Israel's rebellion against God during the days of the judges, then again during the days of the kings of Judah and Israel. This rebellion will be repeated again 220 days into the seven endtime years of tribulation when the great falling away occurs.

The servants of the nobleman were to do business with what they received from the nobleman ... when Jesus' disciples came to Him and asked why He spoke in parables, Jesus told His disciples, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given" (Matt 13:11). The ten coins Christ left with His disciples is knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven—and each disciple received the same knowledge. Each was to engage in business with this knowledge, and when engaging in business with knowledge of the secrets of God, the disciple will make other disciples for Christ Jesus.

Doing business with knowledge of the secrets of God does not bring a monetary return, but brings additional disciples to Christ Jesus.

The Apostle Paul had been given knowledge of the secrets of God; he was called to carry the knowledge given him to the world, all of it. As such, his epistles are of far greater value than the fellowships of saints he began, fellowships that all left him while he yet lived (2 Tim 1:15) ... pause for a moment and consider the saints at Corinth, who would judge Paul if they could—to whom Paul makes a defense because they desired to examine him. Are those saints truly Paul's legacy to endtime disciples? Are not his epistles his legacy to the remnant of spiritually-circumcised Israel that left Babylon in the 16<sup>th</sup>-Century CE to begin a mental trek across the desert sands of a spiritual Iraq? When God delivered the Church into the hand of the Adversary, the spiritual king of Babylon, because of the lawlessness of the Church, He did in the heavenly realm what the Lord did in this physical realm during the days of the prophet Jeremiah (Jer 25:8-9). The Council of Nicea (ca 325 CE) served to formalize the Church's capitulation to the king of Babylon. And in this world, the Council at Nicea is still celebrated as a milestone of Christendom. It is, indeed, a milestone, but one that should be remembered with sadness and mourning.

The Christendom of this world—Roman Catholicism, Greek and Serbian and Russian Orthodoxy, Protestantism, all denominations that worship on the 8<sup>th</sup>-day—is the Christianity of spiritual Babylon ... as most of Israel remained in physical Babylon after a remnant returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the house of God, most of spiritually-circumcised Israel remained in spiritual Babylon after a remnant rushed out of the capital city of this world to journey toward heavenly Jerusalem, where work has only recently resumed on the spiritual house of God. Just as those natural Israelites who remained in Babylon were sons of Abraham, the spiritually-circumcised Israelites who remained in spiritual Babylon are sons of Abraham. They are sons of promise; they are today spiritual Isaac. But when they are "born" empowered by the Spirit of God at the beginning of the seven endtime years begin, they will comprise the hated son Esau. They will rebel against God, and they will cover themselves with their own bloody righteousness.

The Lord is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, not the God of Ishmael and Esau, also sons of Abraham.

Every disciple will give an accounting of what he or she has done with the person's knowledge of the secrets of God—and those who have taught a doctrine of lawlessness, regardless of the good works they have done in the name of Christ Jesus, will be denied

in their judgments (Matt 7:21-23); whereas those who have kept the commandments and have taught others to do likewise will be called great in the kingdom of heaven (Matt 5:19). So being called great by God has been, from the beginning, within the grasp of every disciple.

The Apostle Paul will be called great, even though his epistles are consistently used to support lawlessness. But Paul, even during his ministry, was and has been grossly misunderstood. When Paul returned to Jerusalem shortly before he was seized, he related the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry to James and all the elders present (Acts 21:19). “And when they [the elders] heard it [what Paul said], they glorified God. And they said to him, ‘You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed. They are zealous for the law, and they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or walk according to our custom’” (vv. 20-21).

From the above context and from Paul’s own epistles, textual evidence discloses that Paul did not teach Jews to forsake Moses. He, himself, did not forsake Moses (Acts 21:26). Rather, he understood that physical circumcision was a type and shadow of spiritual circumcision as the first Adam was a type and shadow of the last Adam (cf. Rom 5:14; 1 Cor 15:45). He understood that the mental journey of a Greek who left the landscape of his nativity by abstaining from sexual immorality, from sacrifices to idols, from meats strangled, and from blood, and trekked to the synagogue where he heard Moses read every Sabbath was as far as Abraham journeyed by faith from the geographical landscape of his nativity to Canaan, where he believed God that his seed would be like the stars in heaven. He understood that the Observant Jew who, by faith, professed that Jesus was Lord and believed that the Father had raised Jesus from the dead had mentally journeyed as far as Abraham journeyed. He understood that the temple and the priests were but copies and shadows of heavenly things (Heb 8:5). And this is what he taught to the saints at Corinth, from whom he took no support.

Paul taught the secret things of God because he was under compunction to do so (1 Cor 9:16); he was, literally, without a choice ... there will be those who say that of course Paul had a choice, but those who say such a thing speak from ignorance. They have not been called by God to a job, or they would not utter such ignorance; for those that have been called know that they have no more choice than Jonah had.

The person who preaches the gospel by choice will have a reward and will accumulate even greater rewards for forsaking the world and striving to make disciples for Christ Jesus; whereas the person called to a job will, in this world, receive those things necessary to do the work, and in the world to come, the wages for the job if the job has been well done. Therefore, because Paul taught under compunction, he could freely present the gospel to the saints at Corinth. God was obligated to provide for Paul’s needs. To fulfill this obligation, He could certainly have used the saints at Corinth, but He didn’t need to do so. Thus, Paul was free not to take what was rightfully his in the form of tithes and offerings from these saints. He could, by not taking moneys from them, establish an example for who have been genuinely called by God.

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*The reader shall now read 2 Corinthians chapter 11, verses 1 through 15.*

**Commentary:** How many have come into Christendom to lead astray disciples? There have always been more wolves than shepherds.

Christianity received and embraced a different Christ, a different gospel, a different spirit than the one Paul preached—and the Christian Church, like Israel of old who paid her lovers, has paid dearly to receive a false gospel from much ballyhooed super-apostles.

Paul wonders if he committed sin [a transgression of the law of God] by freely preaching the gospel of Christ to the saints at Corinth. He accepted support from other fellowships, so it wasn't that he refused support: "the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied [his] need" (v. 9).

However, Paul by refraining from burdening the saints at Corinth established the model or pattern for how genuine endtime teachers of Israel, called by God to a work, shall accomplish their work: by not asking for (but accepting when given) support, these genuine teachers of Israel undermine the claims of those who say they have been called by God to do a work, but who do not have their needs supplied by God. Those who claim they work on the same terms as those whom God has actually called to a work will ask for donations, will ask to receive the tithes and offering of disciples, will ask to be supported—but those who ask are "false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ" (v. 13). They are servants of Satan who have disguised themselves as servants of righteousness (v. 15).

The above is a harsh indictment of men and women who, through ignorance, ask disciples to support them since they believe they are doing a work for God. Prime examples of this are the splintered churches of God derived from Herbert Armstrong's mid 20<sup>th</sup>-Century work. Although these ministries, like Armstrong's before them, freely give literature to all who ask, they [like Armstrong] milk their fellowships for very cent they can, even to asking disciples to borrow monies to support their evangelistic efforts. That is not right. It wasn't right 70 years ago; it is even less correct now. Nevertheless, these ministries count income as if counting coup. Millions are spent to produce very little. But because the millions are spent, these ministries believe and teach that they are doing a work for God. In reality, they work to provide for themselves jobs and paychecks. They do not work as Paul did.

By retaining his right to be supported but by refraining to burden the saints at Corinth, Paul established the terms by which all persons called by God to a work will conduct that work. They will work with their hands, and they will accept what support that is given, but they will not burden anyone by demanding tithes and offerings from those to whom they minister. They are lawful recipients of tithes and offerings, but because God called these individuals to the work they do, God has committed Himself to provide for them, whether through the sale of the work of their hands or whether by inspiring others to contribute to them. And because those whom God has called to a work have no choice about what they do, they are able to freely give to disciples those secrets of the kingdom of heaven with which they have been entrusted.

If a ministry asks you for "God's tithe," flee from that ministry. It is not of God, but of this world.

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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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