

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 hindering little children.

Weekly Readings For the Sabbath of December 13, 2008

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.

Last week, in western Kenya *The Philadelphia Church — Lake Victoria*, under the tutelage of Jacob Akal, held a seminar to which other Sabbatarian disciples were invited. Discussion of *Philadelphia's* Statement of Beliefs and Bylaws occupied more than a day of the four-day seminar, as did the character of the one who pastors. Some disciples formerly attending with LCG fellowships joined with Jacob, who also wrote, “[O]n the final day of seminar, we baptized one person from Hombay, by the name Joseph Owili who was a member of Church of the Nazarene; this man accepted the gospel of Jesus Christ.” So the seminar was successful.

Jacob wrote (his grammar usage standardized), “This seminar should also [be] organized in Uganda, Tanzania, Burundi and Rwanda, if possible. On the final day we had our friend from Uganda also attending the seminar. We need to be having serious prayers for most churches of God, more so [for] those who propagate the Armstrong teachings; they inflict wrong teachings to people, the Africans” (e-mail to *Philadelphia*; Dec 10, 2008). And it is here where this Sabbath reading shall begin.

*

The person conducting the service should read or assign to be read Acts chapters 15 & 16.

Commentary: Note especially, Acts 16, verses 25 through 34 ... when the Philippian jailer asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved,” Paul answered, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.’ And they [Paul and Silas] spoke the word of the Lord to him [the jailer] and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family” (16:30–33).

How much instruction did the jailer and those of his household receive before being baptized? An hour's worth? Certainly not much more than an hour's worth if he was baptized in the same hour that he, the jailer, dressed Paul and Silas' wounds; so with, say, an hour's worth of instruction, the jailer and those of his household were baptized and became members of the Church of God.

How much about God did the jailer really know?

The jailer and those of his household could not have known much, truly. There is no indication that the jailer was a Jew; every indication is that he was not. But the intensity of the earthquake that opened the doors of the prison, along with Paul and Silas not fleeing when the chance was presented to them was enough to convince the jailer that Paul and Silas served God. The earthquake and Paul and Silas not fleeing convicted the jailer of the “rightness” of what Paul and Silas taught. And because Paul and Silas remained when they had the chance to flee, the jailer and those of his household were added to the household of God as firstborn sons.

Pause for a moment: how many Sabbatarians, if jailed and the jail doors were miraculously opened, would stick around and be able to answer the question, *What must I do to be saved?* How many Sabbatarian disciples would say to a person such as the jailer that the person must accept the doctrines of the disciple’s particular fellowship and must complete a certain number of correspondence course lessons and must jumped through this hoop or that hoop so that the new convert doesn’t besmirch the fellowship before baptizing the person? Certainly, this is the case with the United Church of God, an International Association (UCG), which in its July 2002 issue of *United News* said that potential members were beginning to come from a two-plus year process that involved receiving all 12 lessons of UCG’s Bible Study Course (one lesson a month) and an additional 12 months of UCG’s fundamental belief sermon tapes and tapes of 22 *Good News* radio programs, plus related booklets. Then, quoting from the *United News*, July 2002 article, the new convert would have his or her name passed along:

[point 7] At the end of this year of monthly tape packages that has included the above tapes, they [potential members] then must have specifically requested to receive contact information for the pastor and/or congregation nearest them, or to have the closest pastor contact them, or to receive tapes from a congregation (or some combination of the three) for *the local pastor to receive their names from the home office*. At that point they are also encouraged to participate in the Bible Reading Program and are offered a subscription to World News and Prophecy, which more than 90 percent of respondents are requesting some already receive it by virtue of being a donor or coworker). We think this information should alleviate concerns that these people are too new or not knowledgeable of what we teach. They have actually been through an extensive two-year program that has exposed them to virtually all of our doctrines, and they have had to respond to at least five separate offers from us to get to the point of requesting local tapes. Anyone who neglected to respond to even a single one of the five offers has been dropped from the process and never made it this far. (emphasis added)

Two years pass before local pastors receive the name of someone in the pastors’ area who is interested in hearing the gospel of Christ? Two years of learning and jumping through hoops—what UCG wrote is spiritually criminal, especially considering that Paul baptized the Philippian jailer after less than an hour of instruction. And after probably even less instruction, Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26–38), who most likely was a Jew even though he would have been excluded from the Congregation of Israel because of his mutilation.

Spiritually, there is no justification for requiring that a potential member jump through two years of hoops before the local pastor receives the potential member's name. If there were a court that had the authority to prosecute an indictment of theological malpractice, UCG would be convicted by its own testimony, and prevented from teaching until Christ Jesus returns.

Yet it was the low bar set for Gentile converts by the Jerusalem Conference that directly led to the demise of the 1st-Century Church, a claim asserting that the visible modern Church is not of Christ Jesus but of the Adversary and is an extension of Greek paganism. This claim will be disputed by the synagogue of Satan, yet there can be no legitimate dispute about the facts:

1. The Church [ἐκκλησίαν] was initially identified as the sect [αἰρέσεως] of the Nazarenes;
2. When Paul was on trial before Felix at Caesarea, Tertullus accused Paul of being a ringleader for “the sect [αἰρέσεως] of the Nazarenes” (Acts 24:5);
3. The Sadducees were also described as a sect [αἵρεσιν] (Acts 5:17), as were the Pharisees [αἰρέσεως] (Acts 15:5 – αἵρεσιν was used by Paul in Acts 26:5);
4. The early Church functioned as a competing sect of Judaism within greater Judaism, and its assemblies were meetings of a newly formed synagogue;
5. The Church did not begin on that day of Pentecost following Calvary as is often taught; rather, it began when Jesus was resurrected from the dead and ascended to the Father, then returned to breathe on ten of His disciples, saying, “Receive the Holy Spirit [πνεῦμα ἅγιον]” (John 20:22).
6. When Jesus breathed on the disciples, thereby directly transferring to them the Holy Spirit, He formed a new synagogue; for according to the Mishnah's requirements a new synagogue could be formed anywhere by ten male Jews.
7. The ten upon whom Jesus breathed were a newly formed synagogue that “with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer [προσευχῆ]” (Acts 1:14 – cf. Acts 16:13, 16) ... the Greek word used by Luke is also the word used for the regular prayer assemblies of the synagogue.
8. Linguistically, the disciples of Jesus were (and functioned as) a synagogue within greater Judaism. In practices and traditions, Jesus' disciples were a synagogue within greater Judaism, a synagogue circumcised of heart, not necessarily in the flesh.

Today, the visible Christian Church could not and would not identify itself as a sect of Judaism; yet the Church or assembly of Christ that constitutes the Body of Christ is a circumcised-of-heart sect of Judaism, said without apologies, for no arguments are needed. It is the assemblies of the synagogue of Satan that have to explain why they assemble on Sunday rather than on the Sabbath; why they teach disciples not to keep the commandments; why they ignore the high Sabbaths of God; why they eat unclean meats; why they teach that human beings have immortal souls; why they deny that being born-of-spirit is an actual second birth. It is the assemblies of the synagogue of Satan that have to explain their dogmas and traditions before man and God—

Peter said of Paul's epistles, “[T]he ignorant and unstable twist [them] to their own destruction, as they do other Scriptures” (2 Pet 3:16). Peter goes on to tell disciples, “You, therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability” (v. 17).

It is the spiritually ignorant that practice lawlessness.

Despite Peter's warning about lawless people twisting Paul's epistles to their own destruction; despite Paul warning, "For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work" (2 Thess 2:7); despite Jesus warning, "And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold" (Matt 24:12) — despite Jesus saying, "If you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words" (John 5:46–47), and "“If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead”" (Luke 16:31) — despite Jesus saying, "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) — despite Paul writing to Timothy, "You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me" (2 Tim 1:15), the visible Christian Church continues to turn away from Paul, from Peter, from Moses, from Jesus until it is not, today, even within hailing range of Judaism.

When Paul defended himself before Festus, he argued, "Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I committed any offense" (Acts 25:8).

The assemblies of the synagogue of Satan commit offenses against the law, against the temple (now, the Body of Christ), and against Christ daily. The only authority these assemblies obey is their lord and master, the prince of this world who disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:15).

It is not the Body of Christ that has to explain itself, but rather the usurper, the synagogue of Satan. The Body of Christ died as Jesus' physical body died. And as Jesus' physical body suffered no corruption but was resurrected after the third day, Jesus' spiritual Body will suffer no corruption when it is resurrected from death after the third day; i.e., when it is resurrected at the second Passover. The gates of Hades will not prevail against the Body of Christ: as the grave could not prevail over Jesus' physical body, the gates of Hades will not prevail over His spiritual Body, the Church.

Jesus' Body began as a sect of Judaism, and it will always be the defining sect of Judaism; for the prophet Jeremiah records, "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will punish all those who are circumcised merely in the flesh ... all the house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart" (9:25–26). It wasn't the sect of the Pharisees or the sect of the Sadducees or the sect of the Herodians that was circumcised of heart. It was only the sect of the Nazarenes; for Paul wrote, "For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter" (Rom 2:28–29). Elsewhere, Paul wrote, "But the righteousness based on faith says" (Rom 10:6), and he goes on to quote from Deuteronomy 30:11–14, thereby identifying the Moab covenant (Deut chap 29–32) as the *righteousness based on faith*, for it is an act of faith to return to God when in a far land (*cf.* Deut 30:1–2; Rom 9:31–32) and without faith no one can please God.

It is an act of faith to begin keeping the commandments when the person has previously lived as a son of disobedience (Eph 2:3), consigned to disobedience (Rom 11:32). It takes no faith to continue living in disobedience. No journey of faith equivalent to Abraham's physical journey of faith is undertaken when a new convert invites Jesus into the person's heart but continues to live as a Gentile. The heart is not cleansed so that it can be spiritually circumcised. The person neither mentally nor physically leaves the filth in which this convert has physically dwelt; for evidence of making a journey of faith for a Gentile will be manifested in keeping the Sabbaths of God while living as a

spiritual Judean (for an Observant natural Jew, evidence is in professing that Jesus is lord and believing that the Father raised Jesus from the dead). So the heart is cleansed and circumcised when the Gentile convert—the Greek who has previously been living as a Greek—abstains “from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood” (Acts 15:20). Doing these four things is enough to cause a Greek to cease living as a Greek. And as James goes on to say, such a Greek will learn whatever else he or she needs to know by hearing Moses read every Sabbath (v. 21).

But the child of a “Christian” should not be living as a Greek, and makes no journey of faith if the child as an adult continues in the beliefs and practices of his or her parents. Nevertheless, before the heart of this child is cleansed, the child when mature must make a journey of faith that takes the child as far beyond the beliefs of his or her parents as Abraham geographically journeyed beyond the land of Haran where Terah, Abraham’s father, remained and died.

Matthew records, “Then children were brought to him [Jesus] that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, but Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven’” (Matt 19:13–14 *et al*) — and it was this passage that 16th-Century Radical Reformers could not well address when Huldrych Zwingli (dod 11.10.1531) used it against their argument for *Believers’ Baptism*: Zwingli contended that not baptizing infants was hindering children from coming to Jesus, but typologically, the physical “little children” who came to the physical man Jesus represented or are analogous to newly born-of-spirit sons-of-God coming to the glorified Jesus. Spiritually, hindering infants from coming to Jesus is nothing more than requiring converts to jump through two years worth of hoops before the local pastor receives the convert’s name. UCG hinders born-of-spirit sons of God from coming to Christ, an accusation UCG will have to address when judgments are revealed.

So there is no mistake: the person or the fellowship that would require a new convert to do more than to cease living as a son of disobedience hinders the infant son of God from coming to the glorified Jesus. UCG is a fellowship that (by UCG’s policies expressed in its July 2002 *United News* publication) hinders infant sons of God from coming to Christ. And no fellowship of *Philadelphia* should ever establish a barricade of hoops through which an infant of son must jump before being baptized. If Paul and Silas could, in an hour, give to the Philippian jailer enough instruction to baptize the jailer and those of his household, and if Philip could give to the Ethiopian eunuch enough instruction to baptize the eunuch in, probably, less than an hour, then a legitimate teacher of God should be able to give to any infant son of God enough instruction to baptize the new son of God in approximately an hour, said with the caveat that the one seeking instruction has truly been born of spirit as a son of God and is not seeking instruction as a religious hobbyist.

How long does it take to determine if a person has been born of spirit? Paul gives the answer: “For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot” (Rom 8:7).

- If a new convert submits to God’s law, meaning that this convert begins to keep the commandments, all of them, then the convert’s mind is no longer hostile to God. The convert will have submitted to God’s law. The convert has

been born of spirit, for since Cornelius the Holy Spirit has been given prior to baptism.

- Whether a convert remains faithful to God is a matter between the convert and Christ Jesus, for the convert will learn all that the convert needs to know by hearing Moses read each Sabbath.
- If the convert hears Moses read every Sabbath, the convert will also hear the words that Jesus spoke (again, John 5:46–47) every Sabbath.
- If the convert doesn't hear Moses read on the Sabbath, if the convert is taught to erase the laws of God that have been written on the heart and the mind, then the fellowship which the convert attends will kill this infant son of God as ancient Israel killed its firstborns by passing them through fire offered to Molech.

The person who makes no journey of faith does not cleanse the heart and the person's heart will not be circumcised ... the person who was far from God and who by faith comes close to God through loving the Lord with heart and mind, keeping the commandments and all that is written in the book of Deuteronomy (Deut 30:1–2, 10), makes a journey of faith that cleanses the heart. However, the person who grows to maturity in a household that has come close to God; the person who makes no journey of faith but continues in the practices and beliefs of the household in which this person grew to maturity does not cleanse his or her heart so that it can be circumcised. This person's mind will be set on the flesh, and this person cannot please God until a journey of faith is undertaken, the heart cleansed and circumcised.

Returning now to the former criticism of the Jerusalem Council's decision: what wasn't made clear by the Jerusalem conference was that the decision by the elders of the Church pertained to Gentile converts whose hearts were already cleansed (Acts 15:9) by having made a journey of faith. The decision did not pertain to children of Gentile converts, but to what was required of Greeks before they could begin to hear Moses read every Sabbath. Yet the decision was taken to mean that only four things were required of Christians: abstaining from sexual immorality, things offered to idols, meats strangled (so as to retain the blood), and blood. And it is this false application of the decision that has resulted in the synagogue of Satan being called Christian, as well as Sabbatarian fellowships setting before converts a barricade of loops through which converts must jump.

A problem truly exists in trying to teach a fellowship in which some disciples have much knowledge and some disciples have very little knowledge. What's said will inevitably offend someone, or be misunderstood by someone; so great care and wisdom is required of the one who teaches. This care in teaching will probably result in incorporating those who have knowledge into the teaching of those who lack knowledge as should be done, thereby spreading the teaching burden to many instead of leaving this burden on a few.

Jacob wrote, "I tend to have this in mind: let's have some durations to give people who want to join God's church to take before they be members" (e-mail Dec 10, 2008). Jacob sees a need for basic instruction prior to permitting disciples recognition as members.

A pastor's need to give instruction before a convert becomes part of *Philadelphia* is a real need, but that need exists in tension with the convert's need to be included in an assembly as soon as possible ... the phrase *exists in tension* might not be understood by

those *Philadelphians* whose first language is not English: what is meant is that both needs are real, legitimate, and must be accommodated. So Jacob's need to provide basic instruction to Kenyans before they become members of the household of God coexists with infant sons-of-God's (dwelling in the fleshly tents of Kenyans) need to be included in services, where they will hear Moses read and the words of Jesus every Sabbath.

Because *Philadelphia* is a worldwide work consisting of many fully autonomous fellowships, no standard other than seen in Scripture for how much instruction is given prior to baptism and inclusion into the household of God can be established. If a pastor sincerely believes that considerable instruction is necessary and if the pastor can honestly reconcile how the pastor teaches converts with the models seen in Scripture, then the pastor has the authority of Scripture behind the pastor to continue to do as the pastor is doing. But if, as in the case of UCG, a fellowship establishes a barricade of hoops that hinders infant sons of God from coming to Christ, then the fellowship is wrong! The fellowship will not be blessed by God (although the fellowship might well receive favor from the prince of this world in that the fellowship keeps infant sons of God away from Christ Jesus).

The person who earnestly desires to keep the commandments when not having previously done so should be baptized and included in the household of God. The person who has previously been keeping the commandments but keeping them without spiritual understanding presents a situation different from the one addressed in the Jerusalem conference. This person might or might not take considerable instruction before the person begins to think spiritually and ceases to think physically. This person will be more difficult to instruct, for inevitably, the person will think that he or she understands Scripture when the person has no understanding. Therefore, to keep this person from harming infant sons of God, withholding permission to attend with a fellowship might be justified—but only in cases in which the person shows that the person isn't willing to remain silent and learn but wants to propagate his or her own ideas. Otherwise, allow the person who wants to learn into the fellowship so that the person can learn. No pastor should hinder a little one (a new believer) from coming to God. No pastor should be fitted for a millstone around the pastor's neck.

The models seen in Scripture are that a small amount of instruction is necessary before baptizing a convert. This small amount of instruction should be one-on-one. The person being instructed should feel free to ask questions. And baptism should not be withheld once the person understands that the person comes under judgment with inclusion into the household of God, with grace covering sins for as long as the convert strives to walk uprightly before God. Grace does not cover the person who is a willing bondservant of sin; i.e., who continues to sin as in continuing to transgress the Sabbath commandment.

Jacob's zeal for God in the Lake Victoria region of Kenya comes at a time when he faces personal tragedy, the loss of a still-born child. He has unmet hospital expenses that will slow his efforts to teach—he is learning what Paul and others before him have learned: the prince of this world appears as an angel of light but is truly evil.

*

The person conducting the Sabbath service should close services with two hymns, or psalms, followed by a prayer asking God's dismissal.

* * * * *

"Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright ©2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved."

[[Home](#)] [[Sabbath Readings](#)]