

Every week thousands of true believers assemble on God's Sabbath and honor the King of the Universe. This day pictures a time when a world bent on its own destruction will be rescued from itself, and the misery it has created will be replaced with unimaginable peace and prosperity.

But is it possible that many of God's children have lost sight of the great purpose pictured by the Sabbath? Has this day simply become a time for comfort and convenience? Has it become a day to enjoy personal pleasures disguised as spiritual activities?

Just how serious are you when it comes to this profound commandment? Do you respect God's word regarding His Sabbath? Or, do you see the Sabbath as YOUR day?

“Then the Lord said unto Moses, ‘Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, THAT I MAY PROVE THEM, whether they will walk in my law, or no.’”

Exodus 16:4

A Sabbath Test

Third Edition

By

Art Braidic & Dennis Fischer

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Special Notice

This is the last edition of *A Sabbath Test* written and published with the full consent of the original authors. Subsequent versions offered by others have been significantly compromised and do not reflect the original content espoused by both Art Braidic and Dennis Fischer.

Dear Friends,

The words you are about to read address one of the most important issues facing the churches of God today. It is an issue that has been at the center of controversy among leaders and members alike with no apparent resolution. Sadly, some have tried to dismiss it as insignificant or unimportant. Others have called it a minor point, a twig—not worthy of risking the possible division it might bring upon the church. But there are some who recognize this issue as a matter of great importance—one that must be seriously addressed by God’s people. They see it as a line in the sand drawn by none other than God Himself.

The subject of *buying* and *selling* on the Sabbath is addressed with considerable force in the scriptures, yet for the most part it has been ignored by some of the premier leaders in God’s Church today. Why? What does the Bible say about purchasing goods and services on the Sabbath and holy days? What about going to restaurants? Does this activity go contrary to God’s clear instructions as set forth in His word? Or can such a practice actually enhance this day?

A Test Commandment

Today, many in the Churches of God consider the Sabbath a “test commandment.” It is a day that can challenge the very faith of those who profess a loyalty to the God of the Bible. For some, that test has been at the center of many very difficult moments. Many have lost jobs over it. Others have lost family relationships and the respect of friends. Today, almost every Sabbath-keeper has a story regarding a Sabbath trial.

Tragically, the Sabbath is, for all practical purposes, ignored by the entire world, including the vast majority of professing Christians. Some have even applied tremendous personal pressure on those few who take seriously God’s instructions concerning this day.

Down through the ages, most true believers have suffered great persecution for honoring the fourth commandment. Many have been publicly ridiculed and scorned. Others have been ostracized from society. Some have suffered excruciating torture and even death for refusing to compromise their commitment to keeping holy the day God set apart. These heroes demonstrated tremendous faith, believing that no price was too high to pay for the privilege of honoring God’s Sabbath!

But what about His people today? Do they view the Sabbath with the same profound reverence as the great champions of faith down through the ages? Do God’s people in our modern world truly honor the Sabbath and sincerely strive to “keep it holy”?

Most would probably answer “yes” to these questions. After all, every Sabbath, God’s people attend services, listen to sermons, fellowship with brethren, and even serve in their local congregations. Furthermore, many of them dedicate more time to prayer and Bible study on this day than any other. Thus they are convinced that their Sabbath-keeping honors the Great God of heaven. But is this really true? The words that follow proclaim that there is more to honoring the fourth commandment than many may have realized. Furthermore, these words reveal that some of God’s people, including His leaders, have carelessly drifted into a wrong practice—one that seriously undermines the proper observance of this day. This practice can take many forms. However, its most prominent is dining out at a restaurant on God’s Sabbath.

Sharing a Sabbath meal at a restaurant has become very popular in God’s Church today. Most people don’t give it a second thought. They simply take it for granted. After all, it is so simple and convenient. For many it can even be a festive activity where people enjoy the companionship of family and friends.

Tragically, this practice can actually threaten the very faith God's people cherish so deeply. Furthermore, it can also make a profound statement regarding how seriously we view the Great God of heaven. These words may sound severe, but what you are about to read will bear them out.

This book is written in two parts. *Part I* presents seven Biblical keys proving that God's people are commanded to refrain from buying and selling in any form (even purchasing food) on His Sabbath. *Part II* examines seven popular arguments advanced by those who find this practice appropriate and provides a compelling rebuttal to each argument.

As you proceed through each part, it is important to understand that the authors are not trying to judge God's people. This booklet is not an attempt to condemn the wonderful community of believers who are called according to His purpose. Instead, it is written with the profound hope that these believers will carefully examine their approach to a day God Himself calls "HOLY." It is intended to challenge you to consider your attitude as well as your behavior concerning the fourth commandment. It asks one very important question concerning your obedience.

What price are you willing to pay?

A Sabbath Test

Part I

“Seven Biblical Keys”

Why God’s People Should
Refrain from Going to Restaurants
on the Sabbath and Holy Days

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Introduction

A Worldly Tradition

“Wherefore come out from among them,
and be you separate, says the Lord...”

2 Corinthians 6:17

In the professing Christian world, there is a very popular tradition that takes place every Sunday—one that is practiced by virtually millions of churchgoers throughout the United States. This tradition is simple but very telling. It begins when the “believer” will wake up, prepare the family for church, then drive off to a sanctuary of his or her choice. There, services will last between one and two hours. After services and some brief fellowship, the family will leave the sanctuary to pursue any one of a variety of recreational activities.

Included among these activities is going to a restaurant and sharing a delicious brunch with family and friends. What could be more enjoyable? The picture of a Sunday brunch after church is something that could fill a Norman Rockwell painting. But is there something wrong with this picture?

To those familiar with God’s Sabbath and holy days, one particular error is easy to detect. That error is the day Protestants keep as their day of worship. The Bible clearly identifies the seventh day (Saturday) as God’s true Sabbath, not Sunday, as so many assume. The true Sabbath was created by God Himself at the very beginning when Adam and Eve were less than one day old (Gen. 2:2-3). Additionally, the scriptures make it clear that this day was created for a special purpose – a purpose linked to a great Plan God has for all mankind.

The Bible also indicates that God’s true Sabbath has been honored by the great heroes of faith down through the ages. Moses kept it. King David and the prophet Samuel kept it. Ezra and Nehemiah kept it. John the Baptist kept it. Joseph and Mary kept it. Peter, James, and John, as well as all of the apostles kept it. Paul and the New Testament church, including the Gentile churches, kept it. Jesus kept the Sabbath. Additionally, the Bible reveals that God Himself rested on this day. The point here is that the Sabbath is alive and well, and has been so throughout human history. Furthermore, God’s Sabbath is still honored by His true church today.

But is there something else wrong with this “Norman Rockwell” picture? Is there an error that is more subtle—one that even God’s true church today may be committing? Is our observance of the Sabbath beginning to resemble the way Protestants observe Sunday? Is the Sabbath simply a day to get together with God’s people and enjoy a little “R&R,” or is there more to honoring this time God called “holy”?

A Day of Recreation

In the Protestant world, recreation is as much a part of their day of worship as any sermon given at church. Additionally, Sunday brunch at a local restaurant has established itself as one of the most popular traditions practiced by those who consider themselves Bible “believers.”

But what does the Bible say about such a tradition? Additionally, how does God’s true church view this practice? Is it a harmless activity? Or is it a dangerous sin, disguised as harmless? Furthermore, has this tradition captured those whom God has called according to His purpose and as a result placed them in grave danger? At the center of this great debate, one question stands as paramount.

What does God Almighty think of this tradition?

The Sabbath is a critical part of God’s great moral code, the Ten Commandments. Each of these wonderful laws reflects the very mind of God Himself and was written personally by Him (Ex. 31:18). It is

also important to understand that God's word provides very specific instructions concerning how His Sabbath is to be kept. It outlines appropriate as well as inappropriate activities for this day.

The following are seven Biblical truths that reveal how the God of the Bible views His Sabbath as well as how He desires it to be understood by His people. Specifically addressed is the issue of going to restaurants on His day. However, it will be easy to see that these keys address many other aspects concerning how God's people are to "remember the Sabbath and keep it holy." Each truth is presented as an argument for God's word to stand as the unimpeachable authority on this subject. Therefore, human reasoning does not take center stage in these keys. God's wisdom is what is sought – and His spirit will reveal His understanding.

The First Key God's Sabbath is Holy

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy"

Exodus 20:8

The Sabbath rest is so important to God that He established it on the seventh day of creation. It was actually a part of His creation. God made the Sabbath. It just didn't happen by chance. By this creative act, the Great Sustainer of all that exists concluded the beginning of man's extraordinary journey on this planet. He also indelibly stamped this day with a "mark" of spiritual perfection. The Bible reveals that this mark will have a profound effect on God's people and their ultimate destiny.

The Sabbath was designed to be a weekly memorial of God's physical as well as His spiritual creation. In a very real sense, it is a continual reminder of the Creator and His plan for man. Because of this, God made the Sabbath *holy*. The book of Genesis reveals that when doing so, He integrated spiritual properties into this day—properties that would make this day unique. Notice what God's word says about the creation of the very first holy day, the Sabbath.

On the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day and *sanctified* it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made. (Gen. 2:2)

The word "sanctified" in this verse is very interesting. Literally translated it means "to consecrate" or "to purify." In other words, God set this day apart from all other days and when doing so He placed His blessing on it. He made it HOLY!

The Bible declares the Sabbath is a sacred day—and not one to be taken lightly. God Himself "hallowed" it. Notice what He revealed about His Sabbath when presenting the fourth commandment to His servant Moses:

For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and *hallowed* it. (Ex. 20:11)

When God created the Sabbath He elevated it to a special state—He made it HOLY. Only God has the power to make something HOLY, and when He does, it is SACRED and PURE. It reflects the qualities of God Himself. At this point, man can do one of two things: he can honor what God has set apart as HOLY, or he can PROFANE it.

Why Did God Sanctify the Sabbath?

The Bible makes it absolutely clear that God set the Sabbath day apart from all other days—He "blessed" the Sabbath and "hallowed" it. But why would He do such a thing? What purpose could God possibly have for making one day of the week different from every other day? And why would He make this day *holy*? Why would the Great Creator place His blessing on it? God's word answers these questions and in doing so reveals why His people should have such a profound respect for this day.

When speaking to the children of Israel, God declared that His Sabbath was a sign between Him and His people. Notice what He says about this sign.

Verily my Sabbaths you shall keep: for it is a **sign** between me and you throughout your generations... (Ex. 31:13)

The word “sign” in this verse is used several times throughout the Bible when describing the Sabbath. It comes from the Hebrew word *owth* and can be translated as “*signal*,” “*beacon*,” “*evidence*,” or “*mark*.” It is a term of profound strength and significance. Here God is saying that His Sabbath is a link between His people and their God. Additionally, the Great Creator reveals that He made the Sabbath so that man would know Him. But there is more to this extraordinary day. Later in this same verse, God states that His Sabbath points to a remarkable hope regarding God’s plan for mankind. Notice what He says.

...that you might know that I am the God that doth **sanctify you**. (Ex. 31:13)

Notice the power of these words. With them God is revealing that He made the Sabbath holy because it is to stand as evidence that He intends to do the very same thing to His earthly family. God’s plan for mankind is that they will also be holy. God set apart the Sabbath so that man could know that He has also set apart His people.

Ultimately, the fulfillment of this holy purpose will take place when God’s children are born into His Family as literal sons and daughters. When describing this birth, the apostle John proclaimed that God’s family would be just like Him.

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, *we shall be like him*; for we shall see him as he is. (1Jn. 3:2)

Imagine being like the God who made the universe. Imagine possessing His love, His virtue, and His wisdom. But that is exactly what is going to happen to those who yield to His authority. The apostle Peter wrote that we are to be partakers of the very nature of God himself (2Pe. 1:4). This is the destiny that awaits all of God’s people. Furthermore, it is a destiny pictured by His Sabbath.

A Gateway to Holiness

The Bible reveals that God wants His people to be holy even as He is holy (1Pe. 1:15-16). The Sabbath is a gateway into that holiness. It is a link between corruptible man and an incorruptible God. It stands as proof that God will deliver on His promise to bring a great Kingdom to this earth. God has also promised that His saints will rule with Jesus Christ in that Kingdom (Dan. 7:18).

When God’s people honor His Sabbath, they are not simply obeying a command, they are declaring their desire to be the recipients of that promise. In other words, by keeping the Sabbath holy, every child of God is not only saying, “Thy kingdom come,” but also, “Your will be done in me.”

This being the case, every true believer should show great deference to the day that points to their part in eternity itself. Their conduct on the Sabbath should reflect a dignity befitting a king or priest commissioned to serve in that Kingdom (Rev. 5:10). That behavior should not be common or profane, but rather filled with virtue and godliness. Every future leader in God’s Kingdom should reflect a great respect for the wisdom that imagined this day at the very beginning. Their conduct should make it clear that the Sabbath is different. It is not a worldly day. It is a Godly *sign*.

Remember the Sabbath

The scriptures reveal that while the descendants of Israel were in the Sinai Desert, God commanded them to “remember the Sabbath” (Ex. 20:8). However, equally important to God is that His people know HOW to “remember the Sabbath.” God wants us to HONOR and RESPECT this day, not simply be aware of when it takes place. After all, most Bible scholars know that God’s Sabbath falls on the seventh day, they simply do not keep that day holy. They profane the day God “sanctified.”

However, God's people must be different and their conduct on the Sabbath must also be different. That conduct should reflect an understanding that the Sabbath is unique. It is a day with great purpose—a HOLY purpose.

The Sabbath Belongs to God

The Bible makes it clear that the Sabbath is God's day. It is called the Sabbath of the Eternal. God repeatedly refers to it as "My Sabbath" (Ezk. 20:12-24). The point here is that the seventh day belongs to God and as such it is not to be contaminated by man. Everything we do on this day should be directed toward our Father in heaven and His purpose for us.

At this point, it is important to understand a profound truth about God's Sabbath day. Contrary to popular belief, this day is *not* about relaxation and comfort. It is *not* about personal pleasure. The Sabbath is about connection and spiritual rejuvenation. It is about *holiness*. God's word is clear and direct: His Sabbath is HOLY.

Tragically, there are some who sincerely believe that they can engage in certain pleasures on this day. One such pleasure is dining out at a restaurant on a Friday evening or Saturday afternoon. Some leaders in God's Church have even suggested that such a practice can actually picture God's millennial Kingdom.

However, this thinking is a grave mistake. In reality, going to a restaurant on the Sabbath does not honor this day, it actually profanes it. It embraces one of the most popular traditions of the secular world. If one truly desired to picture the millennium on the Sabbath, he would never dine out. WHY? Because it *doesn't* picture the millennium at all. In the millennium there will be no restaurants operating on the Sabbath. At that time all people will honor this day as God commands.

A Millennial Government

In this context, consider that Jesus Christ will soon return in all His glory to govern the earth as its God King. At that time, He will rule with a rod of iron (Rev. 19:15), and the saints will share rulership with Him (Rev. 20:3-4). This being the case, what will these resurrected saints teach the world about going to restaurants on the Sabbath? The answer is obvious. They will teach God's truth regarding this wonderful day. Furthermore, they will correct anyone ever attempting to engage in such a practice.

This being the case, how could God's Royal Family (Rev. 5:10) teach others *not* to go to restaurants on the Sabbath, if in their lifetime, they frequented such establishments—In the name of God's Kingdom no less? It just doesn't make sense. It is a total contradiction.

A Millennial Lesson on Sabbath Dining

To illustrate this point, consider the following. Imagine the time when God's kingdom is established on earth. Its citizens will be comprised of those who survived the horrible devastation that took place during the last days. These citizens will know nothing of God's law or His plan for man.

However, it is now time for them to be taught these great truths by God's resurrected saints. With this in mind, imagine that you are commissioned to teach these people about the Sabbath. As the lesson begins, one of them asks you the following question. "If it was wrong for me to work in a restaurant on the Sabbath, why did you permit me to work for you?" Now imagine that Jesus Christ is standing next to you as you prepare to respond. After all, He is the Lord of the Sabbath (Mk. 2:28). He should be very interested in what you have to say. This being the case, how would you answer this question? What would you tell this young millennial citizen?

At this point, it is important to understand that God's people today are ambassadors of His soon-coming Kingdom. They represent its ways and its laws. In a very real sense, their lives proclaim the gospel. By their example, God's people act out His Kingdom every day, including the Sabbath. The truth is that if a representative of God's Kingdom went to a restaurant on His Sabbath or holy day, that person

would be engaging in a practice that contradicts the very Kingdom he or she represents. To do so would be nothing short of rank hypocrisy.

However, it does not have to be that way. God's people not only proclaim their faith by what they do, but also by what they do not do. Refraining from dining out on the Sabbath can make a powerful statement about the God we serve and the Kingdom we represent. To illustrate this point consider a different conversation with a citizen of the millennium. Imagine this citizen asking one of the saints the following. "When I worked at a restaurant I would often see you. I even waited on you occasionally. However, I never saw you on the Sabbath or holy days. Why?"

A Wonderful Lesson

Imagine the wonderful lesson that could be taught to this potential child of God. Perhaps you could begin by explaining why the Eternal instructed the ancient nation of Israel to make sure no one worked on their behalf on His Sabbath—including their servants and even the unbeliever. You might actually quote the very words of God himself when giving the fourth commandment. Notice what He said.

Keep the Sabbath day to sanctify it, as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work: But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God: in it you shall not do any work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your ox, nor your ass, nor any of your cattle, nor the stranger that is within your gates; *that your manservant and your maidservant may rest as well as you.* (Dt. 5:12-14)

At this point, you might explain why God would insist that servants were to be released from working on the Sabbath. After all, God clearly commanded this to be done. The question is why? It is no small matter that God provided the answer.

And remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord your God brought you out thence through a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm: therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath holy. (Dt. 5:15)

Notice what God is revealing to Israel in this verse. Immediately after instructing them to not compel servants or strangers to work on His Sabbath, He tells them why. It is because they (the Israelites) were once enslaved. Imagine what is being conveyed by this Great Law-giver. Israel was enslaved by a nation that had no clue regarding the true God. Egypt worshiped idols. This pagan nation practiced a faith that was light years from that described in the pages of your Bible. Furthermore, it did so because it did not know better. Tragically, when the Israelites lived in Egypt, they eventually lost the faith that filled the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. As a result, they too, engaged in the same idolatry as their masters.

But now they were free—because God had made them free. He personally delivered them from the bondage inflicted on them by a godless society. But what does this have to do with God's people today?

Deliverance from Egypt

The scriptures reveal that just as the children of Israel were enslaved in Egypt until God miraculously delivered them, those whom He has called in this present age were also once enslaved in spiritual Egypt. God's people today were once in bondage. We once believed the things the world believes, taught the things the world teaches, and practiced the things the world practices. We even profaned God's Sabbath and holy days. We did so because we did not know better.

However, our calling reveals that a Great Deliverer has again rescued His people from a world that does not know Him or His way. For this reason, God's people today should never compel the unbeliever to work on their behalf on the Sabbath. They must refrain from this practice because they were miraculously delivered from this very practice themselves.

With this in mind, God's people must understand that the Great Deliverer would no more permit His people today to return to this world and its sin than He would permit the Israelites of yesterday to return to Egypt and their sin. As much as some may want to go back to Egypt, God forbids it and warns of its consequences. Notice what He says.

And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, My people, that you be not partakers of her sins, and that you receive not of her plagues. (Rev. 18:4)

Consider these words in the context of dining out on the Sabbath. In order to engage in this practice, God's people must return to a world that does not know Him. In the Old Testament that world was called Egypt. In the New Testament it is called Babylon. But make no mistake about it, these worlds are one and the same.

Come Out of Egypt

When God commanded His people to cease from working on the Sabbath and to not compel others to work on their behalf, He was making a powerful statement. He was commanding His people to COME OUT OF EGYPT, to COME OUT OF BABYLON! In other words, God's people are not to be a part of the very sin that once gripped their lives.

This is the answer God's resurrected saints will share with the countless millions who will learn about their Deliverer when His Kingdom is restored to this earth. Although the world today is truly in bondage, God's people stand as proof that it will not always be that way. By refusing to allow the slave of this world to labor for them on God's Sabbath, His people are proclaiming a great hope—a hope that one day all who are enslaved will be free. At that time they, too, will “remember the Sabbath and keep it HOLY.”

The Second Key A Day of Rest

“Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.”

Hebrews 4:1

The book of Genesis indicates that when God created the Sabbath on the seventh day, He rested from his labor (Gen. 2:2). He did not do this because He was tired (Isa. 40:28), but rather because of the profound purpose He envisioned for this holy time. The Sabbath stands as proof that God has a spiritual plan for mankind. To impress this upon His people, He also commanded them to cease from their labor on this day. Notice what He said when giving the fourth commandment:

But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant nor thy maid servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates. (Ex. 20:10)

When God gave this command, He was very specific. His prohibition against labor on His Sabbath included everyone under the authority of the master of the house, including animals. The point here is that God wanted everyone to cease from their labor just as He had ceased from His. Consider the scope of this command: servants were not to work, children were not to work. Even the stranger (non-believer) was to cease from labor on God's Sabbath. Clearly this command was far reaching in scope. It touched EVERYONE His people would come in contact with.

This hardly looks like an appropriate place to look for a technicality that would somehow enable a child of the True God to have his own way on this day. For example: imagine two Israelites deciding to swap servants on the Sabbath and then compelling the borrowed servant to work. After all, both Israelites could argue that the command was not broken because the servant working on their behalf was technically not THEIR servant. Furthermore, although their real servant was working for someone else, each man could argue that he, the servant's true master, did not direct the labor. Someone else was responsible for that. Therefore, each Israelite master could argue that He was obeying God's command.

Or perhaps one of them could argue that the command only prohibited the labor of servants, strangers, and children, but did not mention wives. Therefore, he could compel his spouse to work every Sabbath and still be right with God. Come to think of it, the command only mentions the ox and the ass, as well as cattle not working (Dt. 5:14) but says nothing about any other animals. Therefore, it must be permissible to compel them to labor on the Sabbath and the holy days if the master so desired.

If this scenario seems a little far fetched, think again. In reality it is very similar to one advanced by many people in God's church today in defense of going to a restaurant on the Sabbath. These "Sabbath-keeping" patrons often reason that restaurant employees who labor to prepare and serve meals on this day are not THEIR servants, but rather are the man-servant or maid-servant of the restaurant owner. Therefore, in a technical sense it would not be violating the fourth commandment to compel these people to work because the command only refers to "YOUR manservant," not one that belongs to someone else.

Additionally, the command specifically mentions "the stranger WITHIN your gates" but says nothing about the stranger OUTSIDE your gates. Once again, God must consider this practice acceptable or He would have been more specific when giving the command.

Now ask yourself, how impressed would God be with this type of argument? Furthermore, do you think the proponents of such reasoning sincerely desire to obey God? Or, do they appear to be more interested in finding a way to circumvent His law. It is true that God alone can rightly judge in this matter, but make no mistake about it, HE WILL JUDGE (Eccl. 12:13-14)!

A Point of Agreement

Almost all Sabbath-keepers would agree that those who work in restaurants on the seventh day are transgressing the fourth commandment – they are engaging in profane labor on this day. This being the case, why would any Sabbath-keeper think that he or she could patronize such a business? By doing so they become the beneficiary of an activity God forbids. Furthermore, they actually direct that activity by placing orders. How could this practice NOT be in violation of God's law?

Can anyone honestly argue that by going into a restaurant and purchasing its products, a Sabbath-keeper is not responsible in part, for the labor of its employees? At the very least, they are *condoning* this sin by their patronage. Furthermore, does anyone really believe that Moses, based on his understanding of the fourth commandment, would ever permit such a practice on the day God calls HOLY?

God's people can attempt to fool themselves by using semantical arguments to rationalize this behavior if they wish. But if we are truly honest with ourselves, we know that such a practice is wrong.

A Command Regarding Strangers

When giving the fourth commandment, God stated that He prohibited "the stranger within thy gate" from performing any labor on the Sabbath. Consider what is being said here. The "stranger" is an unbeliever—one who does not embrace the faith. The world today is filled with such people. There are virtually billions who do not know the true God or His plan for mankind. As a result, these people think nothing of working on the Sabbath and holy days.

However, even though this is the case, God's position regarding His Sabbath will not be compromised. His command is unwavering. The stranger shall not be compelled to labor on behalf of His people. They may, through ignorance, choose to profane God's Sabbath, but they are not to be encouraged to do so by those God has called. The Great Creator forbids it.

With this in mind, consider the "stranger" spoken of in the days of Moses and those who work in restaurants today. The similarities between them are truly striking. Both are ignorant of God's law and His plan for mankind. Both, because of that ignorance, will break God's law, including His Sabbath, unless prevented from doing so by someone who knows better. Additionally, both the "stranger" of the 15th century B.C. and the 21st century restaurant worker are bound to comply with directions given to them by their masters—those who exercise authority over them. This being the case, should God's people ever order the "stranger" to work on their behalf on God's Sabbath? The fourth commandment says NO! Furthermore, the day will come when that stranger will know why God gave such a command and will deeply appreciate what God's people did on his or her behalf. In reality, this obedience on the part of God's people demonstrates a profound respect for both God's law as well as the "stranger" who does not yet understand it.

"Within Thy Gates"

There is another term included in the fourth commandment that is very interesting. The expression "within thy gates" has been at the center of some discussion among many people in God's Church. Actually, this term can have several meanings. For example, it can mean "inside your house," "on your property," or even "within the city walls." The implied meaning of this verse takes the principle even further. In essence, it is saying that God's people are not to compel anyone under their sphere of influence to work on the Sabbath. In other words you are NOT to seek out that labor let alone pay for it.

Another Technicality

There are some who have suggested that the fourth commandment is not prohibiting God's people from compelling the unbeliever to work on the Sabbath, but rather from compelling the unbeliever to work against *his or her will* on that day. In other words, God's people are not to force their religion on

those who do not believe as they do. Therefore, if the stranger truly wishes to labor on behalf of the believer, he should be permitted to do so.

This is a very radical view of God's law. Furthermore, there is no evidence in the scriptures that supports such an understanding. At this point it is important to understand that when giving His command regarding the Sabbath, God was not crafting some elaborate labor code. He was proclaiming a Great spiritual law. A critical element of that law involved working on the Sabbath. Simply put, it was NOT to be done. God's people were under direct orders from their Creator to not labor on His day, nor were they to direct others to labor for them. This law applied to believer and unbeliever alike. The point here is that even if restaurant personnel desire to work on your behalf on the Sabbath, you are not to solicit it. Tragically, when it comes to many of God's people today, this command is totally ignored.

The Manservant and the Maidservant

Furthermore, the waiters and waitresses working at a restaurant are in reality "servants." Many restaurants even call them "servers." They are in essence contracted by patrons to perform a specific task. They are to represent their customers interests. Additionally, when God's people dine out on the Sabbath, they do so with the full understanding that someone else will prepare the meal, someone else will serve the meal, and someone else will clean up after the meal is finished. In that capacity, restaurant personnel assume the role of a "manservant" or "maidservant."

With this in mind, consider what God commands His people to do regarding the treatment of servants on the Sabbath. God declared that our servants are to do NO WORK on that day (Ex. 20:10). Even if they are strangers, (non-Christians), they are not to labor on behalf of God's people! In a very real sense, this is one way God's people can be identified. They do not compel others to do what they themselves would not do on His Sabbath. Such labor is a violation of the fourth commandment!

More Technical Arguments

Some have argued that restaurant personnel are technically not working for them but rather for the restaurant owner. Therefore, the Sabbath-keeper is not responsible for their labor. If this is true, would it be acceptable with God, if His people contracted a mechanic to work on the family car on the Sabbath? After all, he is employed by someone else and the work is being done "outside your gate." Or, what about a dry cleaning business or a hair salon? Could their services be employed on the Sabbath? After all, technically, they are not your servants either, and the command only prohibits *your* servant from working, not someone else's servant. Both common sense and God's word says such reasoning flies in the face of His law. In a very real sense, those who embrace this form of logic are simply advocating work by proxy. Who really believes God approves of such behavior?

The point here is that God's people should not try to find an angle that will enable them to avoid having to obey the Great Moral Authority of the universe. Instead, they should diligently seek His wisdom regarding how to conduct their lives. When it comes to compelling others to labor on the Sabbath, God's word is very straightforward and its intent is not difficult to understand. Lord of the Sabbath commands His people to NOT labor on this day, nor to seek out others to labor for them.

A Matter of Life and Death

At this point, it is critical to understand that the Sabbath is so important to God that He actually outlined the consequences for failing to honor this holy time. God said that breaking the Sabbath was a capital crime. Notice His words.

Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD: whosoever doeth any work in the Sabbath day, he shall *surely be put to death*. (Ex. 31:13)

So important is this point that four chapters later, God reiterated this same statement of condemnation.

Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be to you an holy day, a Sabbath of rest to the LORD: whosoever doeth work therein shall be put to death. (Ex. 35:2)

With these words, God was not simply issuing an idle threat. He was serious—DEAD serious. Regrettably, He had to prove this fact to the Israelites as they wandered in the wilderness.

Picking Up Sticks

The book of Numbers records an incident in which the children of Israel would witness God's judgment in this matter first hand. At this time, a man recklessly went out to gather sticks for the purpose of making a fire on the Sabbath. When this trespass was discovered the man was arrested and detained.

At this point, Moses and Aaron went to God to determine the man's fate. Sadly, it was not going to be good. For his indifference toward God's command, the man would suffer the greatest penalty. Moses records God's judgment concerning this sin.

While the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the Sabbath day. And they that found him gathering sticks brought him unto Moses and Aaron, and unto all the congregation. And they put him in ward, because it was not declared what should be done to him. And the LORD said unto Moses, *The man shall be surely put to death*: all the congregation shall stone him without the camp. And all the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones, and he died as the Lord commanded Moses (Nu. 15:32-36)

When this man was caught breaking the Sabbath, God intervened directly and powerfully. There was no doubt regarding how He viewed this trespass. His judgment was both swift and severe.

Today we do not see God intervening in such ways, and therefore few fear to transgress His commands. But this must be understood. God does not intervene miraculously in every case. If He did, people would be dropping like flies all around us. Instead, God acts directly in first-time events so that there is a record left for us showing God's judgment in such matters.

The example of the man gathering sticks on the Sabbath is an illustration of enormous value. It reveals God's true standard, and the ultimate fate of those who think they can disobey Him. This now brings us to a very important question: What would God think if this man paid Sabbath breakers to gather sticks for him? Would the Almighty condone such behavior? Or, would He consider it a clear breach of His Sabbath law?

Regrettably, because many of God's people have been influenced by the values and standards of this world, they have become desensitized to God and His way. This is a grave mistake. Furthermore, this mistake is repeated every time God's people go to a restaurant on His Sabbath. By doing so, they become willing participants in the profaning of what He made HOLY.

A Stern Warning

Six thousand years ago, Satan told Eve "eat," and "you surely won't die" (Ge. 3:4). Sadly, she ate and ultimately perished. Today there are some who teach God's people that it is acceptable to go to restaurants on the Sabbath. They say, "eat and you won't die." However, God clearly states that if we work on His Sabbath, we WILL die! Furthermore, when we compel others to work for us, we are ultimately responsible.

The Third Key A Matter of Business

“And if the people of the land bring ware or any victuals on the Sabbath day to sell, that we would not buy it of them on the Sabbath, or on the holy day:”

Nehemiah 10:31

When God gave Israel His instructions regarding the observance of the Sabbath, He told His people that they were not to make a fire on the seventh day.

Ye shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the Sabbath day. (Ex. 35:3)

A Lesson from a Fire

There are two major views concerning what is meant by the term “fire” in this verse. Some believe that fires of any kind (personal or commercial) were not to be kindled on the Sabbath. Others have argued that the “fire” being referred to is an industrial or commercial fire. The latter argument seems more likely because there would have been family campfires on the Sabbath when the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness. In essence God’s would gather sticks on the preparation day and built family campfires prior to the beginning of the Sabbath. When the Sabbath arrived, they would toss an occasional piece of wood on the fire to sustain it. At the very least, this is possible.

However, when it comes to building or even sustaining a commercial fire, a significant amount of work would be required. Furthermore, such a fire would serve no purpose on the Sabbath. Remember, the Sabbath is a day of rest and the building (or sustaining) of such a fire on this day would clearly violate the fourth commandment.

An Unthinkable Practice

Today God’s people would never think of creating a commercial fire for industry or manufacturing on the Sabbath. They would rightly understand that this would constitute a clear breach of the fourth commandment. However, when it comes to the fire necessary for cooking food at a restaurant, many have somehow made the mistake of thinking such a practice is acceptable. But in reality, this is not true.

The food services industry is no different than any other commercial enterprise. Furthermore, when it comes to preparing meals, God commanded Israel to refrain from cooking their own food on the Sabbath (Ex. 16:5, 23), let alone hiring someone else to do it for them. Instead, they were to prepare their meals the day before so that no work was done on God’s day.

At this point it is important to understand that God’s instructions regarding the proper observance of His Sabbath went far beyond commanding His people to refrain from labor on this day. Because the Sabbath is HOLY, God provided specific examples of how it could be contaminated. One such way was to engage in business on this day as either the provider or consumer of goods and services. God said such behavior is wrong and that it profaned His Sabbath. To better understand this truth consider the following Biblical truth.

Buying and Selling

Nothing more clearly defines a commercial enterprise than the exchanging of money. But what does God’s word say about this practice on His Sabbath?

One of the greatest champions of faith in all the Bible was a man named Nehemiah. As a cupbearer to the Persian king Artaxerxes, Nehemiah held a position of considerable prominence. However, when he

heard of conditions in Jerusalem, he forsook a life of comfort and returned to the city of his forebears. This devout man was instrumental in rebuilding the walls of this great ancient place.

Nehemiah was also painfully aware of the tragic story of Judah's captivity. Furthermore, he understood one of its chief causes—a contempt for God's Sabbath and specifically its practice of buying and selling on this day. Nehemiah's passion regarding this issue is legendary in the scriptures and is captured in a book that bears his name.

This great servant condemned every aspect of engaging in business on God's Sabbath and thoroughly excoriated those who participated in this sacrilege. He began His indictment by identifying the vendors who were selling products to God's people on this day. Notice what he says.

In those days saw I in Judah some treading wine presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and lading asses; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all manner of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day: and I testified against them in the day wherein they sold victuals. There dwelt men of Tyre also therein, which brought fish and all manner of ware, and sold on the Sabbath unto the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem. (Neh. 13:14-16).

What could be more clear? Here, Nehemiah testified against these vendors because he knew that God did not want His people to buy and sell on the Sabbath day, even if it was only food that was being purchased. Furthermore, it didn't make any difference if the people preparing the food were non-believers such as those from Tyre. The point here is that God's instructions are very clear in this matter. His people are not to conduct business of any nature on His holy Sabbath—as a buyer or a seller.

This being the case, why would anyone think that a Christian should be able to go to a restaurant on the Sabbath? Dining at a restaurant is in fact conducting business! Only this time, the Sabbath-keeper is the consumer—a role that is absolutely essential in any commercial enterprise. Therefore, when God's people go to a restaurant on holy time, they are doing exactly what He said NOT to do.

More Technicalities

There are some who have suggested that Nehemiah's indictment is against those doing business with MERCHANTS selling food in open markets, not specifically restaurants. Therefore, in a very technical sense, God appears to be silent on the subject of dining out on the Sabbath. But could this possibly be true? Why would God forbid buying food at a market, while permitting buying the same food at a restaurant? The only difference is that the restaurant must labor even more because they must also prepare the food. Why would God make such a distinction? Furthermore, what message does this send about His Sabbath being HOLY?

Despite all the parsing of words, the real point Nehemiah was clearly making in his indictment was that God's people should not take part in any commercial business on the Sabbath—nor were they to patronize such businesses on this day. Any other understanding is simply manipulating the scriptures in an attempt to advance one's personal preferences.

A Scathing Indictment

Nehemiah was so furious at this practice that he actually threatened to use force to remove these “entrepreneurs” from Jerusalem if they persisted in engaging in business on the Sabbath.

Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the Sabbath day? Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? Yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the Sabbath. And it came to pass, that when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the Sabbath, I commanded that the gates should be shut, and charged

that they should not be opened till after the Sabbath: and some of my servants set I at the gates, that there should no burden be brought in on the Sabbath day. So the merchants and sellers of all kind of ware lodged without Jerusalem once or twice. Then I testified against them, and said unto them, Why lodge ye about the wall? If ye do so again, I will lay hands on you. From that time forth came they no more on the Sabbath. (Neh. 13:17-21)

A Commercial Enterprise

Whether one wishes to believe it or not, those who go to restaurants on the Sabbath are engaging in a commercial enterprise. This enterprise involves the purchase of goods, the contracting of labor, the agreeing on a price, as well as appropriate methods of payment. There is even a provision for the payment of bonuses (tips). Furthermore, in this business relationship the restaurant patron possesses a considerable level of authority over personnel. These patrons define what they will purchase, how it will be prepared, and when it will be delivered. Additionally, they have expectations of personnel as well as products, and reserve the right to exercise disciplinary action if expectations are not met. Patrons can lodge complaints, refuse payment, and even engage the services of governmental agencies that protect the rights of consumers. They can do this because they ARE CONSUMERS. They are participants in a very real business transaction. The restaurant understands this principle well and to think otherwise is simply untrue.

Engaging in business with the food services industry, as either the retailer or the consumer, is the very conduct that inspired Nehemiah's righteous indignation. And make no mistake about it, he was indignant. With this in mind, here is a question to consider:

Would Nehemiah think differently
about buying and selling today?

The Fourth Key A Matter of Pleasure

“They walked not in my statutes, and they despised my judgments,
which if a man do, he shall even live in them;
and my Sabbaths they greatly polluted.”

Ezekiel 20:13

Just prior to Israel going into captivity, God directed the prophet Isaiah to indict them because of their wanton disregard of His law. His message made it clear that Israel was in grave danger. Notice the force of His words.

Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins. (Isa. 58:1)

When Isaiah wrote these words, Israel saw themselves as God’s chosen people. In fact, they were even quite religious. This is not unlike God’s church today. However, what they did not seem to realize was that they were sinning by not obeying God’s law regarding His Sabbath. This fact is made evident twelve verses later.

If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honorable; and shalt honor him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words... (Isa. 58:13)

This verse contains several elements that God’s people today should carefully consider when deciding how they will honor the Sabbath. It addresses things to avoid as well as things to embrace when keeping this day holy.

First, consider the words “turn away your foot from the Sabbath.” Today this phrase would be better translated, “Take your dirty feet off My holy day!” From God’s point of view, His people were trampling all over the day He sanctified—the day He set apart—the day He made sacred. This was done because Israel sought their own pleasure on this day. They wanted to pursue what appealed to them. By this statement, God makes it abundantly clear that we are not to seek personal enjoyment on His Sabbath. It is true that the Sabbath was made for man (Mk. 2:27), but it is God’s day (Ex. 31:13-17). Therefore, His people are to honor His instructions regarding how it is to be kept.

Secondly, when God addressed the issue of “pleasure” on His Sabbath, His instructions were very clear. His people were to turn away from doing their pleasure on this day. But what does this mean?

The word “pleasure” used by Isaiah in this verse comes from the Hebrew *chephets*. This term means something that possesses personal value—that which gives pleasure or enjoyment. Therefore, God was instructing His people to avoid physical activities which cater primarily to personal pleasure. Tragically, this is exactly what dining out on the Sabbath is. It is what millions of Americans and Europeans do for entertainment and recreation every single day and especially on the Sabbath.

Some Interesting Facts

According to the American National Restaurant Association (ANRA), the food services business is among the largest of the entertainment industries. It is currently the largest private-sector employer in the entire country, even out-distancing the bloated U.S. government.

Additionally, according to the ANRA, the most popular day of the week for dining out is Saturday. With this in mind, God’s people must ask themselves: Is the Sabbath their favorite day to dine out? If the

answer to this question is “yes,” then consider for a moment why. Is it to fulfill God’s word, or is it to satisfy our own pleasure?

Making the Sabbath Special

At this point it is important to understand that although God prohibits His people from doing their own pleasure on the Sabbath He does not forbid them from participating in making this day special. Consider just some of the things God’s people can do to add their creative touch to this holy time. Some prepare special Sabbath dinners including a favorite desert. These meals are often served on their finest dishes and silverware. Others display fresh flowers as well as play edifying music set aside exclusively for this holy time. Many Sabbath-keepers participate in special Bible studies or games for their family and guests. Some homes are diligently cleaned and made ready to welcome in God’s day. Even the clothing many of God’s people wear is their finest and is fresh and pressed.

Sadly, some argue that the Sabbath can also be made special by dining out at a nice restaurant. But how is that possible? And why would God bless an activity that requires His people to go back into the world and solicit the services of Sabbath-breakers? In truth, those who justify this practice by claiming it is their way of honoring God are actually doing just the opposite.

The Sabbath is Honorable

A third element of God’s instructions regarding His Sabbath is that His people are to call the Sabbath “honorable” (Isa. 58:13). This word means that which is “heavy,” even “glorious.” The point is that the Sabbath is to carry an enormous weight of respect and dignity in the believer’s eyes. It was created holy by God Himself and His people must show it great deference.

This is the very reason God gave specific instructions regarding how His Sabbath is to be kept. God does not want us to dishonor this wonderful day by our mundane practices. Going to restaurants on the Sabbath deprecates God’s day. Whether we want to admit it or not, dining out on the Sabbath shows disrespect toward the great dignity this day was designed to carry. The fact that this practice is convenient or, even pleasurable does not change anything.

The Sabbath Is to Be a Delight

Perhaps the most important instruction recorded by Isaiah concerning the Sabbath is that God wants His people to call this day a “delight.” Regrettably, some have put a unique twist on these words. Many have interpreted them to mean that we are to do things to make the Sabbath a delight. In other words, find something that gives pleasure and do it on the Sabbath. After constructing such a premise, many in God’s Church contend that going out to eat enables them to do less work, and thus makes the Sabbath more enjoyable. Therefore, going to a restaurant on holy time is a delight and is in keeping with the words recorded by Isaiah.

Such an interpretation is a HORRIBLE DISTORTION of the scriptures! God did not create the Sabbath to insure that man would have one day of personal enjoyment every week. He created this day so that our natural pursuit of personal desires would not so consume our lives that they would estrange us from the very God who made us. In other words, the Sabbath is not a day to seek personal pleasures, but rather to reject them. It is a day dedicated to embracing that which is holy.

But what does it mean to call the Sabbath a delight? What is the delight? To better understand what God was conveying with this instruction, consider what He specifically said:

If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honorable; and shalt honor him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words... (Isa. 58:13)

Here God is not telling His people to make the Sabbath a delight. He is instructing them to CALL it a delight. God's people should delight in the great Kingdom the Sabbath pictures. That Kingdom will be a time of unimaginable abundance. The Sabbath is evidence that God will deliver that Kingdom and establish it when Jesus Christ returns in power and glory. It is in that hope we delight.

An Exquisite Exception

The Sabbath is a perpetual reminder of God's power over the physical as well as the spiritual universe. Through Isaiah, God is appealing to His people to see this time for what it really is. If the world today with all its suffering could get just one brief glimpse of what the Sabbath pictures, it most definitely would call it a DELIGHT. But there is more.

The word "delight" used by Isaiah when describing God's Sabbath is very interesting. It literally means "luxury" or "delicate." The point God is making is that His Sabbath is a luxurious delicacy. We are to call it so because it is a day that is set aside to be different. It is an exquisite exception from the other days of the week.

All week long, God's people are in a kind of bondage. We are forced to labor in order to provide for our physical needs. Every day we are subjected to a continual barrage of chores and deadlines. We are rushed and harried as we struggle to meet an endless array of obligations. Then comes the Sabbath.

A Day of Liberation

The Sabbath pictures liberation and freedom from bondage. It pictures the great hope of God's Kingdom. It is a unique day in which we can finally stop doing the labor, chores, and mundane activities of life. On the Sabbath we can come out of this world for one day, and picture a time when this world will be delivered into the hands of the King of kings.

The Sabbath is a delight, not because we are out having fun, amusing ourselves and being entertained. It is a delight because we have a special time set aside to seek our Maker. In a very real sense, the Sabbath is a time when the bride shares moments with the Bridegroom.

God's Church should actually consider His holy Sabbath as an appointment—a date with her fiancé. She should look forward with a deep longing to the Sabbath because it offers the luxury of twenty-four hours of rest from a world that is defiant to God. Furthermore, it replaces that time with a period of celebrating the transcendent hope of eternal life, living and working together with our Father and elder brother, Jesus Christ.

The Sabbath is a great DELIGHT and God's people should DELIGHT in it. God created the Sabbath as a time of immense hope. His people must see that hope and rejoice in it, not try to improve on it.

The Fifth Key A Day of Preparation

“Gather the people together, men and women, and children,
and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear,
and that they may learn, and fear the LORD your God,
and observe to do all the words of this law:”

Deuteronomy 31:12

The scriptures indicate that God was so opposed to His people engaging in profane labor on the Sabbath that He actually designated the sixth day as a period to prepare for this holy time. Even the Great Creator prepared for His Sabbath. Notice what He did.

Then said the LORD unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or not. And it shall come to pass, that on the sixth day they shall prepare that which they bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily. (Ex. 16:4-5)

Here, God declares that he rained a double portion of manna on the sixth day with the express purpose of “proving” the Israelites. In other words, He did this to see if they were truly committed to obeying Him. If they were, they would gather enough food on Friday to satisfy their needs for both that day and the next. They would then cook all of it on the preparation day. Notice the instructions Moses gave to God’s people.

On the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for one man: and all the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses. And he said unto them, This is that which the LORD hath said, Tomorrow is the rest of the holy Sabbath unto the LORD: bake that which ye will bake today, and seethe that ye will seethe; and that which remaineth over lay up for you to be kept until the morning. And they laid it up till morning, as Moses bade: and it did not stink, neither was there any worm therein. And Moses said, Eat that today; for today is a Sabbath unto the LORD: to day ye shall not find it in the field. Six days ye shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is the Sabbath, in it there shall be none. (Ex. 16:22-26)

These verses reveal that God had to supernaturally intervene to provide a way for the Israelites to honor His Sabbath. In this case, He not only provided twice as much food on the preparation day, but He also miraculously preserved it so that it would not spoil.

The point to all of this is that God intended for His Sabbath to be treated differently. It was HOLY TIME. Furthermore, He would personally make sure His people had a way to keep it holy.

But what about the Israelites who failed to prepare adequately? What were they to do? Were they to go out and buy food from someone else on the Sabbath? Absolutely not! God did not give them an alternative food source when they failed to prepare on the sixth day. The scriptures state “they found none” (v.27).

Is there a lesson for God’s people today in the action He took so very long ago? It would certainly seem so. Based on His clear instructions to the children of Israel, perhaps we should ask ourselves a very important question: is it right for us to go outside our spiritual camp and acquire our food from unbelievers on the Sabbath if we fail to adequately prepare for this day?

The Significance of the Preparation Day

Today almost all of God's people understand the great significance of His Sabbath and holy days. These appointed times declare a great plan that was envisioned by the Almighty before the world was created.

With this in mind, consider what God could be teaching His people with a preparation day. If the Sabbath pictures God's kingdom (Heb. 4:9-10), could the sixth day reveal that His people must properly prepare themselves in order to enter into that kingdom? In other words, if we do not make ourselves ready for God's millennial rest, will God allow us to be a part of it? Furthermore, will we prepare for that kingdom by following His instructions, or do we think we can forge our own path and do it a different way? It is clear that some believe the latter because Jesus actually warned against such thinking. Notice His words:

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, you that work iniquity. (Mt. 7:21-23)

When Jesus spoke of those who worked iniquity, He was referring to people who did not keep His law. A cornerstone of that law is His Sabbath. With this in mind, is it possible that Jesus' warning could also apply to those who refuse to honor His instructions concerning the preparation day? After all, these instructions were given to ensure that God's people could keep the Sabbath holy as He intended. Remember, He did it to "prove" them (Ex. 16:4-5).

Now consider a sobering thought—could people in God's Church today ultimately be crying out, "Lord, Lord" to Jesus Christ when His final judgment comes because they failed to obey the fourth commandment, including the appropriate preparation for it? Furthermore, does the convenience of dining out on the Sabbath actually make the preparation day somehow less meaningful to God's people? After all, today there is no sense of urgency with respect to preparing food for the Sabbath. This is because it is so convenient to gather brethren and head off to a popular restaurant on this day.

Furthermore, if God's people refuse to prepare for His Sabbath, why should He think they would prepare for His Kingdom? These are serious words and should not be taken lightly. Notice what God said to Israel because of their cavalier attitude regarding His Sabbath and how they prepared for it.

How long refuse ye to keep my commandments and my laws? See, for that the Lord hath given you the Sabbath, therefore He giveth you the sixth day the bread of two days; abide ye every man in his place. Let no man go out of his place on the seventh day. (Ex. 16:28)

Here, God is rebuking the children of Israel for their failure to honor His Sabbath. Specifically, He was condemning their lack of preparation. In essence, God was conveying to His people three critical elements concerning eating on the Sabbath. These elements were as follows.

- 1) Food was *not to be acquired* on the Sabbath
- 2) Food was *not to be prepared* on the Sabbath and
- 3) His people were *not to leave* "their place" on the Sabbath.

Where Do We Belong on the Sabbath?

Notice that God said, "let no man go out of his place" on the Sabbath. With these words, He did not mean that individuals could not leave their tent for any reason as evidenced by the fact that they left their

tents when Moses assembled them on the Sabbath and holy days (Num. 10: 3-10). Additionally, Jesus Himself dined at the homes of others on the Sabbath (Lk. 14:1-6).

The point God was making with these instructions was that the Israelites were not to leave their homes, or any other place His people were assembled, for the purpose of gathering their Sabbath meals. Furthermore, they had no need to do so. God had already provided their food on the sixth day. Now consider this. If the Almighty prohibited the Israelites from going outside their "place" to acquire food on the Sabbath, why would He permit that practice today? The answer is HE WOULDN'T!

Breaking Every Rule

In reality, those who dine out on the Sabbath are breaking every aspect of God's command with respect to eating. Consider what they do. They *acquire* food on the Sabbath. They have it *prepared* for them on the Sabbath. And they *go outside their community of faith* to procure the food as well as to consume it. Tragically, many of God's people rationalize every one of these practices. Even more tragic is the fate that awaits them if they fail to repent of this sin.

It is also important to understand that God's instructions to Israel were given a thousand years before Nehemiah was even a twinkle in his father's eye. Simply put, His people were not to go out into a world of unbelievers on the Sabbath. This command seems so obvious and is totally consistent with God's character. The Sabbath is HOLY. This being the case, why would God's people even want to be a part of a society that profanes this day?

The Sixth Key A Mark and a Warning

“And there shall be, like people, like priest:
and I will punish them for their ways, and reward them their doings.”

Hosea 4:9

The book of Revelation describes an event in which a powerful political leader known as the “beast” and an apostate religious figure known as the “false prophet” cause the vast majority of people on earth to receive a special mark (Rev.13:16). Those who refuse will suffer great persecution and even death (verse 15). However, those who receive this mark will suffer the wrath of Almighty God (Rev. 14:9-10).

God’s Church has rightly understood this mark to be a rejection of the true Sabbath and holy days and the embracing of false religious customs and festivals. This understanding is drawn in part because of the remarkable contrast that can be drawn between God’s Sabbath and this “mark.” The mark of the beast even has the appearance of being a counterfeit Sabbath.

To illustrate this point, consider the following: one is called a mark (Rev. 13:16), God’s Sabbath is called a “sign” (Ex. 31:13,17). The mark of the beast is placed in the right hand and the forehead (Rev. 13:16). The Sabbath, which is a part of God’s law, is placed in the right hand and as frontlets between the eyes (Dt. 6:6-8). The mark of the beast is very popular: “all received it.” The Sabbath is very unpopular, almost all reject it. Those who refuse the mark will be persecuted by the Beast (Rev. 13:15). Those who receive the mark will be punished by God (Rev.14:9-10). But there is more. Perhaps the most unique quality of the mark of the beast is its connection to buying and selling. Notice what the apostle John writes when describing this “mark.”

And that no man might *buy* or *sell*, save he that had the mark... (Rev. 13:17).

With these words you get the impression that while God is commanding His people to refrain from buying and selling on the Sabbath, the beast, under the direct authority of Satan the devil (Rev. 13:2), is doing the very opposite. He is declaring that unless you reject the Sabbath, he will make it impossible for you to ever buy and sell. With this in mind, is it possible that the rejection of God’s Sabbath is defined more by engaging in business on this day than any other activity? After all, commerce drives so much of man’s physical existence. As a leading industrialist once put it, “nothing happens in this world until something gets sold.” The point here is that the exchange of money represents a huge part of man’s profane existence. This practice touches virtually everyone on earth.

This is a fact that undoubtedly is not lost on Satan the devil. He knows all too well what makes the world “go round.” This being the case, it is almost certain that this great deceiver (Rev. 12:9) will use commerce to persuade God’s people to reject their Creator. In essence, he will attempt to compel them to profane the Sabbath by buying and selling on that day. If they refuse, they will never be able to buy and sell. What an incredible test of faith that would be! It is true that Satan will use the beast to deceive all the people on earth to accept his mark, but the real target will be God’s people.

The Consequences of Disobedience

The Bible indicates that ancient Israel rejected God’s Sabbath and was destroyed as a nation because of that defiance. The twentieth chapter of the book of Ezekiel describes Israel’s rebellion against God’s law concerning the Sabbath, as well as God’s reaction to their rebellion.

And I gave them My statutes, and showed them My judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them. Moreover also I gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between Me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them. But the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness: they walked not in My statutes, and they

despised My judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them; and My Sabbaths they greatly polluted: then I said, I would pour out My fury on them in the wilderness, to consume them. (Ezk. 20:11-13)

Notice what God said He would do because of Israel's contempt for His Sabbath – "I will pour out My fury upon them to consume them" (verse 13). He even reiterated this point eight verses later. Now compare what God said He would do to a Sabbath-breaking Israel with what He said would befall those who had the mark of the beast.

And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb... (Rev. 14:9-10)

Here, the link between God's judgment on a Sabbath-breaking people is almost identical to His judgment on those who have the "mark of the beast." This alone should cause every true Christian to take serious stock of how they are treating this day. But if that wasn't enough, there is another warning.

A Warning of Captivity

The scriptures reveal that despite God's appeal for Israel to repent, they persisted in rebelling against Him and His law. Furthermore, nowhere was this rebellion more apparent than in their flagrant disregard of His Sabbath. Like so many today, Israel failed to appreciate what this day truly means and the great Kingdom it pictures. As a result of this indifference, they thought nothing of ignoring God's instructions regarding the proper observance of His day. The result was devastating.

Because of this defiance, God allowed the nation He raised up to be routed and led into a horrible captivity by the ruthless Assyrian empire. Furthermore, as a result of this crushing defeat, Israel completely lost the Sabbath, and with it, their identity as the people of God. Today they are known as the lost ten tribes of Israel.

A Horrible Mistake Repeated

Regrettably, Israel was not the only nation under God that wanted to do things their own way – including how they honored the Sabbath. The southern kingdom of Judah also fell victim to their own moral devices and would pay a heavy price for it. They, too, contaminated God's Sabbath and were taken captive because of this sin. This time it was the Babylonian empire under the rule of Nebuchadnezzar that conquered God's people and removed them from their land.

However, after seventy years of captivity, the Jews were allowed to return to Jerusalem and renovate part of the city. At that time, Nehemiah noticed that some who had returned were still profaning the Sabbath by engaging in business on this day. Fearing that God would punish His people again for this sin, Nehemiah argued powerfully to correct the wrong – a practice he called "evil." Notice what he writes.

Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the Sabbath day? Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this calamity upon us, and upon this city? yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the Sabbath. (Neh. 13:17-18)

It is clear that the sin which caused Judah to be taken captive was transgressing the fourth commandment. Tragically, these returning exiles were making the same mistake that caused their captivity in the first place. But what exactly were they doing wrong? They were buying and selling food on the Sabbath!

In those days saw I in Judah some treading wine presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and lading asses; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all manner of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day: and I testified against them in the day wherein they *sold victuals*. (Neh. 13:15)

The sin that caused God's people to go into captivity was doing work, as well as conducting business (buying and selling) on the day God made holy. Regrettably, this great sin continues in God's Church to this very day.

A Misguided Opinion

There are some who argue that the Jews during the time of Nehemiah were not going to a restaurant on this day, but rather were purchasing goods in the open market. Therefore, Nehemiah was not specifically addressing the issue of restaurants in his indictment of the nobles of Judah.

However, this argument is only technically true. What was being set up in the city were small booths. There, merchants would offer a variety of products. Some sold crafts. Some sold merchandise. However, others were selling food products – and the scriptures bare this out.

The word "*victuals*" used in Nehemiah's indictment comes from the Hebrew word *tsayid*. This word means, "game," "lunch," or that which is "taken in hunting." This being the case, Nehemiah was excoriating the Jews for buying FOOD on the Sabbath. This practice was similar to God's people today buying a meal from a hamburger stand or catering truck. But does this really make a difference? Does anyone honestly think Nehemiah would give a free pass to the Jews if, instead, they were sitting down to eat at a five star restaurant? Tragically, some do.

Men of Tyre

At this point, it is important to reiterate that the vendors who were selling the food on the Sabbath were non-believers just as they are today. They were from the city of Tyre.

There dwelt men of Tyre also therein, which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold on the Sabbath unto the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem. (Neh. 13:16)

It is clear that the vendors who were selling on the Sabbath did not know God. They were totally ignorant of His law and His plan for man. However, this "shortcoming" was irrelevant to Nehemiah. To him ignorance was no excuse. This truth is born out in the action Nehemiah would take.

Nehemiah's Options

At this point, it is important to understand that there were numerous options available to this servant of God. For example, he could easily have reasoned: "these people are going to sell their wares regardless of what we do. Therefore, what difference does it make?" Or, he could have said, "We are not causing them to work. They would be working anyway." Finally, Nehemiah could have drawn his conclusions based on the practice of his predecessors. He could have thought, "Other respected men of the past have purchased foodstuffs on the Sabbath, why should I pass judgment in such a thing? After all, it will only stir up contention."

Each of these responses were available to this leader of God's people so very long ago. Furthermore, they remain so to the leaders in God's Church today. Sadly, today many of God's ministers seem content to take a different path than that taken by Nehemiah. They balk when confronting this issue.

However, the faithful and uncompromising Nehemiah did not hesitate when addressing what he saw was an egregious evil. And make no mistake about it, that is exactly how he viewed buying or selling on the Sabbath. To him this practice represented a mortal threat to God's people. Furthermore, he realized

that the very future of his nation hung in the balance on this issue. Therefore, He took immediate action. Notice what he did.

Then I contended with the nobles of Judah and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the Sabbath day? Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us and upon this city? Yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the Sabbath. And it came to pass, that when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the Sabbath, I commanded that the gates should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened till after the Sabbath: and some of my servants set I at the gates, that there should no burden be brought in on the Sabbath day. (Neh. 13:17- 19)

With these words, Nehemiah was warning Judah that they were in captivity in no small part because they had profaned the Sabbath. Specifically, they were buying and selling on that day.

God's servant was so concerned over this sin that he took what could only be regarded as radical measures. He expelled the street vendors from the city. Furthermore, when they returned the following Sabbath, Nehemiah was furious. He actually threatened them with physical force if they dared to return to sell their products on God's day.

So the merchants and sellers of all kind of ware lodged without Jerusalem once or twice. Then I testified against them, and said unto them, Why lodge ye about the wall? If ye do so again I will lay hands on you. From that time forth they came no more on the Sabbath. (Neh. 13:20)

The example of Nehemiah's uncompromising love of God's law is a great lesson for all Christians everywhere. This champion of faith boldly confronted those who were complicit in causing God's people to profane His Sabbath. His remedy was forceful and reflected God's thinking about engaging in commerce on the day He made HOLY. Furthermore, God not only abhorred this practice then, but His opinion on the subject has not changed to this very day.

Today it would be impossible to do what Nehemiah did during Judah's captivity. God's people do not have that kind of power or influence. Therefore, they couldn't possibly lock up restaurants to prevent believers from buying food on the Sabbath. However, God's people can do something else. They can lock the vendors out of their lives on God's day. Regrettably, many, including their leaders, don't.

Legislating Righteousness

In recent years, many leaders in God's Church have introduced a very interesting reason for not passing judgment in the matter of dining out on God's Sabbath. They contend that it is not the role of the church to "legislate righteousness." What they fail to understand is that God has already performed this task. Furthermore, His position on this subject is as clear as any ever addressed in the scriptures.

At this point it is important to understand that although the church does not legislate righteousness, it most assuredly administers it. This is a responsibility God's leaders have been entrusted with. Additionally, the consequences for failing to teach God's people about His law and how it is to be applied is a HUGE mistake. Consider what Jesus Christ said about this omission.

Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the Kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the Kingdom of heaven. (Mt. 5:19)

Jesus' words should make every true and faithful servant of God carefully consider the things he does as well as the things he teaches others to do. The scriptures are very clear on this. God's ministers are duty-bound to represent Him, not man. Because of this, God's judgment on them will be greater. The bottom line is this: the ministry is responsible for proclaiming God's word to His children – whether it is popular or not.

A Minor Point

Some leaders in God's Church have also suggested that going to restaurants on the Sabbath represents only a very small aspect of Sabbath observance. They contend that the Sabbath is much broader in scope and to place so much emphasis on one piece of the command diminishes the rest of God's holy day. However, this reasoning goes totally contrary to God's Sabbath law. Consider how much of the fourth commandment is impacted by dining out on holy time.

- Work is being performed at the request of the believer, in clear violation of the commandment (Ex. 20:10).
- A servant is being compelled by the believer to labor on his behalf, in clear violation of the commandment (Dt. 5:14).
- An unbeliever (stranger) is being compelled to work for the benefit of the believer, in clear violation of the commandment (Ex. 20:10).
- Food is being acquired on the Sabbath by the believer, in clear violation of the commandment (Ex. 16:26-29).
- Food is being prepared on the Sabbath at the request of the believer, in clear violation of the commandment (Ex. 16:23-24).
- The believer has to go outside his place on the Sabbath, in clear violation of the commandment (Ex. 16:29).
- The believer is engaged in the purchase of goods and services on the Sabbath, in clear violation of the Commandment (Ne. 10:31).
- The believer is involved in the pursuit of personal pleasure on the Sabbath, in clear violation of the commandment (Isa. 58:13-14).

These are just some of the points of God's law that are violated with impunity when those whom He has called decide they can do as they wish on His day. In truth, dining out at a restaurant on the Sabbath violates more tenets of the fourth commandment than if one chose to chop down trees on his property from dawn to dusk.

Returning to Nehemiah

Nehemiah realized that improper Sabbath observance posed a great threat to God's people. Additionally, he understood that honoring God's holy day could make the difference between being taken captive and being delivered from captivity.

Is it possible that God's Church today is being challenged with a similar lesson? And at the end of this challenge lies two possible destinations: CAPTIVITY or SAFETY

The Seventh Key A Perfect Example

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:”

Philippians 2:5

Virtually everyone who considers himself a Christian would acknowledge that Jesus Christ is the example God’s children must follow in their spiritual walk. The apostle Paul affirmed this truth in his epistle to the church at Philippi. There, he exhorted believers to put on the very mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5). Additionally, the apostle Peter wrote that Jesus left His followers an example that should be emulated (1Pet. 2:21). It is hard to imagine anyone being a greater authority regarding the proper conduct for God’s children on the Sabbath than Jesus. After all, He is the “Lord of the Sabbath” (Mk. 2:27). He is the Master Architect of this day and its great purpose. Every step He took on the Sabbath was dedicated to fulfilling that purpose. So the logical question must be:

How did Jesus honor the Sabbath?

The gospels speak prolifically concerning Jesus’ actions on the Sabbath. And although he was accused by the religious leaders of His time of profaning this day, the truth is that He didn’t come close to doing such a thing. Jesus’ movements, His words, and His conduct on the Sabbath created a living portrait of God’s Kingdom. His behavior spoke of hope and consolation that would be restored to this world only a short time from now. Consider some of the things that defined the Sabbath that Jesus kept:

He assembled with other Jews in the synagogue.

He healed the sick.

He shared meals.

He took walks with close friends.

He criticized self-righteous religious leaders.

He inspired hope in the weak.

He stayed in constant contact with His Father.

Noticeably absent from the scriptures is any hint that Jesus spent even one “mite” on this day. The Messiah loved the Sabbath. He knew every facet of the time He sanctified. If we are truly His people, then we must direct our steps as He did His.

An Extraordinary Example

Although Jesus undoubtedly provided meals for His family during His lifetime on earth, there is no example of Him doing so in the New Testament. However, one example does appear in the Old Testament and it speaks volumes about how God approaches that which is holy.

This event took place while the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness. At that time, God commanded them to refrain from going out to gather manna on the Sabbath. But God did not simply let them go hungry on His day. He provided a double portion of manna on the sixth day. Additionally, this Great Provider supernaturally intervened to prevent the manna from spoiling on the Sabbath.

What God did with respect to this act may be far more special than meets the eye. Most believe God rained a double portion of food for the Israelites on the “preparation day” (Friday), because He did not

want them to work on His Sabbath. Although this is true, is it also possible that by this act, God was honoring His own law. In other words, what Israel saw was that even God will not profane His Sabbath by engaging in profane labor on that day.

It is true that God never tires, however, that is not why He rests on the Sabbath. He ceases from His work because even He respects the Sabbath and its purpose. On the seventh day of creation, God set the Sabbath apart from all other days. He made it HOLY! Is it possible that every Sabbath since then, God sustains its purpose and keeps it HOLY? Based on all the evidence we have in the scriptures, the answer to this question is YES.

Privileges and Restrictions

There are many things that can be enjoyed on the Sabbath, but there are some things that must be avoided. Going to a restaurant is most definitely one of them. This practice contradicts every part of God's Kingdom. It solicits labor, it involves commerce, it inspires competition, and it separates those who work on this day from the joy that keeping the Sabbath brings. It is true that you cannot prevent restaurant personnel from working. But you CAN prevent them from working *for you*.

As the Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus' conduct on this day honored His Father in a way we simply cannot grasp. But we certainly can take that model and act on it instead of trying to modify it.

A Final Thought

When the Great Architect of Heaven and Earth created the physical universe, He was executing a critical part of a plan that would ultimately bring mankind into His Family. As a part of that physical creation, God fashioned the stars and planets as well as created the sun and the moon. His purpose for doing this was not simply to beautify the sky. When describing this work, notice what God's word says.

And God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years..." (Gen. 1:14)

Here God declares that the astronomical bodies are for signs and seasons. These two words have profound meaning and express the great commitment God has to His Plan of salvation. The word "sign" in this verse is *owth* and can be translated as a "signal," "beacon," or a "mark." It is the same word used by God when describing His Sabbath (see Ex. 31:13, 17). But there is more. The Hebrew word for "seasons" in this verse is *moed* and can be translated "appointed times." God's appointed times are His holy days.

God's Sabbath and holy days represent the blueprint of a plan that was borne out of the infinite love of the greatest Being in existence. That Being wants His people to trust His wisdom regarding how to honor the Sabbath and holy days and He has provided the moral guidance in this area. His people should reject anything that does not reflect that guidance. When it comes to going to restaurants on the Sabbath where do you truly think He stands?

Jesus Christ once said that His people were to be lights in a world of darkness (Mt. 5:14-16). They are to let their light shine. One way they can do this is by properly keeping the Sabbath. That Sabbath is a beacon that illuminates the identity of the true God – the Creator.

Today, we live in a world where every single day of the week is honored by some religion. However, the Sabbath is only kept by people who profess a belief in the true God. The lost ten tribes of Israel abandoned the Sabbath – and with it their identity as God's people. God's Sabbath is a reminder of not only who He is, but who His people are.

A Unique Sign

The Sabbath is also a sign. A sign gives people important information. It directs individuals to something or some place. The Sabbath is a sign from God directing man toward Him and His Kingdom (Heb. 4:4-9).

However, the Sabbath points both ways. While it is a sign to us identifying who the Creator is, it is also a sign to God that identifies who His people are. Through it, the Great Creator of heaven and earth not only sees WHO keeps His Sabbath, He sees the WAY in which it is kept. Our conduct on the Sabbath is a sign to Him. It reveals the degree of our love and dedication to His way. To see it as anything else is a great mistake.

The Sabbath is a sign, a test, if you will. It is God's indicator of whether we will walk under His authority or not (Ex. 16:4). The way we honor the Sabbath is our declaration to God that we yield to that authority. The Sabbath is a GREAT TEST.

WILL YOU PASS IT?

A Sabbath Test Part II

Seven Human Arguments

A rebuttal to the seven most popular arguments
advanced by those who buy and sell on the Sabbath

Introduction

Who Decides How God Is Worshiped?

O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself:
it is not in man that walks to direct his own steps

~Jeremiah 10:23~

Several years ago a longstanding member of a major Protestant denomination began questioning some of the traditions of his church. Most notable among these traditions were the festivals and holy days taught by his pastor and embraced by his denomination his entire life.

As a child growing up, this man believed in these traditions. He loved Christmas with all its decorations and presents. He anticipated Easter with its candy and games. They were such great days. What was not to like?

Later, as a young adult, this devout man tried to see meaning and significance in these seasons, but eventually the things he had long thought to be true began to look less true. Oh, to be sure, Jesus' birth is described in the Bible, but noticeably absent is any evidence of this event being celebrated by the apostles or the early New Testament Church. And although Jesus' resurrection consumes a significant portion of the gospels, the early Church kept the Passover, not Easter. Even a casual study of these holidays revealed that their origin came not from the scriptures but rather from ancient Pagan festivals dedicated to honoring an endless array of deities, but never the God of the Bible.

The young man's study would then take him to the Sabbath, and once again, another longstanding practice of the church seemed to directly contradict the Bible. As he continued to research this subject, he would discover that Jesus and His apostles as well as the first century Christians kept the seventh day (Saturday), not Sunday as he had been taught.

Overwhelmed by this new understanding, the young man approached his pastor for answers. However, instead of answers, all he seemed to get were excuses. His pastor argued that it doesn't really matter which day a Christian observes because "God looks on the heart." He then explained that Sunday worship and holidays such as Good Friday, Palm Sunday, Ash Wednesday, and Lent actually enhance the meaning of the "faith" and point believers to a deeper understanding of the gospel. Therefore, God couldn't possibly be opposed to such traditions.

As this meeting progressed, the young man's pastor vigorously defended each of the festivals kept by the church. At one point, he even argued that the world as we know it today, with all its complexities, made it impossible to keep the Sabbath as described in the Bible. He then argued that Christmas was a wonderful holiday because of its impact on children, while Easter was equally beautiful because it was a means to evangelize to unbelievers about a risen Christ. During this meeting, this pastor actually suggested that the holy days kept by Jesus and His disciples were legalistic and burdensome and those who keep them today are simply being self-righteous.

When the young man indicated that not one argument advanced by his pastor could be supported by scripture, his pastor became furious. He accused the young man of being pharisaical and intolerant. At one point, he even called him a "Judaizer." He then suggested that the young man look into his heart for answers. But never once did he encourage him to look into God's word for the truth.

One Last Question

As the young man began to leave his pastor's office he paused and then asked this man he had trusted for so many years one last question. "Sir," he said, "Does the Bible anywhere remotely hint that man has the authority to decide for himself how he may worship his Creator?"

There is a profound quality and strength to this question because it cuts to the very core of the faith proclaimed in the pages of your Bible. It is a question that should be on the lips of every true believer. Tragically, however, it is not.

Mankind down through the ages has always attempted to worship God on his own terms. As a result he has crafted an endless array of faiths, all claiming to serve some higher power. Even within Christianity there are virtually hundreds of denominations with radically different beliefs. However, each of these denominations asserts that it is a "Bible believing church." How is this possible?

A Question Answered

Although the young man's pastor never answered his last question, the Bible most certainly does. The scriptures declare with great force that man does NOT have the moral authority to decide for himself how he will worship the Great Creator of Heaven and Earth. God alone has this authority. Furthermore, both the Old and New Testaments warn against thinking otherwise.

A Stern Warning

When speaking to the children of Israel, God once warned them to not inquire about other religions and to never attempt integrating those religions into the truth He was giving them (Dt. 12:30-31). He then expressed a powerful principle regarding how He is to be worshiped.

Whatsoever thing I command you, observe to do it: you shall not add thereto nor diminish from it. (Dt. 12:32)

Here God is stating that true faith is defined by Him, not by man. God alone has the moral authority to determine how He is to be worshiped. Furthermore, God commanded Israel to follow each of His instructions precisely as they were given. They were not to add to it or take anything away from it in any way, shape or form. Tragically, this is a principle that the ancient nation of Israel repeatedly ignored. The Bible is a chronicle of this defiance. Consider just two examples.

Example I

When Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments, the Israelites were demanding that Aaron fashion a golden calf so that they could have an idol to lead them (Ex. 32:1). Once this idol was crafted, Aaron had the audacity to proclaim it as a gift to the very God who had delivered these slaves out of bondage. With the idol in plain view of this newly emancipated people, Aaron declared "a feast to the Eternal."

And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, tomorrow is a feast to the Lord. (Ex. 32:5)

Imagine the scope of this act. While God Himself was commanding Moses to refrain from making any graven images (the second commandment), Aaron was fashioning a golden calf for God's people to worship! When God saw this attempt to build a faith using the traditions of Egypt, He was furious and even threatened to extinguish the Israelites for such defiance (Ex. 32:7-10).

Example II

Later, when Israel was a young monarchy under King Saul, God, through his prophet Samuel, gave them very specific instructions concerning how to prosecute a war with the Amalekites (1Sa.15:2-3). However, as the war progressed, Saul made some modifications to these instructions (verse 9).

When the battle was over, Samuel came to the king and asked why he hadn't followed God's word concerning the war they had just won (verses 10-14). Saul responded by explaining that he thought his approach would enhance Israel's worship of the Eternal (verse 15). Imagine a man, even a king, actually thinking he knew better than God about worship. But that is exactly what Saul argued.

These are just two of many Old Testament examples where God's children tried to "do Him one better" when it came to defining the faith. Regrettably, such examples of defiance are not limited to the ancient nation of Israel. The New Testament also describes several examples of God's people thinking they could somehow decide for themselves how to worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

"In Vain Do They Worship Me"

The gospels of Matthew and Mark record an event in which Jesus was chastised by the religious leaders of His day because His disciples "transgressed the tradition of the elders" (Mt. 15:1-2, Mk. 7:1-5). Jesus responded to this accusation by rebuking these "pious" men because they held their traditions as having greater moral weight than God's law. Notice what He said:

"...Well hath Isaiah prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. Howbeit in vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do." And he said unto them, "Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition." (Mk. 7:6-9)

A History of Defiance

Clearly, the story of mankind is a story of defiance. It is a story of man thinking that he can decide for himself how he will serve the God who made him. The danger of such arrogance is staggering and even threatens those who consider themselves true believers. Notice the sober warning Jesus gave concerning some who thought they could worship God on their terms.

Not every one that says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? And in Thy name cast out devils? And in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, you that work iniquity. (Mt 7:21-23)

Here, the Messiah declares with great force that simply confessing "Jesus is Lord" is not enough. God requires action. The faith of His people must be a living faith (Jas. 2:20) – one that demonstrates a total commitment to the Great God of Heaven. Such a commitment is reflected in obedience to Him and His law—at any price.

With this in mind, the big question facing God's people today is powerfully linked to the warning Jesus uttered when giving the Sermon on the Mount.

**Are you obeying the God of Heaven - or have you
been captured by the traditions of men?**

Argument I

A Millennial Foretaste

And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying,
This is the way, walk you in it, when you turn to the right hand,
and when you turn to the left.

~Isaiah 30:21~

One of the most popular arguments advanced by those who frequent restaurants on the Sabbath is that such a practice actually enhances the observance of this day. Notice the words of a longstanding evangelist who acknowledged that he and his wife often dine out on the Sabbath, particularly Friday evenings:

“I can’t imagine not going to a fine restaurant on the Sabbath. It’s a very millennial setting - a delicious meal and wonderful fellowship.”

This evangelist offers an interesting point. According to his reasoning, the setting at a fine restaurant makes the Sabbath more reflective of God’s Kingdom. But what would this leader say to those who cannot afford such an activity? Is their Sabbath somehow diminished because they must share this meal in their home? What about going to a pizza parlor or a fast food restaurant on the Sabbath? Would this be consistent with a picture of the millennium?

To be sure, going out to dinner at a fine restaurant is an experience that can bring great pleasure. It is also true that the millennium will be a time of unimaginable abundance and prosperity. But is there a connection between going to a restaurant on the Sabbath and the Kingdom it allegedly pictures? The answer to this question is an emphatic NO! In reality, dining out on the Sabbath not only contradicts God’s Kingdom, it actually embraces the kingdoms of men.

The fact that the meal takes place at an expensive restaurant does not make it any more appropriate than if it were a burger and fries at a local “fast food joint.” Such a practice does not keep this day SACRED or HOLY. It does not show deference to the Sabbath or its purpose. Instead, it is using time that belongs to the Creator of Heaven and Earth for one’s personal enjoyment. Regardless of how adamant this church leader is, this practice does not honor God nor does it picture His kingdom. To illustrate this truth, consider the following question:

Will there be restaurants open on the Sabbath during the millennium?

It is doubtful that any serious Sabbath-keeping Christian would hesitate if asked this question. The answer is: “Of course not!” This being the case, how can an activity that will not be a part of God’s kingdom somehow picture that kingdom? The plain truth is: it can’t!

The mistake in the reasoning of this evangelist is the belief that if something is beautiful and gives pleasure, it must be good. In other words, “it can’t be wrong if it feels so right.”

This same argument has been advanced by the Protestant world in defense of an endless array of traditions it holds dear. After all, Christmas is beautiful and teaches children about the birth of Jesus; it must be good. Easter is beautiful and teaches about His resurrection; it, too, must be good.

The belief that the goodness of something can be determined by the feeling it instills is not new. This line of thinking has been at the center of every heresy ever crafted by men seeking to worship God. Furthermore, it is never the standard God applies when determining righteousness.

The fact of the matter is that the way something looks and feels does not determine its moral standing with the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe. God alone is the True Judge of what is good and what is evil. He is the great Moral Authority. His judgments are reflected in His great moral code: the Ten Commandments. If man truly desires to know what pleases his Creator, he should ask Him. He should seek God's wisdom in His word. When it comes to buying and selling on His Sabbath, God's word is very clear. Notice what He conveys through His servant Nehemiah.

And if the people of the land bring ware or any victuals on the Sabbath day to sell, that we would not buy it of them on the Sabbath, or on the holy day... (Neh. 10:31)

Nehemiah's words are not ambiguous. In fact, they couldn't be more clear: God's people are not to purchase goods and services on His Sabbath or holy days.

Later, Nehemiah would become even more forceful when addressing this issue. At that time, he actually locked the gates of Jerusalem and prohibited vendors from entering the city on the Sabbath day to sell their goods. He even threatened to use force to prevent these "entrepreneurs" from engaging in business on the Sabbath.

In those days saw I in Judah some treading wine presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and lading asses; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all manner of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day: and I testified against them in the Day wherein they sold victuals. There dwelt men of Tyre also therein, which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold on the Sabbath unto the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem. Then I contended with the nobles of Judah and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the Sabbath day? Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us and upon this city? Yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the Sabbath. And it came to pass, that when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the Sabbath, I commanded that the gates should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened till after the Sabbath: and some of my servants set I at the gates, that there should no burden be brought in on the Sabbath day. So the merchants and sellers of all kind of ware lodged without Jerusalem once or twice. Then I testified against them, and said unto them, Why lodge ye about the wall? If ye do so again I will lay hands on you. From that time forth they came no more on the Sabbath. (Neh. 13:15-21)

With this in mind, it is hard to imagine that this great servant of God would see the practice of going to a restaurant on the Sabbath as a picture of God's millennial Kingdom. On the contrary, Nehemiah saw it as a threat to God's people. In a very real sense, this champion of faith saw buying and selling on the Sabbath as a picture of something very ominous – CAPTIVITY! Notice his words:

Did not your fathers thus (buy and sell on the Sabbath), and did not our God bring all this evil (captivity) upon us, and upon this city? Yet you bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the Sabbath. (Ne. 13:18)

Here, Nehemiah is declaring that the people of Judah were engaging in the very practice that led to their captivity in the first place. They were profaning God's Sabbath. They desecrated this holy time by engaging in business. They were purchasing food on this sacred day.

Sabbath Conversation and Restaurants

Some have argued that going to a restaurant on the Sabbath is acceptable to God because of what is done there. After all, God's people go there to talk about the Bible and the Kingdom. How could that not please Him?

Once again, this argument employs the same reasoning used by the Protestant world when they justify keeping Sunday as their Sabbath. After all, every Sunday they read the Bible, sing praises to God, and pray for His kingdom to return. That must be pleasing to Him, too, right? What Sabbath-keeping Christian really believes this argument?

Throughout human history, man has always attempted to justify his behavior by cloaking it in acts of goodness. However, when you get right down to it, talking about God while dining out on the Sabbath possesses about the same moral weight as talking about God while eating a ham sandwich. The problem is not with the conversation. It's with the conduct.

Come Out of Her, My People

One of the great ironies of going to a restaurant on the Sabbath is that this practice actually mirrors one of the most popular traditions of this world. In the United States, more people frequent restaurants between Friday evening and Saturday evening than any other 24-hour period. There is even a major restaurant chain whose name captures the sentiments of this tradition—"Thank God it's Friday."

Regardless of how hard one may defend the tradition of dining out on the Sabbath, it simply doesn't reconcile with the scriptures. The plain truth is clear and direct. Dining out on the Sabbath is not Godly; it is **WORLDLY!** It is a tradition of men – one that is embraced by a world that couldn't care less about the Great God of Heaven and His soon coming Kingdom. It is hard to imagine a practice that stands in greater defiance to the Creator and His law.

Tragically, thousands of God's people see this practice as harmless. But make no mistake about it: God did not invent going to restaurants on His Sabbath. It is a tradition of a world that doesn't know Him. God warns His people to beware of being ensnared by the practices of a society that is defiant to Him. Here is what He says.

And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. (Rev. 18:4)

Those who think that going to a restaurant on the Sabbath is an appropriate activity because it creates a millennial setting should think again. When that millennial Kingdom returns, God's Sabbath and holy days will be honored in accordance with His instructions, not man's traditions.

Argument II

A Complex World

There is a way that seems right to a man,
but the ends thereof are the ways of death.

Proverbs 14:12

When giving a sermon regarding the proper observance of the Sabbath, a prominent minister in the Church of God addressed the issue of going to restaurants on this day. It was clear from his message that he saw nothing wrong with this practice. At one point, this pastor actually suggested that the complex nature of our world today makes it impossible to keep the Sabbath as prescribed in the scriptures. He specifically noted God's instructions regarding buying and selling.

This man did not dispute the fact that in the Old Testament, buying and selling on the Sabbath went contrary to the scriptures. However, based on the nature of our contemporary world, not buying and selling would be so impractical as to actually be a stumbling block to God's people.

According to this pastor, God's people today often buy and sell on the Sabbath without even realizing it. He cited as proof the fact that most homes in the modern world are equipped with utilities such as gas, electricity, and water. This minister contended that as a result of using these services on the Sabbath, God's people not only pay for them, but also make it necessary for utility companies to support their service with manpower on this day – a practice which technically violates God's instruction prohibiting others such as "the stranger within thy gates" (Ex. 20:10) from working on behalf of His people on the Sabbath.

This highly respected minister has advanced a very unusual stream of logic in his argument. His reasoning is based on the premise that because you do not have authority over that which is beyond your control, you do not have to exercise such authority over that which is within your control. Therefore, buying and selling on the Sabbath is permissible in today's world. It is interesting that this identical argument has been used prolifically by the Protestant world as justification for not keeping the Sabbath at all.

Rationalizing a Tradition

It is difficult to regard this argument as anything other than an attempt to rationalize a practice that is nowhere supported in scripture. In essence, it is using technology and progress to invalidate God's word. Following this argument to its logical conclusion, this minister is suggesting that if the world during the days of Nehemiah was as technologically advanced as it is today, Nehemiah would never have prohibited vendors from entering into Jerusalem and selling their goods on the Sabbath. Does anyone really believe this would be the case?

To illustrate how foolish such an argument is, consider how it could be used with respect to eating unclean foods. The argument would go something like this: Because all foods at restaurants are prepared on common working surfaces, clean foods might come in contact with unclean foods. Therefore, it is possible that microscopic particles of unclean meats may attach themselves to the steak you just enjoyed at that five star restaurant. This being the case, you might as well order lobster because you probably had some of it with the meal you just finished.

Would such an argument ever persuade you to order a ham sandwich the next time you go to a restaurant? Of course not! Because it is obvious that God expects His people to exercise authority over

things they can control, not things they can't. The choice of what you eat as well as when you eat it falls within that control. If you wouldn't eat a ham sandwich because God's law forbids it, why would you buy and sell on His Sabbath – which is forbidden by the same God?

The plain truth regarding eating out at restaurants on the Sabbath is revealed not only in the words of Nehemiah, but also in the example of God's people throughout the Bible. There is not a hint in the scriptures that any of the champions of the faith ever engaged in such a practice.

What About the Disciples Picking Grain on the Sabbath?

Matthew 12: 1-8

There are some in the Church who believe Jesus' disciples picking a small amount of grain on the Sabbath (Mt. 12:1-8) stands as proof that acquiring a meal outside the home does not violate God's Law. Some even contend that the Old Testament made provisions for the poor and travelers to do just that (see: Lev.19:9, Deut. 23:25, 24:19). However, Jesus implied just the opposite when defending His men. To illustrate this point consider the following. If what the disciples did was lawful, why would the Messiah cite the examples of David and the Levites in their defense? Jesus readily acknowledged that both David and the Levites did that which went contrary to God's law (Mt. 12:3-5). If this wasn't also true of the disciples, why did Christ invoke these particular examples? Why didn't He simply argue that no law had been violated?

Something to Think About

At this point, it is important to understand that although the Pharisees accusing the Messiah's disciples, were treacherous, they weren't stupid. These men were acutely aware of the provision in the Torah permitting gleaning on another man's property. However, they also knew that this provision did not extend to gleaning on the Sabbath, regardless of how little was gathered—and Jesus understood this as well.

Furthermore, contrary to what many may believe, Jesus never challenged the Pharisees' understanding of the law, but rather their understanding of MERCY. The truth that seems to be so elusive to so many today is that the Messiah considered His disciples "guiltless," not because of what they did, but because of why they did it. These men were genuinely famished, just like David—and like David, what was done to remedy it was unquestionably a once-in-a-lifetime act, not something that could be planned out and done periodically, as so many do today.

How Hungry were the Disciples?

The actual story of David and the Showbread provides some keen insight into what may have been taking place when Jesus defended His disciples against the accusation leveled by the Pharisees. It most assuredly makes a powerful statement regarding dining out on the Sabbath. Consider the following.

When David ate the showbread he didn't simply take it and start eating. He first approached the priest and asked for permission to do so—and he had a very good reason for asking. The scriptures tell us that at that time David was being pursued by King Saul who wanted to kill him. His flight required him and his men to hide out in order to avoid capture and certain execution. In all likelihood, their escape was so swift they didn't have time to take provisions with them. Some commentaries suggest that they may have gone 3 days without food when David finally sought out the priest for help. Jamison, Fausset and Brown's commentary describes David's plight as "an emergency." They would go on to write:

"David and his attendants seem to have been lurking in some of the adjoining caves, to elude pursuit, and to have been, consequently, reduced to great extremities of hunger."

In short, they were famished. This was not a simple case of the "munchies." Nor were they looking for a nice place to fellowship. Their need was REAL. And their situation was desperate.

However, even then David sought the permission of the priest before taking the showbread. And although his need was truly GREAT, Ahimelech, the priest, still inquired of God as to whether he could give David the food. The scriptures tell us that God showed mercy to David and consented. JFB put it this way.

“A dispensation to use the hallowed bread was specially granted by God Himself.”

This now brings us to an important question. Why would Jesus invoke the story of David at this time if it didn't parallel, to some degree, what was taking place with the disciples? After all, if the need of the disciples wasn't comparable to that of David and his men, the analogy wouldn't work. In other words, if what the disciples did was simply a part of a normal Sabbath day then their reason for plucking the grain would have been driven by convenience while David's reason was driven by desperation. It is interesting that the word used to describe the disciples' hunger (Mt. 12:1) was the same used to describe the hunger experienced by David (v. 3). It was also the same word used to describe the Messiah's condition when he fasted for forty days and forty nights in the wilderness (Mt. 4:2)

Based on Jesus' invocation of this story, it is reasonable to conclude that what the disciples were experiencing was truly unique. This was not a typical Sabbath in which these men were simply acquiring a normal meal. These men were genuinely hungry, perhaps even famished. You don't know why, but like David, they must have had a very good reason for having not eaten. As a result they inquired of the Messiah to see if they could gather a small amount of grain to eat. Jesus consented.

The bottom line is this. God's judgment of David as well as His judgment of the apostles was based on a unique circumstance at a unique time. For Sabbath dining advocates to hold this example as proof that God's people may now make plans to pay Sabbath-breakers to prepare their meals on holy time and also be held guiltless is disgraceful. In a very real sense such a belief turns the grace of God into license. In other words, it rejects the true meaning of the words "I desire mercy and not sacrifice," and represents them to mean "If you can acquire your Sabbath food once, because of a genuine need, then I can do it on occasion because of the pleasure I derive from it." In a sermon defending dining out a long-standing pastor of major COG actually referred to dining out on the Sabbath as a "treat."

Do you think that is why David ate the shewbread?

Or, why the disciples picked grain?

The assertion that it has always been permissible with the Lord of the Sabbath for God's people to acquire and prepare their Sabbath meals on holy time is thoroughly contradicted by the Lord of the Sabbath Himself. Jesus never taught any such thing, nor did He imply it—in either word or deed.

Argument III

Strict Obedience is Pharisaical

Well has Isaiah prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written,
This people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.

~Mark 7:6~

One of the most common assertions advanced by proponents of going to restaurants on the Sabbath is that those who refuse to do so are simply being self-righteous. This argument is unique in that it is not an affirmative defense of this practice, but rather an indictment of those who believe such a practice is wrong. In other words, this accusation is not proof that going to restaurants on the Sabbath is acceptable to God, but rather a condemnation of those who would question such an activity.

It is interesting that this same assertion has been used prolifically by the Protestant world when condemning God's people for keeping the Sabbath and holy days at all. It is also ironic that many of the leaders who systematically corrupted the doctrines of God's Church over the past fifteen plus years now regard those who held fast to the truth as "self-righteous Pharisee-types."

What Is a Pharisee?

Today the term "pharisee" is one of the most pejorative in a "believer's" lexicon. It implies that the recipient of this label is filled with arrogance and conceit and void of any compassion. It suggests that such people are legalistic – committed to works but not love. Pharisees are cold and insensitive. They are judgmental and cruel. They are quick to accuse and slow to forgive. And anyone who would question a practice as "innocent" as sharing a meal with brethren at a restaurant on the Sabbath must be a Pharisee. But does this term rightly describe those who refrain from going to restaurants on the Sabbath?

Those in God's Church who employ this label would be well advised to carefully consider what this accusation means and how God Himself understands this term. Just what is a Pharisee in God's eyes? Furthermore, is it possible that those advancing this accusation are actually guilty of the very thing of which they accuse others?

To those who believe that opponents of going to restaurants on the Sabbath are being pharisaical, consider the following questions:

- Is eating unleavened bread during the spring holy days pharisaical? What about fasting on the Day of Atonement? Is that pharisaical?
- What about washing one another's feet on the Passover?
- Or going to a far away place for eight days each fall? Are these practices pharisaical?
- What about abstaining from unclean meats?
- Or tithing?
- What about refusing to keep Christmas or Easter, even at the risk of great personal and professional harm? Is it pharisaical to conduct your life in such a way?

When it comes to the Sabbath:

- What about abstaining from work? Is that pharisaical?
- What about refusing to do your own pleasure on the Sabbath, or speaking your own words? Is that pharisaical?

If you were to ask these questions to the vast majority of “professing Christians,” they would probably answer “YES!” But what about God’s people? How would they regard the life they have been called to live—is it pharisaical? More importantly, how does the God of your Bible view self-righteousness when it comes to worshipping Him?

To be sure, the attitude of self-righteousness is abhorrent to God and is a mortal enemy of His Kingdom. In a very real sense it is a form of idolatry, a violation of God’s law. In the first century, Pharisees were quick to quote the scriptures, but their lives were filled with a great sense of self-importance.

However, there was something very unique about these religious leaders that set them apart from the great heroes of the faith. These pious men relied on the traditions of the elders to define their faith. They saw these traditions as being even more influential in their lives than God’s law. Jesus considered this hypocrisy so vile that during the last days of His life, He excoriated the Pharisees because they reeked with such arrogance (Mt. 23). With this in mind, some very important questions need to be addressed with respect to going to restaurants. Consider the following:

- Is refusing to go to a restaurant on the Sabbath pharisaical? In other words, is it based on a tradition or on God’s word?
- Is refusing to buy or sell on the Sabbath pharisaical? In other words, is it based on a tradition or on God’s word?
- When Nehemiah contended with the leaders of Judah because they were buying and selling on the Sabbath, was he just being a Pharisee?

Jesus Versus the Pharisees

One of the greatest indictments ever leveled by Jesus Christ against the religious leaders of His day was that these learned men embraced traditions they thought possessed greater moral weight than God’s law. Imagine having such arrogance! These men actually thought they knew better than God Himself when it came to how the GREAT CREATOR should be worshiped. Jesus saw this attitude as repugnant and He did not mince words when condemning it. He began by blasting their hypocrisy.

Well has Isaiah prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, this people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. (Mk. 7:6)

Jesus then exposed their faith as worthless. In essence it was void of any substance because it was driven by the contrivances of man. It was not God’s law they loved. It was their traditions.

Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the traditions of men... (Mk: 7:7-8)

At this point Jesus thundered a crushing indictment against these spiritual leaders for their attempt at refashioning God’s law. He put their behavior in God’s perspective and the picture was not pleasant.

Full well you reject the commandment of God that you may keep your tradition. (Mk.7:9)

At this point it is important to understand that Jesus was NOT excoriating the Pharisees for being too careful in keeping God's law. His condemnation was that they rejected that law.

God's people today should be in fear of those words. They are dreadful indeed and reflect the judgment of God Himself. If man embraces traditions instead of honoring God's law, they make the law of none effect. When it comes to dining out on the Sabbath versus refraining from such a practice, which is driven by tradition?

The Bible makes it absolutely clear that the traditions of men have no place in the worship of God. Furthermore, those who believe they can decide for themselves what is acceptable to the Creator of Heaven and Earth should consider what the great prophet Jeremiah said about man's capacity to make such decisions.

O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walks to direct his own steps. (Jer. 10:23)

Despite what mankind believes, humanity has never had the capacity to decide for himself how to worship the God of the Bible. Every attempt at this endeavor has only met with failure.

The scriptures reveal that God is the Great Moral Authority of the Universe. It is His wisdom that must be sought and honored. During His earthly life, Jesus Christ understood this timeless principle – and this understanding guided every decision He ever made. The Bible states without ambiguity that even Jesus did not rely on His own wisdom. Notice His own words:

I can of my own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not my own will, but the will of the Father which has sent me. (Jn. 5:30)

If Jesus wouldn't rely on His own wisdom, why would anyone who calls himself a true believer try to do differently? The scriptures make it abundantly clear that God is not impressed with how man navigates his moral path (see: Pro. 14:12; Jer. 17:9).

God's word also reveals that man's wisdom is driven by a love of self, not a love of righteousness. However, God loves righteousness – and His law, the Ten Commandments, reflect that love. The Bible declares that God's heart is inclined toward those who have a deep respect for His word. Notice what God reveals through the prophet Isaiah.

...To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite of spirit and trembles at my word. (Isa. 66:2)

There is a profound truth in this verse. Here, God is revealing that His law is to be treated with great deference and respect. In a very real sense, it is to be feared. Tragically, the Pharisees of Jesus' day failed to reflect a proper reverence for God's word. They thought they "could do Him one better" when it came to the scriptures. They were wrong. Tragically, their mistake has been repeated for two thousand years.

To those who claim that a person who refrains from going to a restaurant on the Sabbath is just being pharisaical, ask yourself the following.

- Who trembles at God's word?
- Who loves its hope and fears its consequences?

Nehemiah certainly did. His bold words regarding buying and selling on the Sabbath are a testimony to how committed he was to God's law (Ne.13:15-21). Now consider this: when it comes to God's Church today, who is most like that great servant? Those who eat out on the Sabbath, or those who don't?

It is not the self-righteous that refrain from going to restaurants on the Sabbath. It is the self-righteous who believe you can do otherwise. They are the ones who “spin” God’s word to fit their traditions. They see God as tolerant of anything they do. To these “New Covenant Pharisees,” God has this warning:

Every work will come into judgment (Eccl. 12:14)

The argument that God will somehow give His people a “free pass” to dine out on the day He made holy reflects the height of arrogance. In a very real sense, it is pharisaical. It makes the law of God of none effect. It reflects a total disregard for God’s word.

However, God’s instructions are firm. His law is absolute. God’s word does not require man’s “spin,” it requires man’s obedience. Buying and selling on the Sabbath is a test of that obedience. The self-righteous will ignore that test. Those who tremble at His word will heed it.

Which best describes you?

Argument IV

I'm Not Responsible

And the lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel your brother?
And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?

~Genesis 4:9~

One of the most popular arguments advanced by proponents of dining out on the Sabbath is that those who serve them would be working anyway. This being the case, there is no apparent violation of the fourth commandment which prohibits the labor of a “manservant” or “maidservant” under the Sabbath-keeper’s authority (Ex. 20:10).

Even if you accept this argument as valid, it misses a critical point. The issue of whether or not one goes to a restaurant on the Sabbath is not about those who work at the restaurant on this day; it is about the Sabbath-keeper, and how he or she honors the fourth commandment. In other words, even though some may choose to work, what about those who choose to obey? What does God expect of those people concerning their behavior on His Sabbath?

Today we live in a world where the overwhelming majority of people on earth break God’s law without a second thought. This is because that law is not real to them nor is the Great God who fashioned it. There are few places where this attitude of indifference is more apparent than mankind’s approach to God’s Sabbath and holy days. For the most part, people around the world go about their normal routine on these days. They seek their own will. They engage in their own pleasures. To them, the Sabbath is no different than any other day.

On a typical Friday evening or Saturday afternoon, mankind engages in a variety of enterprises. Many enjoy recreational activities and hobbies. Some spend time with family and friends. Others catch up on an endless array of household chores. But almost no one thinks of this time as the Sabbath of the Eternal. For most, this period belongs to them. Friday evening is their time. Saturday is their day.

A Typical Sabbath in the World

Among the endless array of activities engaged in on the Sabbath is WORK – the pursuit of a “living.” For many businesses, the Sabbath is the most profitable day of the week. It is a time when consumers have money to spend and businesses have products for them to spend it on. Regrettably, many of God’s people can be counted among those consumers.

The argument of those who believe it is okay to go out to a restaurant on the Sabbath because it isn’t work suggests that God is only concerned with the person selling the goods and services, not those purchasing them. Does this really make sense? Furthermore, is there an example in the scriptures that even remotely suggests such a practice is acceptable to God? Once again, the answer is NO!

When Nehemiah contended with the nobles of Judah over engaging in commerce, as either the provider of goods or the consumer of them, he did not qualify his words. His warning was clear and direct and to suggest otherwise is a distortion of scripture. Nehemiah was so passionate regarding his opposition to engaging in commerce on the Sabbath that he actually threatened to use physical force against those who defied his word (Neh.13:15-21).

The argument that because a restaurant would be open anyway and therefore it is permissible in God’s sight to avail oneself of their services is simply not true. That argument is driven by a desire to justify a

behavior that is nowhere found in the scriptures. Not only does the Bible instruct the restaurant personnel to cease from their labor, but it also commands the Sabbath-keeper to refrain from supporting that labor.

Additionally, to suggest that the Sabbath-keeper bears no responsibility for restaurant personnel working on this day is not entirely true. In a 2003 interview with a representative of one of the leading family restaurant chains in the United States, it was revealed that on a typical Sabbath, one of their stores serves approximately 600 customers. When asked what this restaurant would do if only 300 customers patronized their store, a representative stated, "We would reduce our manpower because the demand would not be as great." This representative was then asked what would happen if no one visited the restaurant on the Sabbath. He responded, "The answer to this question is obvious. We would close on that day."

With this in mind, if as few as six Sabbath-keepers frequent that restaurant on the Sabbath, their level of responsibility for that restaurant being open is one percent. In other words, those who profess to keep the Sabbath are one percent responsible for that restaurant's decision to break this commandment. This is a fact that the representative acknowledged.

This is not to suggest that those who work at the restaurant would become Sabbath-keepers if their restaurant was closed on Saturdays. What it is saying is that the personnel in this restaurant who break the Sabbath are being compelled to do so for many reasons. When it comes to their specific labor, one percent of those reasons would be directly linked to God's own people.

It is true that the decision to work on the Sabbath rests solely in the hands of restaurant personnel. But it is equally true that the decision to support that labor rests solely in the hands of those who purchase their goods and services. With this in mind, ask yourself one question: would Jesus ever compel them to work that one percent? The bottom line regarding this argument is really quite simple: You may not be able to prevent restaurant personnel from working on the Sabbath. But you most certainly can prevent them from working for you on that day!

Argument V

It Preaches the Gospel

Let your light so shine before men, that
they may see your good works, and
glorify your Father in heaven

~Matthew 5:16~

One of the newer arguments advanced by people who frequent restaurants on the Sabbath is that by engaging in this practice, God's people can actually preach the gospel. The thinking here is that restaurant personnel will see how polite and respectful God's people are. Additionally, if there are children with them, they will also see how well behaved they are. Therefore, going to a restaurant on the Sabbath is an opportunity to "let your light shine" and to show the world there is a better way.

If this argument is true, why stop at restaurants? What about an amusement park? Certainly they would appreciate being witnessed to by God's people on His Sabbath, wouldn't they? How about the people who work at a bowling alley? Or a movie theater? What about a sporting event? Certainly a Saturday afternoon baseball game would be a great place to show fans and vendors alike how a child of God conducts himself.

Perhaps a golf course would work. This would be an ideal place to let your light shine. When one of the players in your foursome misses a three foot putt and begins to take God's name in vain, you could remind him of the third commandment. However, don't forget to duck if you do. Tragically, there are some who have actually suggested that each of these activities can be appropriate on the Sabbath for this very reason – it preaches the gospel.

The idea that a Sabbath meal at a restaurant is a godly activity because it affords His people an opportunity to be a witness to the world would be silly if it wasn't so serious. In reality, this argument actually mocks God's word as well as the very Kingdom His Sabbath pictures.

A Gospel of Defiance

To be sure, the scriptures exhort God's people to let their light shine (Mt. 5:16). Additionally, it is also true that one of the great commissions to the Church is to preach the gospel of the Kingdom as a witness (Mt. 24:14). But what does going to a restaurant on the Sabbath say about these two very important scriptural directives? The answer is: PLENTY, but none of it is good.

Those who go to restaurants on the Sabbath don't honor God's word – they actually defy it. Consider what this behavior is saying – it says:

- "Don't take the Bible or God too seriously."
- It says, "our children obey us, but we don't obey our Father in Heaven when it comes to His instruction concerning the Sabbath."
- It says, "We believe in God's millennial Kingdom; we just don't believe in picturing that Kingdom at this moment."

In essence, this single act shouts before the God of Heaven the same declaration that every false religion has cried out down through the ages:

“I have the authority to decide for myself how I will worship the God who made me!”

To those who believe you can pick and choose what you will and will not do on the Sabbath, consider how many times man has attempted to worship the Creator on his own terms and it met with God's approval. The answer is zero. Man has spent his entire history in such an endeavor and God has always rejected it. Consider just a few examples.

- Adam and Eve attempted to decide for themselves how they would worship God. How successful were they?
- What about those at the tower of Babel? How does history remember them?
- Even the great King Solomon consented to idolatry when he allowed his pagan wives to construct shrines to their gods in Israel. The scriptures indicate that this act greatly displeased the Eternal (2Ki.1:4-9).

In the New Testament Church, many tried to craft a faith on their own as well and were severely indicted for it.

- The apostle Peter spoke of teachers who brought “damnable heresies” into the Church (1Pet. 2:21).
- Additionally, the apostle John warned God's people about a proliferation of false prophets, each bringing their own ideas on how to worship the King of the Universe (1Jn. 4:1).

The point here is really quite simple: God is worshiped on His terms, PERIOD. Despite this truth, thousands of God's people are convinced that by letting their light shine at a restaurant on the Sabbath they can somehow turn the profane into that which is holy. This mistake has been made by countless thousands who have sought to justify their behavior and argue that their disobedience somehow has God's blessing. It has never worked in the past, and there is no evidence that this trend is changing.

Justification, Not Faith

There are numerous examples illustrating how God's people can fool themselves into believing that their behavior has God's blessing despite the fact that it goes contrary to the scriptures. The following true story reflects how man can spin a behavior into something it is not.

The “Godly” Coach

Several years ago, a baptized member of God's Church left the faith and pursued a career as a high school teacher. In addition to teaching, this young man became a very successful basketball coach. His teams won championships and many of his players went on to play at some of the leading universities in the country.

When asked why he would coach on the Sabbath, this “believer” explained that what he was doing was his way of “preaching the gospel” because he was teaching his players about fair play and sportsmanship. He argued that he was building character in young men and positively molding their lives. He then asked, “How could God possibly be unhappy with that?”

This story is typical of how those in God's Church justify behaviors that clearly go contrary to scripture. In this particular case, the coach was fully aware of God's law regarding the Sabbath. Sadly, he thought he could decide for himself how he would honor that law and the God who made it.

The True Gospel

To those who have advanced the argument that dining out on the Sabbath in an appropriate activity because “It Preaches the Gospel,” ask yourself the following question:

What is a greater witness to this world:
your presence at a restaurant on the Sabbath, or your absence?

As you think about this question, consider what lies ahead for those who work at restaurants on the Sabbath. The day will come when they will know about God and His Great Kingdom. At that time, they will understand God’s purpose for the Sabbath and they, too, will honor this great commandment.

Additionally, when God’s Kingdom is established on earth, its citizens will understand why God’s people today did certain things and refrained from doing others – including purchasing goods and services on His Sabbath. They will know that by refraining from buying and selling on the Sabbath, God’s people were not only honoring the Great Creator, they were also expressing a genuine hope for all mankind – a hope that all people would one day enter into God’s Sabbath rest. This is the true witness God’s people must proclaim. It is one that will be affirmed by the very government of God when His Kingdom returns. The gospel is NOT proclaimed by your presence at a restaurant on the Sabbath. It is, in fact, proclaimed by your absence.

Argument VI

Moderation and Balance

Who can understand his own error?

~Psalm 19:12~

One of the most common arguments advanced by people in God's Church today is that although one should not make a habit of going to restaurants on the Sabbath, it would not be wrong to engage in such a practice on occasion. In other words, it could be done in moderation and balance.

To be sure, the Bible does encourage moderation. This quality is a virtue that reflects discipline and self-control, which are essential components to the Christian walk. However, does the Bible remotely suggest that God approves of moderation when it comes to going contrary to His law? In other words, can you imagine anyone arguing that adultery is appropriate if done in moderation? Or, that stealing is acceptable if done in balance?

When it comes to sin, God prohibits moderation. He hates it!

To illustrate this point, how would God respond if His people wanted to go to an amusement park once every six months on the Sabbath? Or play golf every six weeks on His day? What about painting a room on the Sabbath? Or working on the family car every 5000 miles during the time God set apart as holy?

It is doubtful that any true Sabbath-keeper would see these activities, regardless of how infrequently they were done, as anything less than a clear violation of the fourth commandment. Those who think otherwise are just fooling themselves.

God's law concerning His Sabbath makes many provisions for its observance. But it also outlines prohibitions. This is not done because God is some tyrant in the sky, but rather because He is a Master Architect who created the Sabbath and its great purpose.

When God instructed the children of Israel to "remember the Sabbath and keep it holy," He indicated that as a result of their obedience, they would know Him (Ex. 31:12-17). This alone should make honoring the fourth commandment among the highest of priorities. What could be more important than knowing the GREAT GOD and His plan? But how does one keep the Sabbath holy?

Specific Instructions

The Bible is filled with very specific instructions concerning how God's Sabbath is to be kept. Additionally, the scriptures provide numerous examples of how the great champions of faith honored this commandment. Noticeably absent from these instructions and examples is any hint that buying and selling, even in moderation, is permitted on this day. It simply is not there. On the contrary, God's word indicates that buying and selling on the Sabbath is one of the primary reasons the nations of Israel and Judah went into captivity over 2500 years ago. This was the point Nehemiah was trying to hammer home when he contended with the nobles of Judah over their reckless disregard of this day (see Neh. 13:15-21).

Moderation or Compromise

The argument of “Moderation and Balance” advanced by proponents of dining out on the Sabbath may have the appearance of maturity and wisdom, but in truth it is nothing more than an attempt to rehabilitate sin.

The fact of the matter is that God’s law forbids moderation in many areas. Consider just a few: God’s law prohibits lying in moderation, stealing in moderation, coveting in moderation, killing in moderation, cursing in moderation, or building an occasional graven image. Such “balance” is abhorrent to God. When it comes to the Sabbath, God’s law prohibits working in moderation, doing your own pleasure in moderation, and compelling others to work on your behalf in moderation. That law also prohibits buying in moderation as well as selling in moderation.

Appropriate Sabbath Activities

Although God’s law outlines certain prohibitions concerning the Sabbath, it also outlines numerous activities that enhance the honoring of this great commandment. In reality, the command to honor God’s Sabbath is among the most affirmative in the Decalogue. Here are just some of the things you can engage in on that day:

Rest from your labor.
Fellowship with God’s people.
Study His word.
Pray to Him.
Refrain from worry.
Meditate on His way.
Sing praises to Him.
Be nourished by His servants.
Anticipate His Kingdom.
Celebrate God’s way with family.
Teach your children.
Delight in the great hope He has given you.
Serve God’s people.
Comfort the weak.
Encourage the strong.
Embrace the lonely.

And in all of this, God’s word instructs His people to DELIGHT in this day, knowing that the Sabbath stands as evidence that God’s hope for all mankind will one day be accomplished!

A Great Blessing

The Sabbath pictures God’s great millennial Kingdom. It is a day filled with hope and rich in meaning. God’s people should see it as nothing less. The Sabbath is a day that provides a glimpse into a Kingdom that will be absent of suffering. That Kingdom will be a time of great peace, great prosperity, great health, and great hope. It will be a time when ignorance and superstition will be replaced with the knowledge of a loving God and Father. Honoring the Sabbath that pictures that Kingdom is nothing less than a tremendous privilege and blessing. It should fill all of God’s people with a sense of purpose and hope, and most of all, it should fill them with THANKSGIVING.

King David once wrote a psalm dedicated to the Sabbath (Psa. 92). It contains some of the most inspiring words ever recorded in scripture. The day will come when those words will be fulfilled. For now, God’s people can act out that great Kingdom every week. And to do so, they do not need an occasional visit to an amusement park, an occasional movie, or an occasional meal at a restaurant. Such practices do not reflect that Kingdom in the slightest, even if done in “moderation and balance.”

Argument VII

An Ox in a Ditch

I can of my own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge:
and my judgment is just: because I seek not my own will,
but the will of the Father which has sent me

~John 5:30~

One of the more popular arguments for going to restaurants on the Sabbath is based on the principle of “an ox in a ditch.” This argument is driven by the belief that circumstances beyond the Sabbath-keeper’s control might necessitate having to purchase a meal on the Sabbath. Therefore, because emergencies do arise from time to time and take a variety of forms, it is up to the conscience of the “believer” to determine if it would be appropriate to go to a restaurant on God’s day.

This is a very interesting argument primarily because it has very little to do with an ox and more to do with Prime Rib or Chicken Tarragon. In other words, as a general rule, the advocates of this reasoning are using it to justify their appetite for pleasure as opposed to exploring how God truly wants His people to manage genuine emergencies. This truth becomes evident when you consider how Sabbath dining advocates define what constitutes an “ox in a ditch.” For most, just about anything meets this criteria. Consider some reasons actually advanced by leaders in God’s Church as “an ox in a ditch.”

- “A new family attended services for the first time and we wanted to be hospitable. Therefore we took them to a restaurant.”
- “A large group wanted to discuss the sermon and their children were getting hungry.”
- “We were going to attend a Church activity that evening, but didn’t want to drive several miles home to eat before the sun set.”
- “I’m a bachelor. I always eat out. If I had a wife, I’d stay home.”
- “We were running late to services, and were really hungry. So we went to a fast food restaurant to get a quick bite to eat.”
- “We were so busy yesterday, we couldn’t go shopping.”

These are just a few of dozens of “reasons” God’s people have advanced as legitimate emergencies when justifying dining out going on the Sabbath. But the real question that needs to be addressed is:

Where is the ox and where is the ditch?

If God’s people are going to invoke the principle of “an ox in a ditch” to justify dining out on the Sabbath, they would be well advised to understand the principle the Messiah was conveying when giving this lesson.

An Ox in a Ditch

When Jesus gave this very important principle regarding the Sabbath, He was dining at the home of a prominent Pharisee. Also there was a man suffering from “dropsy,” an abnormal and painful accumulation of fluid in the tissue of the body. Some believe this man was placed in front of Jesus in an attempt to see

if He would heal on the Sabbath. Others have suggested that Jesus Himself may have orchestrated this event in order to present this teaching. Whatever the case, the Messiah seized upon this moment to teach a valuable lesson about compassion. He began by asking these religious leaders if it was wrong to heal on the Sabbath. When they did not answer Him, Jesus healed the man. Perhaps anticipating a reaction, Jesus posed another question:

Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the Sabbath day? (Lk. 14:5)

Jesus' question silenced these men because it not only appealed to their understanding of the scriptures, but to rabbinical law which also provided for such acts of mercy. By invoking the law, Jesus was cutting through all the potential arguments these men may have been crafting. However, His words and actions were saying much more. The point He was making was that sometimes life does not go according to plan—there can be unexpected twists and turns. In short: an ox can fall into a pit.

The action Jesus took illustrated that when there is danger to life or property, God understands and even expects His children to take measures to correct the problem, even if it occurs on His Sabbath. In other words, save the ox.

This principle can be applied to other situations in life. There may be a time when the car breaks down or an injury occurs. These are not planned events. They are unforeseen emergencies. The fact is that our lives can be interrupted by events that are simply beyond our control.

However, there is a principle here that must be respected. The ox in a ditch is the exception, not the rule. In other words, just because you had to change a flat tire last Sabbath does not mean it is okay to rotate the tires next Sabbath.

A Genuine Emergency

There are times when purchasing something on the Sabbath might also be appropriate based on the principle of an ox in a ditch. For example: suppose you are taking a Sabbath walk and notice an elderly gentleman has collapsed on the sidewalk. When you approach to offer assistance, he informs you that he is diabetic and asks if you could buy him a specific kind of candy bar. Across the street is a convenience store and in your pocket is a five dollar bill. This is an ox in a ditch. This act is not about engaging in business on the Sabbath. It is about healing on the Sabbath. This being the case, there may be times when it might be necessary to buy food on this day. But this should only take place in a genuine emergency where the alternative may be catastrophic.

Additionally, it is important to understand what an ox in a ditch is not. Poor planning is not an ox in a ditch. A messy home that is not ready for company is not an ox in a ditch. Running into old friends that you haven't seen in years is not an ox in a ditch. An ox in a ditch is something to regret, not something to anticipate – or even celebrate.

Furthermore, when Jesus gave the lesson of an ox in a ditch, it was in the context of healing, not dining. The principle is there to be sure, but it is not to be manipulated. To do so would be a HUGE mistake. Those who use Jesus' teaching regarding an ox in a ditch to justify going to restaurants on the Sabbath should ask themselves, "Is it really an emergency?" Or is it possible that you are just exploiting for your own benefit the compassion and mercy of the very Savior who made provisions for dealing with a real tragedy that may arise on God's holy Sabbath?

A Final Thought

The Sabbath is a day with profound meaning. It was created by God as evidence that He has an incredible plan for mankind. That plan reflects a great wisdom and an infinite love for His children. God made the Sabbath so that His children could know Him and the hope of His Kingdom. The Sabbath pictures that Kingdom. And those who honor it honor what it pictures.

When God gave the command to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy, He wasn't simply instructing the children of Israel to be aware of when this day occurs. It is not simply a cognitive test of knowledge. The Sabbath is a test of faith—a test to see if His people will declare their loyalty to Him and His kingdom (Ex. 16:4).

Honoring God's Sabbath is done by acting out that kingdom every week. In a very real sense, God's Sabbath is His signature on a great moral code Jesus described in one word: LOVE. Honoring this day as God instructed is the profound responsibility of every true Christian. But there is more. To keep the Sabbath as God commands is also a great privilege—one that is known by so few. God's people should see it as an honor bestowed upon them by none other than the King of Eternity.

Does it matter which day is kept as the Sabbath? YES! Because the Great God said it does. Does it matter how that day is kept? YES AGAIN! Because the Great God said it does.

Finally, does man have the authority to decide for himself how he will honor the day God sanctified? Think about that question very carefully the next time you pick up a menu on Holy time.

Appendix I

“Amending God’s Law”

There are those who believe the scriptures can be somewhat misleading with respect to God’s instructions concerning proper Sabbath observance. These “believers” argue that God’s law must be placed in a proper context. Although this is true, it brings with it considerable risk. For example: many professing Christians manipulate the scriptures in an attempt to accommodate pre-conceived ideas about what God is saying in His word. As a result, man has concocted an endless array of beliefs. Sadly, this practice has even raised its ugly head within God’s Church.

Nowhere is this fact more evident than in the Church’s understanding of the fourth commandment—specifically the issue of going to restaurants on the Sabbath. Although the Bible clearly prohibits this practice, many of God’s people, including their leaders, believe it is permissible. They justify this view by employing semantical arguments when applying God’s word in their lives. In essence, they re-write His law to accommodate their actions.

The following are seven examples of how the original command is modified in the minds of many in the Church today. And although those who engage in this practice may not literally desire to change the wording of the command, they most definitely alter its meaning by their behavior.

These modifications are intended to illustrate how radical certain beliefs are. This is done by expressing how they would look if God Himself actually stated them. As you read each example ask yourself if the amended command is really what God intended when He gave the fourth commandment.

Example I:

A Matter of Personal Labor

Original Command:

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shall you labor and do all your work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God: in it you shall not do any work...” (Ex. 20:8-10)

Amended Command:

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shall you labor and do all your work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God: in it you shall not do any work. *However, you may compel others to labor on your behalf provided they are not under your direct authority or responsibility.*”

Surprisingly, there are many in God’s Church today who believe the fourth commandment is limited in scope. In other words, although it prohibits His people from engaging in labor, it does not prohibit them from orchestrating the labor of others for their benefit. As a result of this thinking, many contend that when God gave His law regarding the Sabbath, He intentionally made provisions for His people to be the beneficiary of the labor of others. Therefore, they contend that going to a restaurant on the Sabbath is acceptable with God because the labor being solicited is being performed by those outside the camp of His people.

Although many may write the amended command differently with respect to style, those who go to restaurants on the Sabbath concur with the substance of this modified rendering of God’s law. The question is: do you? Ask yourself: do these words really sound like they express the wisdom of the Holy One of Israel? Was it God’s intent to simply shield His people from profaning the day He set apart? Or was He expressing a greater eternal truth about His Kingdom?

The point God was making when He uttered the fourth commandment was that Israel was not to be a party to profane work in any way, shape, or form on this day unless it specifically related to a Levitical duty (Mt. 12:1-5). Going to a restaurant on the Sabbath is not such a duty.

Example II:
A Matter of Children

Original Command:

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shall you labor and do all your work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God: in it you shall not do any work, you nor your son nor your daughter...” (Ex. 20:8-10)

Amended Command:

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shall you labor and do all your work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God: in it you shall not do any work, you nor your son nor your daughter. *However, you may compel others such as aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, nephews and nieces, as well as that guy you refer to as ‘Uncle Bob,’ to labor on your behalf.*”

This amended command is intended to illustrate where semantical arguments can lead. Those who try to affix a very narrow interpretation of God’s commandments do so in order to broaden the path they wish to take. In other words, many conclude: “the Bible only mentions ‘my servants,’ ‘my family,’ and ‘my livestock.’ It doesn’t mention those that belong to someone else. Therefore, I can do anything I wish with that which is not mine.”

At this point it is important to understand that when God gave His Great Moral Code, it was to provide the Israelites with His perfect wisdom as well as His desire for all mankind. One only has to consider what the world will look like when Jesus Christ returns to understand this truth. At that time, all will honor His law the way He intends. Where do you think dining out on the Sabbath will fit in that Kingdom?

The point is that God never intended for His people to look for loopholes in His commandments. Ultimately, when He dispenses His judgment, we will all understand that there are no loopholes.

Example III:
The Treatment of Servants

Original Command:

“Keep the Sabbath day to sanctify it, as the Lord your God has commanded you. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God: in it you shall not do any work, you nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your manservant, nor your maidservant...” (Dt. 5:12-14)

Amended Command:

“Keep the Sabbath day to sanctify it, as the Lord your God has commanded you. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God: in it you shall not do any work, you nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your manservant, nor your maidservant. *However, you may compel someone else’s manservant or maidservant to labor on your behalf, provided they genuinely desire to work and are appropriately compensated for it.*”

Perhaps the most popular argument advanced by people attempting to justify going to restaurants on the Sabbath is that those working in the restaurant are not their servant – and the command only refers to “your servant.” Therefore, the amended command must be in keeping with God’s intent.

However, this thinking fails to understand God’s purpose for commanding the Israelites to free their servants from labor on the Sabbath. That purpose was powerfully conveyed by God when He gave the original command. The Great Law Giver told the Israelites, and He tells His people today, “You were once a slave in the land of Egypt” (Dt. 5:15).

The question God’s people today should ask themselves is: Would God want me to go back into spiritual Egypt and avail myself of the same bondage I was once in? The answer should be obvious.

Example IV: The Treatment of Animals

Original Command:

“Keep the Sabbath day to sanctify it, as the Lord your God has commanded you. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God: in it you shall not do any work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your ox, nor your ass, nor any of your cattle...” (Dt. 5:12-14)

Amended Command:

“Keep the Sabbath day to sanctify it, as the Lord your God has commanded you. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God: in it you shall not do any work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your ox, nor your ass, nor any of your cattle *However, you may compel other beasts of burden such as camels, elephants, etc. to labor on your behalf provided they are not treated with cruelty. Furthermore, if you must use an ox or an ass, you may do so provided it does not belong to you. Therefore, you may procure it from an unbeliever in the same way you may procure the services of a manservant or maidservant.*”

It is doubtful that any true child of God would advance the argument that certain animals could be compelled to labor on the Sabbath while other animals are exempt from labor. However, for those who believe it is appropriate to go to restaurants on the Sabbath, this amended command must ring true. After all, why would God extend more mercy to an animal than He would to a person created in His own image?

Example V: The Treatment of Strangers

Original Command:

“Keep the Sabbath day to sanctify it, as the Lord your God has commanded you. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God: in it you shall not do any work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your ox, nor you ass, nor any of your cattle, nor the stranger that is within your gates...” (Dt. 5:12-14)

Amended Command:

“Keep the Sabbath day to sanctify it, as the Lord your God has commanded you. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God: in it you shall not do any work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your ox, nor your ass, nor any of your cattle, nor the stranger that is within your gates. *However, you may compel the stranger that is outside your gate to labor on your behalf, provided he or she is not forced to labor against his or her will.*”

Those who dine out on God’s Sabbath have argued that although the server at a restaurant is an unbeliever (“stranger”), God permits His people to avail themselves of his or her labor because the “stranger” in this case is not under the believer’s authority. In other words, the “stranger” is not “within the gates” of the believer. But is this really true? Does the believer possess no authority over the restaurant employee? This question can be answered with the following illustration: Imagine you are at a restaurant and the service is horrible. The meals are prepared incorrectly and the server is totally unresponsive to you and your guests. When you politely informed him of your concern over the level of service, he responds, “You can’t talk to me like that! I don’t work for you!” Would you honestly agree with his assessment?

The belief that restaurant employees are not under your authority is simply not true. But even if it was, does it make any difference to God? When it comes to the treatment of a “stranger” or brother on the Sabbath, God’s people are not to involve themselves in labor, directly or otherwise.

Perhaps the most important facet of God’s command with respect to the treatment of “strangers” is that God’s people were once “strangers” themselves. However, He delivered them out of the bondage of ignorance and sin into the liberty of His truth. It is a HUGE mistake to think that God would somehow permit His people to return to a world they were delivered from simply to benefit from its sin.

Statement VI: Buying and Selling

Original Command:

“And if the people of the land bring ware or any victuals on the Sabbath day to sell, that we should not buy it of them on the Sabbath, or on the holy day...” (Neh. 10:31)

Amended Command:

“And if the people of the land bring ware or any victuals on the Sabbath day to sell, that we should not buy it of them on the Sabbath, or on the holy day. *In other words, you are not to spend the entire day purchasing food or other necessities. However, you may spend abbreviated portions of the Sabbath to purchase provisions for you or your family as long as you remember to attend services and be with My people.*”

Some leaders in God’s Church today contend that Nehemiah’s indictment of buying and selling on the Sabbath was limited to the scope of purchases being made. According to their reasoning, the Jews in Jerusalem were going into the open market for the entire day and purchasing provisions for their homes. These provisions would last for several days and even longer in many cases. This would be tantamount to buying several hundred dollars worth of groceries today as well as performing other errands. As a result, the entire day was spent in activities totally unrelated to the Sabbath. The assumption here is that it is acceptable with God if only an hour or two are spent in activities totally unrelated to the Sabbath.

These leaders argue that Nehemiah would never have addressed this issue if God’s people invested a more abbreviated period of time doing family errands or some other activity. Furthermore, they contend

that sharing a meal with brethren at a restaurant does not distract God's people from the Sabbath. On the contrary, they argue it actually keeps them more connected to this day.

However, this reasoning represents a massive leap in logic. Nowhere does Nehemiah mention the length of this activity (buying and selling) as an issue, but rather the activity itself. Notice that Nehemiah was not attempting to restrict this practice, he was attempting to eliminate it altogether. It is true that some of God's people may have spent the entire day purchasing goods and services, but that ignores a bigger question: why were they there at all? Nehemiah's remedy was designed to address the latter.

The big question God's people should ask themselves is this: Why would God allow His people to procure ANY food on His Sabbath when He actually prohibited the children of Israel from doing such a thing when they wandered in the Sinai desert (Ex. 16:16-25)?

Appendix II

“The Devil’s Diner”



“NOTICE”

This restaurant rejects God's law and profanes His Sabbath. We serve another god. He is our master. So come on in and enjoy the best food and service in town.

Imagine that you and some friends decide to go to your favorite restaurant after Sabbath services and enjoy a delicious meal and some wonderful Christian fellowship. This has been a long standing tradition of yours and you never once questioned it. As you pull into the parking lot you immediately notice something different. The name of the restaurant has changed. You then proceed toward the entrance and see a small announcement board with a notice that informs all customers that this is a God rejecting, Satan worshipping restaurant. Aside from that nothing has changed. The personnel are all the same and the menu is identical to the one that was there before. Now here is our question:

Would you feel as comfortable eating there as you did prior to this "renovation"?

If your answer is "no" then you are simply the victim of good advertising. You may never find this sign or the accompanying announcement, but every Sabbath you will find the restaurant they describe. It is the one many of God's people visit every week.

"And no marvel; for Satan himself is Transformed into an angel of light."
2 Cor. 11:14

What is the Point?

The point in presenting this "hypothetical" is to illustrate that what takes place in a restaurant on God's Sabbath goes entirely against His great moral law. On that day, restaurant personnel serve the god of this world, and do his bidding, whether they are aware of it or not. In a very real sense, restaurants that profane God's Sabbath are, for that day, "The Devil's Diner." Simply because they don't post this fact on a sign may provide consolation for advocates of Sabbath dining, but such an omission carries no weight with the Almighty. Both Israel and Judah went into captivity because they forgot about His Sabbath. Is it possible that the same fate awaits His people today, if they continue to engage in this sin? Certainly that was what Nehemiah suggested (Neh. 13:17-18).

What all too many in God's Church fail to grasp is that a real God-rejecting devil has blinded the minds of those who profane the Sabbath by laboring in restaurants on this day (2Cor. 4:4). Furthermore, that devil has also blinded the minds of those in God's Church who see nothing wrong with seeking out these unbelievers and paying them for their services.

The bottom line is this: Satan desperately wants restaurant personnel to reject God's Sabbath, and he desperately wants God's people to purchase the fruit of this sin. So far, he seems to be having his way with both.

A Sabbath Diner's Indignation

When the doctrinal committee of one of the most prominent COG associations saw this portrayal of "The Devil's Diner," they were infuriated. Here is how they expressed their outrage.

The outlandish hypothetical situation given above has no relationship with reality. It is inconceivable that such an announcement would be posted. It seems that the point being made is that a restaurant open for business on the Sabbath is by definition a "God-rejecting, Satan-worshipping restaurant." Hence, we should not patronize such an establishment. If this indeed is the point being made, we would also have to logically conclude that we should not patronize such an establishment any day of the week, Why would we patronize at any time a business that openly declares itself to be a "God-rejecting, Satan-worshipping restaurant"

Furthermore, if this logic is followed, we should only patronize restaurants that are closed on the Sabbath (from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday) and Holy Days. In the unlikely event that such a restaurant could be found, there probably would be other objections to patronizing such a restaurant-for example, what if unclean meats are served, what if smoking is permitted, etc.? Indeed, if the logic of this hypothetical situation is followed, it would be impossible to eat in any restaurant at any time unless it is owned by a Church of God member and its employees and patrons are only Church of God members!

Deceived by Appearances

The indignation expressed by these Church leaders speaks volumes about their approach to deception. According to them it is inconceivable that they could ever be fooled by the devil. After all, they know just what to look for. As soon as they see a man in a red suit with a pitchfork and a tail they will be the first to warn God's people to stand clear. However, if he appears as an angel of light it must be okay to avail themselves of his services. Regrettably, this is their approach to dining out on the Sabbath. In other words, they would never patronize a restaurant bearing an offensive name or vulgar announcement, but wouldn't give a second thought to patronizing one whose behavior is an affront to God Almighty as long as it is done in good taste.

In one sense their response proves the illustration's point. Instead of seeing God's Sabbath being profaned as a clear "SIGN" telling them to avoid such places on holy time, they see a festive atmosphere,

scores of delicious meal options, and friendly attentive servers all whispering to them, "Don't worry, you can keep your Sabbath here." Unfortunately, they listen attentively. At this point it is significant that a similar enticement was uttered and believed long ago "You will not surely die" (Gen. 3:4).

With that said, here is a little advice for these leaders regarding appearances. Although it is "inconceivable" that a restaurant would ever acknowledge that their Sabbath is fully invested in a behavior inspired by the devil himself, it is also "inconceivable" that Osama Bin-laden would ever call himself a terrorist or, that the Babylonian Mystery religion would ever refer to itself as a false Church.

The point in this "hypothetical" is that what takes place in a restaurant on God's Sabbath goes entirely against His great moral law. On that day, restaurant personnel serve the god of this world, and do his bidding, whether they are aware of it or not. In a very real sense, restaurants that profane God's Sabbath are, FOR THAT DAY, "The Devil's Diner." Simply because they don't post this fact on a sign may provide consolation for numerous COG leaders, but such an omission carries no weight with the Almighty. Both Israel and Judah went into captivity because they forgot about His Sabbath. I believe the same fate awaits His people today, if they continue to engage in this sin. Certainly that was what Nehemiah suggested (Neh. 13: 17-18).

What these ministers fail to grasp is that a real God-rejecting devil has blinded the minds of those who profane the Sabbath by laboring in restaurants on this day (2 Cor. 4:4). Furthermore, that devil has also blinded the minds of all too many Church leaders in this matter. While they claim they would never patronize a restaurant called "The Devil's Diner," they actually consent to doing just that.

The bottom line is this: Satan desperately wants restaurant personnel to reject God's Sabbath, and he desperately wants the God's shepherds to seek out and purchase this sin. So far he is having his way with both.

Appendix III

“Taking a Stand in the Millennium”

Imagine that it is one year into the millennium and you are serving with thousands of the faithful under the reign of Jesus Christ. However, not all of mankind has yet submitted to God's government. Some continue to assert their own will and refuse to honor the Almighty's great moral law, including His Sabbath and holy days. One such pocket of resistance is the nation of Egypt. God has already begun to deal with this rebellion by withholding rain from them. This was done in an attempt to encourage their repentance, but as yet they continue their defiance.

Now imagine that you have been dispatched to this land to speak to a small group who has begun to turn from their ways and to honor the true God. At one point during your message someone in your audience asks you the following question.

"Your Majesty,

As you know our nation refuses to honor God's Sabbath and annual festivals. One way they profane them is by engaging in business during these holy times. Our question for you is this: May we purchase their goods? For example, may we dine out at restaurants on the Sabbath? We know that God does not approve of what they are doing at such places. One only has to see the affects of the drought He has brought upon us to understand that. But what about buying their goods? It isn't as if we are making them work on the Sabbath. They would be doing that anyway. What does your God desire of us in this matter?"

How would you answer this question? Remember, you now speak for Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Sabbath. Therefore, your words must reflect His perfect will.

If you believe that God would permit these recent converts to continue to buy their Sabbath meals at the very restaurants that are defying His law, our question is: WHY? Why would your God permit His people to purchase the fruits of the very labor He abhors?

For any leader of God's Church to suggest that the Lord of the Sabbath would actually embrace a practice that relies totally on someone else's sin is hypocritical to the core. Everything about it goes contrary to God's very nature. Throughout the scriptures God's people are admonished to come completely out of sin—not come out and later return to partake of someone else's sin. The example of Lot's wife strongly suggests that God doesn't even want His people to look back at sin, let alone go back and solicit it from others.

It is inconceivable that any true believer would think that the Almighty would actually condone a practice that requires His people to seek out those who are desecrating His Sabbath and then pay them for the fruit of their sacrilege—in this world or in the world to come.

Appendix IV

“An Interesting Hypothetical”

Imagine for a moment that a deacon in God’s Church approaches his pastor and informs him that he was going to have to work one Saturday each month. He didn't want to do this but his employer made it abundantly clear that he would lose his job if he refused. The good news was that he would still be able to attend Sabbath services because he would only be required to work Saturday mornings. At this point his pastor decides to pursue the matter. The conversation proceeds as follows:

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Pastor: "How can you reconcile your decision with the fourth commandment?"

Deacon: "I don't think the command really addresses my situation."

Pastor: "Really? What about "You shall do no work"?"

Deacon: "Work was different then. People had to sweat and toil in those days. I'm a systems manager. I wear a suit to work. I have my own office. The work environment is very comfortable, almost luxurious. But even if what you say is true I still think the Sabbath command is different now."

Pastor: "How so?"

Deacon: "Sir, when God gave Israel His Sabbath law, they were a "closed society" where everyone honored His commandments. However, that isn't the case today. Our world and its culture are radically different from what they were during the days of Moses. It is just not suited for strict Sabbath observance. And because of that I think we need to apply God's law to fit our unique circumstances."

Pastor: "But what about Jesus? He kept the Sabbath and He didn't live in a 'closed society.' He didn't do His business on the Sabbath."

Deacon: "Actually, we can't know that for sure because the Bible doesn't describe every minute detail of His life. However, we do know that Jesus did permit work to be done under certain circumstances. Remember, He healed on the Sabbath. He even permitted His disciples to pick grain on the Sabbath. And God permits Levites to work every Sabbath. You work on the Sabbath."

Pastor: "But the Levites perform work related to the service of God's people."

Deacon: "That's true. But don't you see? So do I. My family are God's people and by keeping my job I serve them. And God wants me to provide for my family. Anyway, I am only going to have to work occasionally. I would never do it to excess, only in moderation and balance."

Pastor: "How do you think other people in the congregation will react when they discover you are working on the Sabbath?"

Deacon: "Well, if they judge me for this decision, they are no different than the Pharisees who condemned Jesus for His Sabbath practices. I don't think God's people should judge

others regarding how they honor the commandments. It's divisive and accomplishes nothing.

Pastor: "What about your employer? Do you think it is right to dedicate part of your Sabbath to his business? Isn't he breaking the fourth commandment?"

Deacon: "That's not for me to judge. However, even if he is sinning I am powerless to prevent that. Whether I work or not he will be open for business anyway. I can't force Sabbath observance on him. God has to call him. However, there is another reason I am convinced God approves of this."

Pastor: "Oh. What's that?"

Deacon: "My salary has made it possible for me to do good for God's people. Not only do I faithfully tithe but I also help people less fortunate to go to the feast. Last year I paid for Mrs. Johnson as well as the Baxters. This would be impossible without my job. God must appreciate my situation."

Pastor: Personally, I have difficulty understanding how you can come to this conclusion. It just seems to contradict God's law to me.

Deacon: I appreciate what you are saying. But I want you to know that I can do this in good conscience and that is what really matters. God says that if it can't be done in faith it is sin. But I can do this in faith.

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Although this scenario is fictional it illustrates an important point regarding the lengths people will go to when justifying their behavior. Furthermore, these were just some of the arguments actually employed by God's leaders today when defending the practice of dining out in restaurants on the Sabbath. This now brings us to the questions of the day.

What would the Lord of the Sabbath think of these arguments? Would He be impressed? Or, would He be disappointed? We think the answer should be obvious.

A Final Thought

Today, our approach to the fourth commandment has changed radically and scarcely resembles what it was just a few decades ago. It is now commonplace for God's people to engage in a variety of Sabbath activities that have nothing whatsoever to do with holy time. These activities include such things as going to movies, participating in sporting events, doing family errands and the most popular one, dining out at restaurants on the Sabbath and holy days. The latter activity is arguably the catalyst for all the others, but even if it stood alone, God's word makes it abundantly clear that it has no place in respectful Sabbath observance.

Despite this truth, many of God's servants defend their endorsement of this practice by using the flimsiest of arguments. Whether these leaders realize it or not, their advocacy of dining out on the Sabbath is promoting a practice that contradicts every part of God's Kingdom—a Kingdom where nothing close to such a sin will exist. When that great government is established on earth, this debate will finally come to an end, and a practice that insults God's law will be rightfully terminated forever.

Furthermore, whether the leaders of God's people want to accept it or not, God HATES what takes place in restaurants on His Sabbath and holy days. This time is sacred and there is NOTHING a restaurant can do that will aid His people in honoring it. Those who labor on holy time do so in defiance of God Almighty

Himself. To think that He has no qualm with His people patronizing this sacrilege is simply not true. It is borne out of a desire to justify a behavior that trivializes God's law.

Appendix V

“Parlor Games”

A few years ago a member of one of the most prominent GOG associations wrote a paper objecting to his church's defense of dining on the Sabbath. In it he argued that this practice would invariably lead to God's people engaging in a variety of secular activities. His church obviously disagreed and denied that Sabbath dining could be linked to behaviors that obviously contradict proper Sabbath observance. The words below represent part of a second letter written by this member in response to their assertion. In it, he illustrates how many in God's Church have been desensitized into engaging in profane activities on holy time. The example he employs actually involved an elder of the very COG that denied they were inviting a more casual approach to God's Sabbath. It is very telling.

“Parlor Games”

Dear Sirs,

A few years ago my family and I were invited to the home of a COG member who was hosting a reception for a visiting elder. The reception was to take place Sabbath afternoon after services. We were very honored to receive the invitation and looked forward to fellowshiping with people we genuinely loved. Personally, I looked forward to discussing God's word in a more informal way. Those who know me would testify to my passion for talking about the Bible. It is such a wonderful book.

About an hour after we arrived, the COG elder suggested that we all play a parlor game. I don't recall the name of the game, but it had absolutely nothing to do with the Sabbath. It was a nice family game to be sure, but clearly not appropriate for the day, in my view. After about twenty minutes I decided to excuse my family by informing our hosts that we had a long drive home and needed to go. I didn't want to offend them or their guests and thought this was a discrete way to withdraw from this activity.

As we were gathering our things and saying "good bye," the elder asked if I was offended by the game. I responded by saying something to the effect of, "It is not what I would do, but I am not judging you." I then repeated that we had a long ride home in an attempt to deflect any potential debate on this. The elder then said, "You know, the Sabbath is about family and there is nothing wrong with doing family things on this day. I suppose you're one of those people that think it's wrong to eat in restaurants on the Sabbath too." I concluded the dialogue by wishing him and the guests a pleasant day without commenting on his last statement. At no time did I think that this would be a good time to engage this COG elder on this issue.

The point I am making is that this elder immediately linked my opposition to playing generic parlor games on the Sabbath with not going to restaurants. Furthermore, it was clear he felt disapproval by my answer although there was nothing in it that showed any disrespect. By the way, every guest who later spoke to me about this incident mentioned that they were thoroughly embarrassed by the elder's comments.

In closing, I realize that the intent of the church is not to encourage a more casual approach toward Sabbath observance, but that is exactly what its teaching on dining out fosters. Scores of God's people apply the same self-serving logic to defend a host of practices that go totally contrary to His law.

Although I sincerely believe that God's ministers truly desire to honor the fourth commandment they are making a HUGE mistake in thinking that God's people may somehow seek out those who profane this day and pay them for their sin, with God's blessing. This is nothing but wishful thinking.

Appendix VI

“Who Do You Think You Are?”

In a letter asserting the right of God’s people to dine out on the Sabbath, a prominent COG challenged the legitimacy of A Sabbath Test and its message, because of the qualifications of those who wrote it. According to these COG leaders there were numerous differences between the book’s authors and the original apostles with respect to their work as well as this issue. In essence, they contend that A Sabbath Test is not preaching a gospel like that proclaimed by Jesus’ apostles. Here is how they expressed their point.

There are a number of significant differences between the [work of the apostles] and your paper. Peter and John [as well as the other apostles] were commissioned and sent forth by Christ to do a certain work (Matthew 28:19-20). Their audience was nonmembers, not other baptized members of God’s Church (Acts 3). They were not teaching anything contrary to the established doctrine in the Church. Their message did not cause other leaders in God’s Church to provide a written response in order to address related problems. They were not disrespecting the Church or its leadership. The truth that the apostles taught was primarily objective among the Church members.

Dismissing a Vital Work

Although this COG attempts to dismiss A Sabbath Test, their endeavor to extinguish its message just might be impossible. With this said, let’s examine the points these men raise concerning what they claim are "significant differences" between the work involved in A Sabbath Test and that done by Jesus’ disciples. Their argument has been broken into six points.

I

Peter and John [as well as the other disciples] were commissioned and sent forth by Christ to do a certain work (Matthew 28:19-20).

The implication here is that these COG leaders believe the work of A Sabbath Test has no such calling. This may be hard for these men to believe but God Himself is the force behind this storm. He is the One driving it, and in so doing, He is appealing to His Church to not be swayed by cunning arguments disguised as "spiritual insight." It does not require a scholar to understand God’s will on this subject. What it demands is HONESTY and a mind willing to accept the TRUTH, even if it hurts. In reality, God’s will on this issue is quite simple and His word is very plain.

With that said, here is how history will play this one out. The day will come when those who advocate the practice of God’s people seeking out unbelievers to perform their Sabbath labor will come to realize how terribly wrong this sin is. They will also come to understand that because God is a merciful Father, He sustained this issue in an attempt to convince His people to repent from the terrible trespass so many leaders promote. These leaders may reject this now, but that won’t always be the case.

II

Their audience was nonmembers, not other baptized members of God’s Church (Acts 3).

This assertion is simply not true. The disciples were speaking to God’s people of their day. Peter and John went directly into the Temple and proclaimed the gospel of Christ. Peter even called his audience "brethren" (Acts 3:17) as well as "children of the covenant" (verse 25). For this COG to suggest that these

people were outsiders is false. It is true that Peter exhorted them to repent and be converted (verse 19), but that is exactly what A Sabbath Test is exhorting God's leaders to do today.

III

They were not teaching anything contrary to the established doctrine in the Church.

On the contrary, this is exactly what they were doing. These men spoke boldly about the greatest contrary teaching in the history of religion. Furthermore, it was their regular practice to enter the synagogue on the Sabbath and proclaim their message. Even Paul was a part of synagogue life, much to the frustration of the religious leaders of his day.

IV

Their message did not cause other leaders in God's Church to provide a written response in order to address related problems.

This sounds more like whining than a Biblical argument. Furthermore, A Sabbath Test didn't cause these men to write anything. They did so because thousands of God's people blew the dust off their Bibles and discovered a remarkable truth—one that so many COG leaders have tried to suppress. Sadly, the arguments advanced by these men illustrate how frustrated they have become in this debate. Instead of honestly applying the scriptures when advancing their case, each group presents what can only be construed as an avalanche of human reasoning and contorted logic masquerading as Biblical scholarship. These words may sound strong but any objective examination of the numerous COG position papers on this subject shout out this truth

V

They were not disrespecting the Church or its leadership.

John the Baptist called the religious leaders of his time a "generation of vipers" (Mt. 3:7). Furthermore, Jesus excoriated church leaders with a mountain of insults because of their contempt for God and his word (Mt. 23, Jn. 8:44).

Although this COG's feelings may have been hurt by the passion of this debate, in truth they have a much bigger problem. Here is something for them to think about. The real leader of God's Church is Jesus Christ. He also happens to be the Lord of the Sabbath (Mk. 2:28). It is the behavior advocated by this and other COG groups on this issue that shows DISRESPECT to Him. At every turn these contemporary nobles of Judah cling to a practice that disgraces what God Almighty made holy. The great tragedy is that these men have no idea the peril they are bringing on both themselves and God's people.

VI

The truth the apostles taught was primarily objective among the Church members.

If these COG leaders are suggesting that the position of A Sabbath Test is "subjective," they are simply in denial of the Biblical facts pertaining to this issue. Throughout their doctrinal paper they have rejected both God's Sabbath law and its enduring moral principle. A Sabbath Test, on the other hand, takes God's word to mean exactly what it says.

A Final Thought

The Sabbath has been a defining issue for God's people down through the ages and its contamination has even provoked the Great Creator of Heaven and Earth to execute His judgment on those He so

deeply cares about (Ezk. 20:11-13). If history has said nothing else, it is that God's people do not have a good track record when it comes to Sabbath observance. For this reason alone, leaders of His Church should think long and hard on this issue, especially in the age of Laodicea.

Finally, contrary to what Sabbath dining advocates wish to believe, God's Sabbath continues to cry out on this issue. Furthermore, its voice will not passively accommodate those who think they can call the holy "profane" and the profane "holy" (Ezk. 22: 26). The real question is this:

WILL YOU LISTEN?

Appendix VII

“Seven Prohibitions”

Every time one of God’s people goes to a restaurant on the Sabbath or holy day, he or she is transgressing numerous aspects of the fourth commandment. Consider what God specifically prohibited His people from doing on this day.

You shall not acquire food on the Sabbath

God actually rebuked the Israelites when they attempted to engage in this practice. His exact words were, “How long refuse you to keep my commandments and my laws?” (Ex. 16:26-28) He uttered them after the Israelites went out to gather food (manna) on the Sabbath.

You shall not prepare food on the Sabbath

God specifically instructed the Israelites to do their meal preparation on the sixth day (Ex. 16:23). Furthermore, at no time did He suggest that they could commission others to prepare it for them on the Sabbath. He actually indicated that the preparation day was given to “prove” the Israelites and to test their obedience (Ex. 16:4).

You shall not go outside your place on the Sabbath

God revealed this specific aspect of His command because the Israelites went outside the camp to obtain food on the Sabbath (Ex. 16:29). Furthermore, God was furious with this practice and He made that fact abundantly clear.

At this point, it is interesting to note that the only way God’s people today can avail themselves of a restaurant on the Sabbath is to go outside of “their place.” They must literally go out into the world where God’s Sabbath is being profaned and avail themselves of this sin. Despite this fact, many believe God somehow condones this practice.

You shall not labor on the Sabbath

God first addressed the issue of work on the Sabbath when He made the seventh day. At that time, the Great Creator of heaven and earth rested from His labor (Gen. 2:2-3). Later, when giving the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, God made reference to this rest. Through the Sabbath commandment, God is declaring that our lives should be like His. Labor should not be a part of this day – directly or indirectly.

Additionally, God knew that there were only two broad sources of labor – the work you perform, and the work that is performed for you. The fourth commandment addresses both types. First, you shall not do any work on the Sabbath. That addresses your part. Secondly, no one who comes into your sphere of influence shall be compelled to labor on your behalf. This includes family, servants, strangers, and even livestock. That part addresses everybody else his people would come in contact with on the Sabbath. Everyone else on earth is outside the camp and God already forbid His people to go there (Ex. 16:29).

When God gave the fourth commandment, His intent was very clear: work profanes the day He consecrated – to engage in such a practice is to desecrate that which is sacred (Ex. 20:8-11).

You shall not direct a servant to labor on the Sabbath

God's plan for man is that he will ultimately be free from the tyranny of ignorance and sin. The Sabbath pictures that freedom. It is not by accident that when giving the fourth commandment, God reminded His people that they were once slaves in Egypt (Dt. 5:15). It is for this very reason that every Sabbath God's people are to be liberators. In other words, they are to declare everyone they come in contact with FREE. Nowhere in the commandment does it remotely hint that God condones His people going back into "Egypt" to avail themselves of the very sin they were once a part of (Dt. 5:14-15). The Sabbath is about liberty, not slavery.

You shall not direct an unbeliever to work on the Sabbath

Whether one is a believer or a skeptic, bond or free, rich or poor, young or old, God's people are not to seek out their labor on His day.

Those who are ignorant of God's law may not understand why the faithful would be so considerate of them. But God's people do understand. By releasing the unbeliever from labor on the Sabbath, they are acting out what their King will ultimately do when He returns to earth.

You shall not buy or sell on the Sabbath

Throughout history, there has been an inextricable link between money and labor. Furthermore, God is very much aware of this link. For this reason, He inspired both Nehemiah's words and his actions when dealing with the issue of buying and selling on the Sabbath.

If the Israelites during the days of Moses had honored God's Sabbath as it was revealed to them, there would never have been a reason for buying and selling – and this would not have been an issue to Nehemiah or to God's Church today. Regrettably, that did not happen.

When Nehemiah commanded the Jews to refrain from buying and selling on the Sabbath, he was not introducing a new aspect to the fourth commandment. He was reminding God's people of where this sin can lead – CAPTIVITY (Neh. 13:15-21). That one word should carry an enormous weight with God's Church today. The Great Law Giver was not bluffing when He indicted the nations of Israel and Judah for profaning the Sabbath. History bears out this painful truth.

