

Thirty Excuses

A rebuttal to the most popular arguments advanced by
leaders in God's Church who advocate the
practice of dining out on the Sabbath.

By Dennis Fischer



This book is dedicated to
Mr. Arthur Vernon Braidic, the man who gave this issue life.

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Thirty Excuses

Dear Friends

Over twenty-four hundred years ago, God Almighty inspired a Jew serving under the Persian king Artaxerxes, to boldly confront the nobles of Judah and excoriate them for defiling the Sabbath. The man's name was Nehemiah and his words and actions are legendary in scripture. His indictment of the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem was provoked by their calloused indifference toward a day consecrated as HOLY at the very beginning (Gen. 2:3). Instead of treating this time with deference and respect, these Jews had profaned it by engaging in commerce. They had actually come to a point to where they thought nothing of allowing unbelievers access to their lives on holy time and then had the audacity to pay these Sabbath-breakers for their goods and services.

Nehemiah's reaction to this sin was passionate and forceful. He saw buying and selling as a clear breach of the fourth commandment. Furthermore, he made a direct link between this sin and Judah's CAPTIVITY (Neh.13:15-21).

Little did this courageous man know that his voice would once again ring out to the last generation of God's Church. Today, the contemporary nobles of His people promote a sin that is strikingly similar to the one condemned by the Almighty in Nehemiah's time. Furthermore, if these leaders persist in teaching that God's people may now seek out merchants who sell their wares and victuals on the Sabbath and holy day and purchase their Sabbath-breaking services, they will find themselves in the same position Nehemiah warned of so very long ago. Tragically, it appears that they may have to learn this lesson the hard way.

Dismissing the Test

For the most part, the leaders of His Church have attempted to dismiss this topic as unimportant. Some groups have even directed their members to refrain from discussing it altogether on the grounds that it is "divisive." Others have warned members that failure to conform to the Church's position could result in expulsion. Most have taken a softer approach, calling it "a matter of conscience." However, what every one of these groups has utterly failed to do is present a legitimate Biblical argument in defense of this practice. Instead, they obfuscate the clear intent of God's law.

When examining the host of arguments offered in defense of this activity it becomes clear that it is vastly easier for God's leaders to explain away passages that threaten what they wish to do, or say, or think, than it is to face up to the reality that they have done wrong, and have taught others to do so.

What follows are the 30 most popular excuses presented by COG leaders today in defense of God's people seeking out unbelievers on holy time and paying them for their Sabbath labor. As you read each excuse it will become clear that the advocates of this practice reject the undeniable injunction in God's word and have replaced it with a mountain of human reasoning and contorted logic. Regrettably, each of these leaders seems more interested in justifying their behavior than in honoring the Lord of the Sabbath and His law. Our sincere prayer is that they will reconsider their position on this critical end time issue. Each excuse is introduced with a question similar to ones proffered by those who attempt to justify this SIN.

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Thirty Excuses

Excuse I The Scriptures are Silent

Question:

Isn't it true that because God's Sabbath law was given when Israel was a closed society, we can't know for certain how He would approach this issue in our modern world?

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When defending the practice of dining out on the Sabbath, the leader of one of the more prominent Church of God groups gave a sermon in which he claimed that the scriptures are silent on this issue. In other words, he believes that you can't know for sure what God's position is with respect to His people going out into the world (spiritual Egypt), where the Sabbath is being trampled on by slaves to sin (Ro. 6:16), and actually paying these slaves to labor on their behalf (Neh. 10:31). This leader contends that God permits this practice because His people now live in a different cultural setting than the one in existence during the days when the scriptures were written. Here is how he expresses this point.

Regarding this subject, there is no "Thus saith the LORD" verse one can turn to, because frankly, in the cultural setting within the Bible when it was written, no "Thus saith the LORD" was needed. But things have changed since the time that Moses began the writing of the Bible and when the apostles finished the writing of the Bible.

Justifying Sin with Semantics

When this long standing minister insists that there is no direct prohibition against dining out on the Sabbath, he is relying on semantics to prove his point. After all, nowhere in the scriptures does it even mention the term "restaurant," let alone specifically prohibit God's people from employing their services. Therefore, he wants you to believe that you just can't know for sure how God feels about this practice.

Tragically, his assertion is flat out WRONG. In truth, God's word speaks with great force concerning this day. Furthermore, it is the definitely NOT favorable to those who think He approves of seeking out unbelievers and paying them for their Sabbath labor. To better understand this, consider the following.

A Lesson from History

When God gave the Ten Commandments to the children of Israel, He had already introduced them to His Sabbath. This was done immediately after delivering them out of bondage in Egypt. Furthermore, it was not by accident that when doing so, the Eternal presented very specific instructions regarding their Sabbath meals. In short, God prohibited His people from: 1) acquiring their meals on the Sabbath, 2) preparing their meals on the Sabbath, and 3) going outside their place on the Sabbath (see Ex. 16). Furthermore, He declared that His instructions were to stand as a **test of their obedience** (verse 4).

A few weeks later, when presenting these emancipated slaves with His great moral law, God reinforced His position concerning His Sabbath. This time He addressed labor on this day. Simply put, no one was to work on the seventh day (Ex. 20:8-11) with the exception of those He specifically designated (Levites in His service). To go contrary to this injunction was a capital crime (Ex.31:14). Even unbelievers

("strangers") were to be released from work (Dt. 5:14). Furthermore, God made no provision for His people to solicit the labor of others on His Sabbath. This included those within the camp as well as those outside the camp. Those inside the camp were bound by the same Sabbath law as the Israelites. Those outside the camp were already declared off limits when He gave His people the manna miracle (Ex. 16:29).

Simply because these "outsiders" saturate our present society does not mean God now permits His people to seek them out and hire them to prepare their Sabbath meals. This is NOT how He thinks. This COG leader may believe that things are different now, but when it comes to God's Sabbath, there is nothing in His word suggesting that what was once Sabbath breaking is now Sabbath keeping.

Nehemiah's Bold Stand

At this point, it is interesting to note that when Nehemiah powerfully addressed the profaning of God's Sabbath by the Jews in Jerusalem, he locked non-believers (men of Tyre) out of the city. He did so because they were selling wares and food products on the Sabbath and holy days. Nehemiah also rebuked the nobles of Judah for allowing them access to Jerusalem on the Sabbath in the first place (Neh.13:15-21). Additionally, this great servant of the Almighty made it absolutely clear that God's people were not to patronize these Sabbath-breakers on this holy time. He commanded them, in no uncertain terms, to not buy ANYTHING (Neh. 10:31). Furthermore, there was no limitation to this directive.

With this said, let's consider some very specific commands from God Almighty concerning His Sabbath. This is not a complete list, but it does stand as incontrovertible proof to those who honestly seek God's will, that there is definitely a "Thus saith the Lord" concerning this activity.

You shall not acquire food on the Sabbath

Exodus 16:26

God actually issued a blistering indictment to 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 they went out to gather food (manna) on the Sabbath, in clear violation of His command. Tragically, some COG leaders today believe that because our current society is infested with Sabbath-breakers, God's Church may now seek out these people and acquire their food from them.

You shall not prepare food on the Sabbath

Exodus 16:23

God specifically instructed the Israelites to do their Sabbath meal preparation on the sixth day (Ex. 16:23). Furthermore, at no time did He suggest they could commission others to prepare it for them on holy time. He actually indicated that the preparation day was given to "prove" the Israelites and test their obedience (Ex. 16:4). Despite this undeniable fact, numerous COG leaders today attempt to argue that because our current society is no longer limited exclusively to Israelites, God's people may now seek out unbelievers and pay them to labor for their benefit.

You shall not go outside your place on the Sabbath

Exodus 16:29

God revealed this specific aspect of His command because the Israelites went out 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 "their place." They must literally go out into the world where God's Sabbath is being profaned and seek out the services of unbelievers and their sin. It is even referred to as "GOING OUT to eat."

You shall not labor on the Sabbath

Exodus 20:10

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.

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). Furthermore, to pay others to do it for you is no different. Leaders of God's Church today may try to claim that because they are powerless to prevent unbelievers from laboring on His Sabbath, they may now seek them out and purchase the fruit of their sin, but this is NOT true. Nehemiah was well aware that God's people would encounter Sabbath-breakers selling food and other things on holy time. However, that didn't prevent him from forbidding the purchase of ALL their goods (Neh. 10:31).

You shall not direct a servant to labor on the Sabbath

Exodus 20:10

God's plan for man is that he will ultimately be free from the tyranny of 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 the practice of 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.

Modern day Church of God nobles may argue all they want that because we live in an open society with unbelievers, we may now go back into spiritual Egypt and partake of their sin, but they do not have the force of scripture on their side. God's word forbids such things and actually warns of its consequences (Rev. 18:4).

You shall not direct an unbeliever to work on the Sabbath

Exodus 20:10

Contrary to what so many believe today, God's prohibition against Sabbath labor extends beyond His people. Even the unbeliever is not to be compelled to work. Although scores of God's people think they bear no responsibility for the labor restaurant personnel perform, this is NOT true. As customers we are the ones who are soliciting and directing that labor.

You shall not buy or sell on the Sabbath

Nehemiah 10:31

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 (Neh. 10:31) and his actions (Neh. 13:15-21) when dealing with the issue of buying and selling on the Sabbath.

When this great instrument of the Almighty commanded the Jews to refrain from engaging in commerce on holy time, 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. 13:17-18)! That one word should carry 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.

A Final Thought

For any minister of God to claim that there is no prohibition in the Bible concerning seeking out unbelievers and paying them for their Sabbath labor, he must rely on a disgraceful attempt to manipulate language. God's law addresses Sabbath meals in a way that leaves no room for the scriptural trickery employed by this argument.

Thirty Excuses

Excuse II Jesus Sanctioned It

Question:

If Jesus' permitted His disciples to acquire food on the Sabbath when they walked through a grain field, why would anyone think He wouldn't allow His followers today to acquire their Sabbath meals in a restaurant?

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In an attempt to justify the practice of seeking out unbelievers and paying them to prepare their Sabbath meals, some invoke the story of Jesus' disciples picking grain on this day. They do this because they believe that what the disciples did once in their lifetime is the moral equivalent of making Friday evening dinner reservations every few weeks. After all, according to these advocates, the disciples 1) acquired food on the Sabbath, 2) prepared food on the Sabbath (they rubbed it in their hands), and 3) they went outside their place to obtain food on the Sabbath. Furthermore, this was clearly done with the full blessing of the Messiah. Therefore, it must have been lawful, regardless of its prohibition in Exodus 16. One particular minister, who heads up a prominent COG organization, put it this way.

As we conclude the topic of the Pharisees condemning Christ and the disciples for gathering food on the Sabbath, we repeat the fact that their main objection (evidenced by the subsequent replies by Christ) was their "servile work" in the gathering of food. It is significant that these carnal Pharisees were savvy enough not to invoke Exodus 16 to bolster their position. It was obvious to all familiar with God's laws that the prohibition against gathering manna did not apply to gleaning on the Sabbath to relieve hunger.

A Parade of Distortions

In this brief paragraph, one of the most prominent ministers in God's Church advances several distortions of the Biblical record. Consider how he misleads God's people with this argument.

Distortion I

Contrary to what this man claims, Jesus NEVER picked, nor ate, anything Himself—only His disciples did. Here is how Matthew records this truth.

At that time Jesus went on the Sabbath day through the corn; and His disciples were hungered, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat (Mt. 12:1).

Luke's account of this event is even more explicit.

And it came to pass on the second Sabbath after the first, that he went through the corn fields; and his disciples plucked the ears of corn, and did eat, rubbing them in their hands (Lk. 6:1).

Additionally, the accusation advanced by the Pharisees centered on the disciples' behavior, not the Messiah's. Their exact words were:

Behold, Your disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the Sabbath day (Mt. 12:2).

At this point it is interesting to note that this is not the only time this prominent Church leader suggests that Jesus participated in gleaning on the Sabbath along with His disciples. When presenting his explanation of Nehemiah's condemnation of Jerusalem's Sabbath behavior he interjected the following comment.

Dining out at restaurants...is comparable to **Christ and His disciples** gleaning corn to be eaten on the Sabbath...

In another section of his article, this minister continues to misrepresent the Biblical record when "explaining" what took place in the grain field.

In Matthew 12, **Christ and His disciples** were immediately accused of breaking the Sabbath when **they** acquired some grain.

Why this Distortion?

This now brings us to a very important question. Why would a recognized leader of God's people argue that Jesus participated in gleaning on the Sabbath when the scriptures clearly state that He did no such thing? The answer is simple but very telling. If this man can somehow convince God's people to accept his assertion that Jesus picked the grain along with His disciples, it would prove his claim that acquiring small amounts of food on the Sabbath does not go contrary to God's law and therefore is not wrong. After all, Jesus did it. However, if the Messiah never did such a thing, this leader's argument loses its most powerful exhibit—the Lord of the Sabbath Himself.

Why Didn't Jesus Pick the Grain?

In truth, the reason Jesus would not pick grain with his disciples was that that to do so was UNLAWFUL and the Messiah never offended in one point of the law. And although He gave the disciples dispensation in this one instance, He wouldn't give it to Himself.

The real story concerning the action our Savior took actually speaks volumes about going to restaurants on the Sabbath and holy days and reveals why God prohibits this practice. Read on...

Distortion II

This leader claims that because the Pharisees never mentioned Exodus 16, they never considered it in their accusation. However, what he subtly omits is that the Pharisees never mentioned any verses, nor did they identify any specific trespass. Their accusation was simply that Jesus' disciples did that which was "Not Lawful" (Mt. 12:2).

Distortion III

This leader asserts that the issue in the minds of the Pharisees was labor. He claims to base this view on Jesus' response to their accusation. What he omits to acknowledge is that when the Messiah defended His disciples He invoked two examples—one involving Sabbath labor (the Levites) and one involving the acquisition of food (David and the shewbread). In truth, based on Jesus' response, it is reasonable to conclude that the Pharisee's accusation included both prohibitions.

Distortion IV

This COG leader claims that the Pharisees' indictment centered on "servile" work. However, what he fails to acknowledge is that the fourth commandment does not mention "servile work" but rather ALL work—servile or otherwise (Ex. 20:10). In that regard the Sabbath command is identical to the command regarding the Day of Atonement, which also says, "NO WORK" (Lev. 23:28, 30-31). Furthermore, God warned that anyone who performed any labor on that day (with the exception of the Levites) would be "destroyed from among His people" (vs. 30). When it came to the weekly Sabbath, labor was also a capital crime (Ex. 31:14-15).

Distortion V

This COG leader contends that "the prohibition against gathering manna did not apply to gleaning on the Sabbath to relieve hunger." He even claims that this "fact" was obvious to all who were familiar with God's law. He makes this statement because he is under the illusion that the disciples never broke any law when they picked grain on God's Day. What he fails to acknowledge is that Jesus implied just the opposite. 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 were treacherous, they weren't stupid. These men were acutely aware of the provision in the Torah permitting gleaning by a stranger or the poor on another man's property (see: Lev. 19:9, Deut. 23:25, 24:19). 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. This COG leader's assertion that everyone understood that some gleaning was permissible, is categorically FALSE. No one knew any such thing, because it wasn't true. There isn't a syllable in God's word that says otherwise.

Furthermore, contrary to what this man and others imply, 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 permission from 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 Lesson of David and the Disciples

The story suggests that Jesus was making two points by using David's example when defending His men. The first was that the Pharisees were quick to judge the disciples without knowing all the facts. By invoking the story of David, Jesus put the situation in perspective. In other words, there is more here than meets the eye.

The second point Jesus was making is truly extraordinary. He was telling the Pharisees that the same God who gave David permission to eat the shewbread gave the disciples permission to eat the grain.

Jesus was that God.

This is why He said, “For the Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath day”

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 the disciples can acquire their 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 on holy time, a long standing pastor of another major COG actually referred to this practice as a “TREAT.”

Do you think that is why David ate the shewbread?

Or, why the disciples picked grain?

A Final Thought

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 **TOTALLY FALSE**. Jesus never said any such thing, nor did He imply it—in either word or deed. Furthermore, the attempt by some to misrepresent what actually took place in Matthew 12 is nothing less than scriptural trickery. It is a cynical attempt to manipulate God's word as well as His people.

P.S. To those who hold the view that it was permissible with God for his people to glean on the Sabbath to relieve hunger, ask yourself why He absolutely prohibited gathering manna on the Sabbath to relieve hunger. Was He simply interested in protecting manna? Or, is the entire notion of this argument False. We think the answer should be obvious.

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Excuse III The Pilgrimage Sabbath

Question:

Because of the extensive travel often required to attend services today, shouldn't the Sabbath be treated more like a pilgrimage feast where meals were allowed to be prepared?

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In an attempt to justify dining out on the Sabbath, a long standing member of God's Church wrote a lengthy letter explaining why God now approves of His people seeking out Sabbath breakers and paying them for their labor on holy time. According to him, the Sabbath today is more like the pilgrimage feasts kept in ancient times because God's people must travel great distances to attend services each week. Therefore, although the fourth commandment strictly prohibits ALL work from being done on the weekly Sabbath, God now allows labor for the purpose of food preparation on this day just as He did for the annual holy days so very long ago. This member never reveals where he received the authority to make this pronouncement, he simply declares it to be so. Here is how he begins his point.

Exodus 12:16 plainly and specifically provides for the work of meal preparation to eat on the Holy Days, at least during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. There's more here than meets the eye at first glance. It's the only scripture making this particular point about Holy Day meals. The KJV refers to "work that may be done in them." Why did God provide this provision? It could not possibly be because the High Holy Days are somehow "less holy" than the weekly Sabbath. The High Sabbaths, or Holy Days, are super-significant. They reveal His Plan of Salvation! That leaves us to conclude a loving God made this exception out of concern for His followers, and because meal preparation while worshipping away from home does not compromise Sabbath-keeping.

It is fair to conclude this may be a God-given principle which applies when a Sabbath is required to be kept at an inconvenient distance from people's homes, like the weekly Sabbath is today.

Blurring the Lines

Consider what this gentleman is suggesting. According to his Biblical wisdom, God considers traveling to services in a modern vehicle on paved roads, for as much as a few hours at most, to be just like what the ancients did when they gathered their families and traveled for several days, if not weeks, to honor the annual festivals. Does anyone sincerely believe the Almighty respects this argument? Sadly this member offers it. However, even then he must modify God's law to say something it never even intimated. In truth, God only allowed His people to prepare their own meals on His annual feasts—not hire unbelievers to prepare them. Notice His instructions.

And in the first day there shall be an holy convocation, and in the seventh day there shall be an holy convocation to you; no manner of work shall be done in them, save that which every man must eat, that only may be done of YOU (Ex. 12:16).

Buying and Selling on the Sabbath

After offering his previous argument, this member presents an additional change in God's Sabbath law. When doing so he again distorts scripture in order to make it conform to his sin. Notice how he does this.

Yes, Deut. 14:23-25 explains handling meals and second tithe on a Feast trip. If the place God chooses to convene His worshipers makes it impractical for a farmer to bring his own foodstuffs, he may convert his Festival Tithe into money and spend it eating out, away from home, at the Feast, **even on the weekly Sabbath and holy days**. This passage, too, shows God is concerned about the convenience of His worshipers.

Manipulating Scripture

Although this man vigorously asserts that God's people have always been permitted to spend money on the weekly Sabbath and holy days during the pilgrimage feasts, the Bible says no such thing. The only reference to buying and selling on holy time in the scriptures categorically denounces this practice (Neh. 10:31).

Furthermore, there is not one syllable in the historical record to substantiate this man's claim. On the contrary, history contradicts it as well. To illustrate this point consider that Jerusalem was the hub of Judaism during the time of Christ. It was there that virtually tens of thousands would go up to keep the annual festivals.

However, when doing so they never engaged in business on holy time. This is because ALL business stopped on the afternoon of the preparation day. As a matter of fact, one of the functions of the priests was to sound a trumpet announcing that the Sabbath was approaching and that all BUYING and SELLING was to terminate. This fact is confirmed by the distinguished scholar, Dr. Alfred Edersheim.

The approach of the Sabbath, and then its actual commencement, were announced by threefold blasts from the priests' trumpets. When the priests for the first time sounded their trumpets, all business was to cease, and every kind of work to be stopped. The second time the priests drew a threefold blast, to indicate that the Sabbath had actually begun.

What is God Concerned About?

Furthermore, while this gentleman argues that God is "concerned about the convenience of His worshipers," we think He is more concerned about their OBEDIENCE. So important is the Sabbath to God that He actually established a separate covenant regarding this day. When doing so the great Creator declared that it was a perpetual covenant. He then laid out its terms—including the one that prohibited labor as well as the consequences for defiance. Here are the Almighty's EXACT WORDS.

The Sabbath Covenant

Exodus 31: 12-18

And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying,

Speak you also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my Sabbaths you shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that you may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you.

You shall keep the Sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: **every one that defiles it shall surely be put to death**: for whosoever does any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people.

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.**

Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant.

It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed.

And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God. (Ex. 31:12-18)

Making Things Up

Despite the clear injunction in God's Sabbath law, this COG member continues to announce that there is a new set of rules. Furthermore, he is more than willing to share what they are. After all, he made them up himself.

In Old Testament times, these situations [extensive travel] arose only on the High Holy Days. Today, they occur each week. It is true we would not spend our Festival Tithe for a meal on the weekly Sabbath; but if we are prepared to spend our own money, if that's how we've prepared for the day, does the God who was so solicitous for the convenience of the Old Covenant worshiper not care as much ... or more ... for His begotten sons? Our all-wise Creator probably inspired this timeless provision more for Sabbath-keepers in non-observant societies down through history, like ours today...

An Insult to True Believers

To suggest that the Lord of the Sabbath somehow condones what He once condemned is total nonsense. Furthermore, to suggest that God would craft His holy day laws in such a way as to accommodate the Sabbath dining practices of this member is not only arrogant, it is an insult to the scores of true Sabbath-keepers who gave their lives because they rightly honored this day. These heroes of faith never employed "convenience" as a standard for what constitutes appropriate Sabbath behavior. Sadly, this man does just that.

To obey God's Sabbath commandment, most believers must now travel a great distance from their homes, to where God has convened His people. God Himself has changed the circumstances of the Sabbath. Today's weekly Sabbath is more like the ancient Holy Days, for which there were specific cooking and spending permissions. Earning the money during the six workdays for our Sabbath meal at the place outside our gates God commands us to assemble is preparation conforming to Christ's example and instruction, and thus a valid application of the principles.

Blaming God

The idea that "God Himself has changed the circumstances of the Sabbath," is not only self serving, it is TOTALLY FALSE. Whether this member wants to believe it or not, this is NOT God's world, everything in it is the product of another god. Satan himself is the one who inspires its cultures and traditions. With that said consider the following. Is it possible that a real God rejecting devil has fashioned our modern world with the specific purpose of estranging God's people from Him. In other words, is it possible he has influenced society in such a way as to flood our lives with Sabbath breaking distractions disguised as essential components to proper worship? It would certainly seem so.

Something to Consider

For God to create the circumstances that now require His people to seek out Sabbath breakers and pay them for their profane labor He would have to reject the very law that makes it possible for His people to know Him. To do such a thing would contradict everything He is. Notice what He conveyed about this day.

Speak you also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my Sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is **a sign between me and you** throughout your generations; **that ye may know that I am the LORD** that doth sanctify you. (Ex. 31:14)

The Rigors of Travel

Furthermore, this member's attempt to enlist the rigors of traveling to Sabbath services as justification for dining out at carnal restaurants reflects extraordinary weakness. Imagine him explaining his plight to an ancient Israelite. To hear him describe it, the Israelite would probably wonder how this COG member could be so brave as to endure the hardship that had been forced on him every week, by God Himself, no less. WOW! The Israelites had it so easy when they traveled compared to this member.

The Lap of Luxury

The assertion made in this point is not only FALSE, it's embarrassing. When this man travels to services every Sabbath he is in the lap of luxury compared to the children of Israel. When the Israelites traveled to the Feast they brought their food making equipment with them. Additionally, it was necessary for them to build makeshift kitchens to accommodate the needs of the family. We're just curious, but how many times has this COG member had to set up camp when he journeyed to Sabbath services? Furthermore, for him to argue that God crafted His law regarding the pilgrimage feasts more for His people today is self centered, not to mention ludicrous. He did no such thing and to suggest otherwise is an insult to both the Lord of the Sabbath and the children of Israel.

Exposing Hypocrisy

However, if this COG member sincerely believes his "traveling a great distance" theory, what does he think about God's people going out to Sabbath breakfast at a local diner before heading off to services? Or what about making Friday night dinner reservations at a nearby bistro where little or no distance is involved? Where does that fit into his rendering of Deuteronomy 14?

By making no distinction between the obvious rigors of travel faced by ancient Israel and the slight inconvenience faced by some in God's Church today, this man claims real change is in order—and he know exactly what that change should be. For starters, work is now permissible on the Sabbath. Additionally, professional labor may be contracted and paid for on holy time. Why? Because we have it tougher today than God's people had it thousands of years ago when both work and buying and selling were clear breaches of God's Sabbath law.

A Contempt of Righteousness

Although this man claims to be applying the provisions God made for the pilgrimage feasts in his new Sabbath rules, he is doing no such thing. In truth, he is not only brazenly trespassing God's Sabbath law but also His law as it applies to the holy days. Consider what this member advocates.

Compromising God's Law

God's Sabbath Law	God's Holy Day Law	COG Member's Law
<p>All manner of work is strictly prohibited.</p> <p>Ex. 20:10, 31:14-15, Lev. 23: 3, Deut 5:14, Jer. 17:21-24</p>	<p>Servile work is prohibited (Lev. 23). Thus food may be prepared, but only by God's people— No one else</p> <p>Ex. 12:16</p>	<p>Servile labor performed by Sabbath-breakers may now be sought out and solicited on the Sabbath and Holy day</p>
<p>All buying and selling is strictly prohibited</p> <p>Neh. 10:31</p>	<p>All buying and selling is strictly prohibited</p> <p>Neh. 10:31</p>	<p>Buying meals is now permitted and encouraged</p>
<p>Seeking out a "servant" to engage in any labor is strictly prohibited</p> <p>Ex. 20: 8-11, Deut. 5:14</p>	<p>Seeking out a "servant" to engage in servile labor is strictly prohibited</p> <p>Lev. 23:</p>	<p>Seeking out someone else's "servant" to perform servile labor is now permitted and encouraged</p>
<p>Seeking out "unbelievers" to engage in any labor is strictly prohibited</p> <p>Ex. 20: 8-11, Deut. 5:14</p>	<p>Seeking out "unbelievers" to engage in servile labor is strictly prohibited</p> <p>Lev. 23:</p>	<p>Seeking out "unbelievers" to engage in servile labor is now permitted and encouraged</p>
<p>Going outside your place is strictly prohibited</p> <p>Ex. 16: 29</p>	<p>Allowing Sabbath breakers access to your place is strictly prohibited</p> <p>Neh. 13:17-21</p>	<p>Allowing Sabbath breakers access to your life is now permitted and encouraged</p>
<p>Returning to the bondage that once enslaved you is strictly prohibited</p> <p>Deut. 5:14-15</p>	<p>God's people are commanded to come out of the world and not partake of its sins</p> <p>Rev. 17:4</p>	<p>Going out into the world where the Sabbath is being trampled on by slaves to sin (Rom. 6:16) is now permitted and encouraged.</p>

Outside Your Gates

This long standing member also contends that the distance traveled to services now requires Sabbath-keepers today to go "outside their gates." But is this true? Just what is the principle concerning "your gate" as it applies to God's people today? To understand this, consider what takes place in the lives of God's people every Sabbath in today's world.

First, as the Sabbath begins God's people are in their homes where His law is being honored. Furthermore, His people have given God jurisdiction over what occurs in those homes. In other words He has authority over them. It is clear that such a place is within His people's gate.

They are then in their cars where they are conveyed to a place of assembly (meeting hall). Although circumstance requires some travel, God's people are not engaged in the world. In other words, they are not seeking out Sabbath breakers and soliciting their services. Everything in their vehicle is being done in accordance with God's law and its enduring moral principle. Additionally, God's people have authority over their vehicles. Once again, they are within their spiritual gate.

They then arrive at services where God's people are gathered and His law is being honored. Furthermore, they possess a reasonable expectation that the True God is there in spirit and presiding over the services. Clearly this is still within their "spiritual" gate. In other words, they are where they're supposed to be.

Finally, we come to a restaurant. Here Sabbath-breakers are doing their business and selling their goods in clear violation of God's Sabbath command. Does anyone honestly believe that God considers a commercial restaurant to be within His people's gates on the Sabbath? We have virtually no authority over what takes place there other than to refuse its sin.

A Matter of Jurisdiction

What so many in God's Church today fail to recognize is that there is an enduring moral principle woven within God's law. God's Sabbath command to the children of Israel then and to His people now, is that they are not to go outside the place where God Almighty is the constituted authority. It is not about distance. It is about jurisdiction. God's law has jurisdiction inside our homes, inside our cars, and inside the halls where we worship. However, it has no such jurisdiction inside the restaurant so many want to patronize on the Sabbath. That place is under the jurisdiction of another god.

Thirty Excuses

Excuse IV Millennial Restaurants

Question:

If there are going to be great temple kitchens preparing and serving meals to God's people every Sabbath during the millennium, why would it be wrong for His people to avail themselves of restaurants on holy time during this present age?

~ ~ ~

One of the most interesting arguments advanced by some who defend the practice of dining out on the Sabbath is that something very similar will take place during the millennium. This idea is based on a belief that God's people will appear before Him by the thousands every Sabbath and present sacrifices that will be slaughtered and prepared into great meals to be consumed by the people every week. One prominent church leader put it this way.

During the Millennium, throngs of people will come to the temple complex on Mount Zion and offer sacrifices, especially on the weekly Sabbaths and annual Holy Days.

This long standing minister then argues that as a result of these sacrifices, a great deal of strenuous work will be performed by millennial chefs as a part of their service to God's people. He then reasons that if God's millennial subjects may present their offerings on the WEEKLY Sabbath, thus causing the intense labor involved in preparing and serving food by these servants, then why would it be inappropriate for them to solicit the Sabbath labor of restaurant personnel every seventh day? Here is how this argument is presented.

Just as this was done in ancient times, it will also be done in the world tomorrow. The future temple will be a huge complex that will accommodate the many thousands and later, millions who will come to worship there each year. This complex will need to accommodate far larger numbers than Solomon's temple or the temple that was renovated in the days of King Herod. In the future, certain types of meal service will be done on the Sabbath -- with God's blessing!

Ezekiel's vision of the future temple gives us a glimpse into how God will conduct things in the world to come. From this, we can readily discern that feeding large congregations on the Sabbath will entail a degree of real labor. If God can make and always has made allowances for His priests when they worked on the Sabbath, is it not possible for Him to make allowances for others [like restaurant personnel] who serve God's people?

Levitical Restaurants

This is an astonishing question. According to the reasoning behind it, those who labor in restaurants on the Sabbath are actually performing a Levitical service when waiting on God's people. As such, they deserve the same consideration as that given by God to His priests.

While this leader, for obvious reasons, argues the similarities between restaurant personnel and Levites working on the Sabbath, we would like to present the differences—and they are significant. Consider just a few.

- Those who perform Levitical duties in the Kingdom serve the God of Heaven. Those who work in restaurants on the Sabbath serve the god of this world (2 Cor.4:4).
- Those who serve in the temple during the Millennium are committed to assisting God's people in honoring His Sabbath and holy days. Those who work in restaurants have no idea what those days are let alone what they mean. They will however, wish you a "Merry Christmas" or "Happy Easter."
- Any compensation extended to those performing Levitical duties in the Kingdom is provided by God Almighty from tithes and offerings given to Him. By the way, the same is true today. Meanwhile, those who work in restaurants are compensated by patrons in the form of tips and by their employer who generates revenue by selling products.
- Those who perform Levitical duties on the Sabbath are held blameless before God (Mt. 12:5). However, those who work in restaurants on the Sabbath are commanded to REPENT!

The idea that anyone would characterize serving God's people a meal on holy time, from His temple no less, as tantamount to what is done at a commercial restaurant is reckless and a huge distortion of the scriptures. But that is exactly what this leader is doing. Can you imagine presenting this particular explanation to God Almighty?

A Matter of W-O-R-K

This minister continues to explain how Levites serving in the temple on the Sabbath are engaged in profane labor through their service to God's people—often very strenuous labor. The implication here is that if it is permissible for Levites to engage in strenuous labor on the Sabbath in the service of God's people, it must be acceptable with Him for restaurant personnel to labor as well.

The food menus at the millennial temple will not solely consist of meat (beef, lamb or goat). Ezekiel 46 also mentions meal (grain) offerings and baked bread. Certainly, God will allow vegetables, fruits and various trimmings to make the dishes attractive, as well as nourishing. Again, all these things spell W-O-R-K. Much of it will be pre-assembled on the preparation day, but also much will be done on the Sabbath.

It Isn't True

The argument this minister is advancing may appear compelling, however, there is one problem with it. IT ISN'T TRUE! That's right, his claim that great amounts of labor will be done in the Millennial Temple on the weekly Sabbath is entirely FALSE. It is a phantom argument based on a pre-determined belief that has absolutely no basis in fact. Furthermore, there is virtually no scriptural authority or historical evidence even hinting that this was ever done in the past or will ever be done in the future. The real Biblical record declares that the conduct of the priests on the weekly Sabbath not only contradicts this minister's view, but actually proves why going to restaurants would be forbidden by God. To illustrate this point let's look at what the scriptures really say?

An Important Distinction

God's word declares that He makes an important distinction between food preparation on the weekly Sabbath and food preparation on the annual Holy Days. First, notice His instructions concerning food preparation on the weekly Sabbath as given through His servant Moses.

Tomorrow is the rest of the holy Sabbath unto the LORD: bake that which you will bake to day, and seethe that you will seethe; and that which remains over lay up for you to be kept until the morning. Eat that to day; for to day is a Sabbath unto the LORD: to day you shall not find it in the field. Six days you shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is the Sabbath, in it there shall be none. (Ex. 16:23-26)

God's command concerning labor on the weekly Sabbath is identical to His instructions concerning labor on the Day of Atonement. According to His law, total abstinence from work is the steadfast rule (compare Lev. 23: 3 & 28-31). While God's people were permitted to eat meals on the weekly Sabbath, they were absolutely prohibited from acquiring or preparing them on that day.

What about the Annual Festivals?

With respect to the annual holy days, God made an exception when it came to the work of meal preparation. He explained that on the annual feast days, no "SERVILE" work (the work of business) was to be done (Lev 23:7-8, 21, 25, 35-36). However, when speaking of the work needed to cook meals, God said that this work was allowed. However, it could only be performed by His people—not others. Here is how He conveyed it.

And in the first day there shall be a holy convocation, and in the seventh day there shall be a holy convocation to you; no manner of work shall be done in them, save that which every man must eat, that only may be done of you. (Ex. 12:16)

At this point it is important to understand that God specifically forbade labor to be performed on His weekly Sabbath. Furthermore, He instructed His people that the food eaten on that day was to be prepared the day before. With this in mind, the scriptures make it absolutely clear that contrary to what some assert, there were never sacrifices eaten by the common people on the weekly Sabbath. Furthermore, there is absolutely no evidence this practice will change in the millennium.

Because God made an exception regarding food preparation on the annual holy days, His people were permitted to bring their personal sacrifices at that time, provided it did NOT fall on a weekly Sabbath.

The Historical Evidence

The fact that God's people will NOT come to sacrifice on the Sabbath in the millennium is also made clear by historical record. Consider the observation of Dr. Alfred Edersheim, an internationally recognized 19th century scholar who has written prolifically on Jewish practices. Dr. Edersheim is regarded as one of the foremost authorities on the temple and its service during the time of Christ. Here is what he says.

At the outset, indeed, it must be admitted that the whole social Rabbinical legislation on the subject seems to rest on two sound underlying principles: negatively, the avoidance of all that might become work; and, positively, the doing of all which, in the opinion of the Rabbis, might tend to make the Sabbath a "delight." Hence, not only were fasting and mourning strictly prohibited, but food, dress, and every manner of enjoyment, not incompatible with abstinence from work, were prescribed to render the day pleasurable.

Dr. Edersheim goes on to describe the role of the temple on the Sabbath.

The only directions given in Scripture for the celebration of the Sabbath in the sanctuary are those which enjoin 'a holy convocation,' or a sacred assembly (Lev 23:3); the weekly renewal of the shewbread (Lev 24:8; Num 4:7); and an additional burnt-offering of two lambs, with the appropriate meat and drink-offerings, 'beside the continual' (that is, the ordinary daily) 'burnt-offering and his drink-offering' (Num 28:9,10).

Notice that there were NO OFFERINGS given by God's people on the weekly Sabbath. There were only the daily sacrifices performed by the priests as well as the addition of two lambs for a burnt offering, and these were only done according to the direct command of God. But there is more. Notice what Dr. Edersheim continues to write.

The ancient records of tradition enable us to form a very vivid conception of Sabbath-worship in the Temple at the time of Christ... the Sabbath commenced at sunset on Friday, the day being reckoned by the Hebrews from sunset to sunset. But long before that the preparations for the Sabbath had commenced. Accordingly, Friday is called by the Rabbis 'the eve of the Sabbath,' and in the Gospels "the preparation" (Mark 15:42; John 19:31).

No fresh business was then undertaken; no journey of any distance commenced; but everything purchased and made ready against the feast, the victuals being placed in a heated oven, and surrounded by dry substances to keep them warm.

Early on Friday afternoon, the new 'course' of priests, of Levites, and of the "stationary men," who were to be the representatives of all Israel, arrived in Jerusalem, and having prepared themselves for the festive season, went up to the Temple.

The approach of the Sabbath, and then its actual commencement, were announced by threefold blasts from the priests' trumpets. When the priests for the first time sounded their trumpets, all business was to cease, and every kind of work to be stopped. The second time the priests drew a threefold blast, to indicate that the Sabbath had actually begun. But the service of the new "course" of priests had commenced before that. Then the outgoing 'course' handed over to the incoming the keys of the sanctuary, the holy vessels, and all else of which they had charge. Next the heads of the 'houses' or families of the incoming 'course' determined by lot which of the families were to serve on each special day of their week of ministry, and also who were to discharge the various priestly functions on the Sabbath.

Both history and the scriptures make it abundantly clear that the Sabbath was a day in which no business was to be conducted, no food to be purchased, and no work was done even if it was to prepare meals. When reading Dr. Edersheim's words, as well as the words of God Almighty, there isn't even a hint that people brought their sacrifices to the temple, while Levitical chefs would labor over them to prepare and serve spectacular meals on God's holy Sabbath. IT JUST DIDN'T HAPPEN.

Is There Something to Learn?

The fact that God's temple has never been a hub of intense labor on the Sabbath speaks volumes about how His people should conduct their lives on this day. The Bible reveals that God's Sabbath is a day that can be contaminated by profane labor. Furthermore, God's people have known this throughout history and so have the Levites. This is why they will refrain from preparing great meals for God's people on the Sabbath in the millennium. It is also why commercial restaurants will not engage in their business either. Just as the Levites refrained from preparing meals for God's people on the weekly Sabbath, so should those who work in restaurants.

Thirty Excuses

Excuse V Things are different Now

Question:

Doesn't God's law require a different application in our contemporary secular world?

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Throughout a sermon in defense of dining out on the Sabbath, one prominent COG leader worked tirelessly to prove that God didn't really mean what He originally said in the scriptures, or, at the very least, He doesn't mean it anymore. At every turn, this man paraded out a steady stream of excuses in an attempt to prove that the Holy One of Israel now approves of his people actively seeking out unbelievers, who profane the Sabbath, and paying them for the fruit of this sin. Why?—because according to him, we now live in a society where God's law cannot be administered the way it was when it was originally given on Mt. Sinai. Here is how his point was described on his church's website. These are lofty sounding words, so take your time reading them. However, as you do, ask yourself what is meant by the words "slightly different ramifications?"

The complicated libertine Babylonish system in which we live (in contrast with the closed society of the camp of Israel) has made discernment exceedingly difficult. The application of God's Law may have slightly different ramifications in secular modern Israel, but spiritual principles guide each individual decision, providing a common-sense balance, neutralizing the pharisaical or morbidly exacting extremes.

WOW!

Although this minister's words sound thoughtful, we're curious, what is it about our "libertine Babylonish system" that makes him think that God now condones a practice that requires His people to proactively seek out the services of Sabbath breakers? No one is denying that our modern world is vastly different from ancient times, but how does that difference translate into embracing the profaning of what God made holy. Is there something in society today that actually mandates dining out on the Sabbath? Is there a law in some culture that preempts the fourth commandment? Or is this simply another attempt to rationalize sin?

Furthermore, although this leader cloaks his point in scholarly words, these "slightly different ramifications" are anything but "slight." Consider what he is advocating. Mind you that this is from a man who claims to worship the Lord of the Sabbath.

Slight Ramification Chart

God's Sabbath Law	Slight Ramifications
Don't acquire your meals on the Sabbath. Ex. 16:5,26	Acquire your Sabbath meals at a restaurant.
Don't prepare your meals on the Sabbath. Ex. 16:23	Let Sabbath breakers prepare them for you.
Don't go outside your place on the Sabbath. Ex. 16:29	Going out to eat is fine in today's world.
Don't compel servants to labor on the Sabbath. Ex. 20:10, Deut 5:14	They're not my servants.
Don't compel unbelievers to labor on the Sabbath. Ex. 20:10, Deut. 5:14.	They would be working anyway.
Don't do your own pleasure on the Sabbath. Isa. 58:13	Eating is a necessity.
Don't buy or sell on the Sabbath Neh. 10:31	They're having a special at Denny's.

More Self Justification

Despite the obvious flaw in his reasoning, this longstanding servant of God continues to pursue his defense of seeking out Sabbath breakers and paying them for their goods and services.

Regarding the Sabbath and the worship of God, everybody was doing the same thing, and when the Sabbath arrived, theoretically, brethren, nothing moved, because every Israelite and the strangers in Israel was already a "called-out" one. There should have been nothing working in Israel—no restaurants, no policemen, no electricity, no, no, no! Do you get the point? That same situation does not fit us today.

The argument this highly respected COG leader is trying to sell is simply not true. According to him God's people must adapt to the times in which they live—even if it requires going contrary to His law. What he doesn't offer is one Biblical example illustrating why this approach is appropriate. For example: The apostle Paul lived in a society infested with unbelievers as well. However, he drew a much different conclusion. This faithful servant admonished the Church at Ephesus to "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness..." (Eph. 5:11).

Furthermore, God's servant Nehemiah also lived at a time when Sabbath breakers were a part of life in Jerusalem. And although he drove them out, he acknowledged that they still posed a real threat to God's

people. His remedy was radically different than that offered by so many in God's Church today. Notice his exhortation.

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)

What the majority of God's people fail to realize is that the restaurant that serves their Sabbath meals is part of a culture that is totally antithetical to God's way—and contrary to what many Church leaders teach, the Almighty didn't decide to capitulate with it. Instead, He took a different approach. He demanded that His people COME OUT OF IT!

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)

The point we need to draw from this is that just because God's people are "IN" the world does NOT mean they should embrace it. Those who believe otherwise are in for a rude awakening.

A Real Cultural Trial

The idea that because modern culture is different God's people may now engage in activities that go contrary to His LAW is flat out wrong. Furthermore, it fails to grasp something hugely significant about our culture. The fact of the matter is that there is a part of modern life that has a far greater impact on Sabbath observance than restaurants ever could—**WORK**—specifically the pressure applied by employers on God's people to work on the Sabbath. And while many COG leaders have heard countless stories about members being threatened with losing their jobs if they didn't work on the Sabbath, we seriously doubt that any of them have heard even one story of how God's people were threatened if they didn't dine out. The point here is that if God's people should stand on principle when it comes to their own Sabbath labor, why should it be any different when it comes to seeking out the labor of others?

A Final Thought

The harsh reality concerning this particular argument is really quite simple: there is nothing about modern culture that should ever compel God's people to seek out the services of Sabbath breakers in restaurants. Those who think otherwise are simply attempting to manufacture an excuse to indulge their own appetite for a practice they enjoy.

Here is something this long standing minister should consider. God is not the author of our modern culture, Satan is. And while it may appear that the temptations he has flooded this world with are just too powerful to resist, there is one point that should never be forgotten. The cost of obedience may be great, but the cost of defiance is infinite.

Thirty Excuses

Excuse VI They're Not My Servants

Question:

Isn't it true that God's law never addresses whether or not His people may compel another person's servant to labor on their behalf?

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In an attempt to justify purchasing the services of restaurant personnel on God's Sabbath, the doctrinal committee of one of the largest COG associations published a paper outlining why they approve of this practice. In it, they claim that those who labor in restaurants are not THEIR servants but rather the servants of someone else. Therefore, because the commandment only mentions "your servant" God must approve of His people seeking out unbelievers who desecrate holy time as well as paying them for the fruit of this sacrilege. In other words the actual meaning of the fourth commandment in the eyes of these COG scholars would be something like this:

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, nor your manservant, nor your maidservant. *However, you may compel someone else's manservant or maidservant to labor on your behalf, provided they are not under your direct authority or responsibility and would be working anyway.* (Ex. 20:8-10 revised)

This COG presents this phase of their case by posing two questions and then confidently providing the answer. Notice their words carefully. As you read them ask yourself the following: "Would I be comfortable advancing this argument before God Almighty?"

Isn't it wrong to have someone serve you in a restaurant?

Are they working for you?

The answer to both questions is "no."

The waitresses, waiters, cooks, etc., in a restaurant are not your servants. They do not live in your household. This was the principle given in Exodus. Those who live under your roof or are under your control were not to work on the Sabbath. This cannot be applied to a waitress unless you have control over her and can force her not to work.

The Meaning of "Your"

Here, this prominent COG association adopts a very narrow view of the term "your" when offering their explanation of God's intent when giving the fourth commandment. We're just curious, but what do they believe God meant by the word "your" when He gave the ninth and tenth commandment? After all, those commandments only mention "your neighbor" with respect to bearing false witness and coveting. Are they suggesting that God's people may covet the wife of someone else's neighbor?

Furthermore, what these men assert as the "principle" given in Exodus is totally UNTRUE! Contrary to their claim, God's purpose when giving the fourth commandment was not to define what a servant was.

Nor was He was crafting some elaborate labor code. He was declaring in no uncertain terms that the Sabbath is HOLY and that work profanes this day no matter who performs it. That's the PRINCIPLE!

When the Almighty gave His Sabbath law to the children of Israel He prohibited them from personally engaging in, or soliciting from others, labor. Furthermore, there was no provision in His law for finding a way to circumvent the command. Any honest examination of scripture bears this out. Consider how all encompassing that law is as expressed in the fourth commandment.

First, "you shall not do any work" (Ex. 20:10). That addresses your part. Secondly, no one who comes into your sphere of influence shall be solicited by you to labor on your behalf. This includes family, servants, strangers, and even livestock (same verse). That part addresses all others His people would come in contact with on the Sabbath. Everyone else on earth was outside the camp and God had already forbidden His people from going there on this day (Ex. 16:29). Simply because unbelievers now saturate our world does not mean we may seek them out on holy time and be partakers of their sin. This is NOT how God thinks.

Whose Servants are They?

Perhaps the greatest error in this COG's thinking is in claiming whom restaurant workers serve. Most think they are the servants of their managers. But is this true? At this point, it is important to understand that those who labor in restaurants on the Sabbath are SINNING! That's right, it is a SIN. It may look innocent, but looks can be deceiving. God calls labor on His Sabbath a CAPITAL CRIME (Ex. 31:14), unless it is performed by those He specifically designates. This being the case, those who work on the Sabbath are actually SLAVES to SIN! The apostle Paul understood this truth and wrote about it to the Church at Rome.

Know you not, that to whom you yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants you are to whom you obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? (Ro. 6:16)

Today, those who work on the Sabbath are truly slaves to sin—a sin that has been sold by mankind's greatest enemy (Rev. 12:9). Furthermore, those in God's Church who proactively seek out this sin are condoning both the slavery and the SLAVE MASTER (2 Cor. 4:4). This is what God was conveying when He gave the fourth commandment. Our Great Lawgiver actually explained why His people were to release their servants from labor on His Holy Sabbath. Notice the command:

But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shall not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy 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.

And remember that YOU WERE A SLAVE in the land of Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the Sabbath day. (Deut. 5:14-15)

Here, God is telling His people that labor on the Sabbath is a form of bondage. This is the very bondage He freed them from when He delivered them out of Egypt. This being the case, it is hard to understand why anyone would want to return to that bondage, even to look at it.

A Final Thought

God's plan is that all mankind will ultimately be free from the bondage of 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 all who labor for them "FREE!" Nowhere in the

command does it remotely hint that God condones the practice of His people going back into “Egypt” and solicit the very sin they were once a part of (Dt. 5:14-15). The Sabbath is about liberty, not slavery.

Thirty Excuses

Excuse VII Beyond Our Control

Question:

Isn't refusing to allow unbelievers to serve us just another way of imposing our religion on them?

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In an ongoing attempt to justify the practice of seeking out Sabbath-breakers and paying for their services, many COG leaders argue that it is not the duty of God's people to cram their religion down the throats of unbelievers. They never explain how avoiding their services does that, they simply advance it as a credible argument. One prominent COG attempted to make this point by offering an interesting scenario. According to this body of Biblical thinkers there are times when God's people today should even allow those living in their home to labor on the Sabbath. What they fail to do is take their hypothetical question to its logical end. Notice what they write.

There are even occasions where someone under your roof cannot be forced to keep the Sabbath. An example would be a son or daughter who is older, yet chooses to live at home. Many people today have 25 and 30-year-old children living at home. Should you force them to keep the Sabbath? Can you forbid them from working?

This COG poses some interesting questions. What they are saying in effect is: Can a true believer today require those living in his home to worship the true God? The answer is: Of course not. Why?—because the worship of the true God must be voluntary. It cannot be forced on anyone. However, these COG leaders are missing a far greater point.

Ignoring Your Moral Duty

Here are some questions this prominent Church refuses to address. How would you answer the following queries?

- Can a true believer prevent those under his roof from offending his God? For example: What if your adult son brought his girlfriend home to sleep with him?
- What if he brought drugs into your home? Or cigarettes? Could you as the homeowner prohibit such things?
- What if he wanted to put up Christmas lights or bring a tree into the house? Could you say "no"?

The answer to these questions should be obvious. The believer would not only have the right, but the moral duty to prevent such behaviors. This is not cramming your faith down someone else's throat. It is preserving the spiritual dignity of your home. It is our belief that every true Christian has an obligation to do just that.

What about the Sabbath?

However, there is another hypothetical that is even more applicable to the issue at hand. Consider the following.

- What if your adult son wanted to wash your car or mow your lawn on the Sabbath?
- What if he wanted to labor FOR YOUR BENEFIT during this holy time?
- Should you consent, knowing he doesn't worship your God? Or, once again, should you defend the spiritual integrity of your home and forbid it?

While this COG doctrinal group believes that if you can't control everything you don't have to control anything, we see it much differently. Although God's people can't prevent this world from profaning the Sabbath, they don't have to make reservations and pay for it to be done. Those who think otherwise are just fooling themselves. Furthermore, to argue that God's people cannot prevent restaurant personnel from laboring on the Sabbath leaves one question unanswered. Imagine if God presented this query:

**"Do you have the power to prevent them
from working for you?"**

Thirty Excuses

Excuse VIII I'm Not Responsible

Question:

How can God's people be complicit in the labor they receive from restaurant personnel when their servers would be working for someone else if we weren't there?

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In an ongoing effort to justify the practice of dining out on the Sabbath, one of the Church's most prominent figures advanced a very interesting argument. He claims that he is no more complicit in the sin of restaurant personnel who labor for him on the Sabbath than God was complicit in the "sin" of gentiles eating unfit food He permitted the Israelites to sell them. This long time minister supports his claim by implying that there is no moral distinction between these two behaviors. Therefore, if God can be a party to one, then His people today may be a party to the other. But is his understanding correct? Remember, although God permitted His people to sell meat that had been compromised to Gentiles, He absolutely prohibited them from acquiring or preparing their Sabbath meals on the seventh day (Ex.16). Additionally, although God permitted gentiles ("strangers") to eat food that was compromised, He absolutely prohibited these same gentiles from working on His Sabbath (Ex. 20:10, Deut. 5:14).

A Real Eye Opener

We encourage you to read what follows very carefully. It's a real EYE-OPENER. As you do, never lose sight of this leader's goal. He wants you to believe that the Lord of the Sabbath approves of His people seeking out unbelievers on holy time and paying them for their goods and services, including their work. Here is how he makes his point.

If dining out on the Sabbath causes employees to sin, then we must conclude that God contributed to the sin of foreigners when He decreed that animals that die of themselves should be given or even sold to "strangers" among the Israelites! (Deut. 14:21)

Rationalizing Sin

Consider this minister's stream of logic. According to him, because an Israelite was permitted to sell a gentile food which was unfit for them (Israelites) to eat, God would somehow permit these same Israelites to go outside their camp on the Sabbath and purchase a meal from unbelievers, just as this COG leader does. Does anybody really believe this? Here is a clue: Once again, consider what God specifically commanded these very same Israelites to do regarding their Sabbath meals.

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 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.

This COG leader may see Deuteronomy 14:21 as proof that God would have permitted His people to dine out on His Sabbath, but Exodus 16 and a host of other scriptures clearly contradict his conclusion. With that said, some may wonder why God would permit the children of Israel to sell unbelievers meat that died in such a way as to make it unfit for His people to consume.

The REAL TRUTH about Deuteronomy 14:21

At this point, it is important to understand that God was NOT instructing His people to sell gentiles unclean animals (i.e. swine, cats, dogs etc) as food. The animals He permitted them to sell were clean. However, because of the nature of their death, God declared them unfit for His people, but not unfit for others. The question for us to consider is: WHY? Why does God state that Israelites are not to eat an animal that dies of itself while those who are not of God's faith may eat it if they wish? In order to understand what the Eternal was conveying, let's look at His exact words.

Ye shall not eat of any thing that dies of itself: thou shall give it unto the stranger that is in thy gates, that he may eat it; or thou may sell it unto an alien: for thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God. Thou shall not see the a kid in his mother's milk (Deuteronomy 14:21).

Notice that although an animal that died of itself was not to be consumed by God's people, it could be consumed by unbelievers—even unbelievers within the camp where God's law was in force (the "stranger that is within your gates"). This now brings us to a great misunderstanding.

Although this Church leader asserts that for a gentile to eat food that had been compromised was a sin, this is NOT TRUE. Actually, it was not a sin at all for them. That's right!—those "strangers" will never be judged for this, in this life or the next. If it was a sin for them to eat such things, then God would have been complicit in it. However, that is clearly NOT how He works (Jas. 1:13).

Here Is the Point

With this said, what did the Eternal mean when giving His instructions in Deuteronomy 14:21? What was His intent and motivation behind this directive? The answer is actually found in the verse itself. The issue is HOLINESS. In truth, God was speaking about how His people are to behave because they belong to Him.

Clearly, the relationship between God and His people is unique. However, the same cannot be said about the relationship between God and unbelievers. The point here is that God was not making a distinction between sin and righteousness, but rather a distinction between those who are His people and those who are not. Now here is the striking lesson God is teaching.

The True God is Different; You be Different, Too

Throughout the scriptures it is abundantly clear that the True God is not like other deities. He is HOLY. He is divinely pure—the epitome of dignity and majesty. He would never think of eating food that dies of itself or even that which has been cooked on a stove in which an unclean animal had once died (Lev. 11:35). The Great Creator and Sustainer of the Universe is so connected to moral purity and dignity that He would never boil a calf in its mother's milk or eat garbage out of a trash can.

When God gave these instructions, He was exhorting the children of Israel to appreciate their unique relationship with Him. In short, the Holy One of Israel was telling His people that they are to be holy as well. They are to be different from others. They are to be cleaner, more hygienic, more dignified, more modest and proper. They are not to dress in a way that is unseemly, nor behave in a way that lacks self-respect. They are not to mutilate their bodies with excessive piercings nor deface it with paintings. Their pagan neighbors may choose to behave in such a way, but God's people are to be different. Why?—because He is different.

A Lesson for God's People Today

In a similar manner today, Christians are God's children as well. As such, they should not eat food that has been tainted by being dropped on the floor, thrown in the trash, or that which has been set out too long before being cooked. This enduring moral principle is brought out at the beginning of this chapter.

Ye are the children of the LORD your God: ye shall not cut yourselves, nor make any baldness between your eyes for the dead. For thou art a holy people unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth. Thou shall not eat any abominable thing (Deuteronomy 14:1-3).

If God's people, including His leaders, sincerely desire to be like Him, they would never seek out "strangers" and pay them to labor on holy time. Instead, they would seek to be holy—different from those in the world—not go back into the world and partake of its sin. In other words, they should not do what the unconverted allow themselves to do.

The bottom line is this. Everything about us and our way of life should reflect the dignity of our calling. In essence, God is saying: "If unbelievers want to eat garbage or food that is unseemly, let them do it. However, My people must be different because I am different."

Complicit in Sin

This long standing minister then argues that unbelievers who profane the Sabbath are held to a lower standard prior to their conversion. After all, judgment is now on the house of God, not on those who aren't called at this time. Therefore, because of this, the Eternal must also view His people's purchase of an unbeliever's Sabbath trespasses differently as well. In essence, this man is suggesting that God sees dining out on the Sabbath as: "no harm, no foul." Here is how he expresses this view

Today, God is working with spiritual Israel; His judgment begins with His Church (1 Pet 4:17; Eph 2:19). Colossians 2:16-17 and Ephesians 1: 22-23 show that God's government within His Church has authority in how those within the Body of Christ keep the Sabbath and Holy Days. However, that authority does not extend to people in the world, those whom God is not yet calling.

Here, this leader is making two points. First, he claims that the ministry is responsible for determining how God's people keep the Sabbath. Therefore, because he is a minister, he is making an administrative

judgment that permits God's people to purchase the goods and services of unbelievers on holy time. But does this man have authority to legislate disobedience? The short answer is NO! Furthermore, the idea that he can mandate Sabbath behavior that flies in the face of scripture is a teaching of the Church of Rome, not the Church of God. Here is how the Mother of Harlots expresses it.

Sunday is our mark of authority. The church is above the Bible, and this transference of Sabbath observance is proof of that fact. (The Catholic Record, Sept. 1, 1923)

When this or any other COG leader, claims to have the authority to teach that God's people may go back into spiritual Egypt and purchase the Sabbath labor of unbelievers, he is placing himself above the Bible. He may deny this fact, but scriptures say otherwise.

"Don't Blame Me"

The second point this prominent COG leader makes is that because he does not have authority over unbelievers, he bears no responsibility for their behavior—even the behavior he specifically solicits and directs. Therefore, he teaches that because God's leaders can't shut down businesses on the Sabbath, they may now seek out these Sabbath-breaking services and teach others to do so as well. This is human reasoning run amok. Furthermore, it is totally antithetical to everything the True God stands for. With that said, we have some questions for all who agree with his assertion that he is not complicit in the sin of restaurant personnel who profane the Sabbath on his behalf. We will present them using three hypothetical scenarios. Here they are.

Scenario I "The Assassin"

Imagine this COG leader wanted someone killed. However, he knows that God's law prohibits murder, so he decides to enlist the services of a professional "hit man." This seems like the perfect solution. By doing this, he would not have to commit the act himself.

After soliciting the assassin's service and negotiating the terms (location, method, as well as price and how it is to be paid), this minister waits for the "dirty deed" to be done. While waiting, he reasons that he has done nothing wrong. After all, the assassin is unconverted and is totally ignorant of God's law. Therefore, God holds him to a lower standard. Additionally, the assassin is a highly skilled professional. If he doesn't kill for this minister, he will kill for someone else. That's what he does. He is a killer. It isn't as if one can prevent him from this line of work.

The Confession

After the "hit" is carried out, the assassin is unexpectedly caught and confesses to everything, revealing all the details. This leads the authorities to serve an arrest warrant on this long standing minister. Here is our question:

Does God Almighty consider this COG leader complicit in this murder?

We realize that many might consider our hypothetical as outrageous and grossly offensive. But is it? Consider how closely the facts of our "murder for hire" scenario resemble a "Sabbath food preparation for hire" behavior.

- Both acts require God's law to be violated. Murder violates the sixth commandment. Labor on the Sabbath violates the 4th.

- Both acts (murder and Sabbath labor) are identified as capital crimes in the scriptures. The penalty for both is DEATH.
- Both acts involve people who don't have a clue regarding the True God. At least we hope that's the case.
- Both acts require skilled labor to be contracted.
- Both acts require specific conditions to be met. In the case of the restaurant: the type of food, how it is to be prepared, when it is to be served, etc. In the case of the assassination: the intended target, as well as the time, location and method of the "hit"
- Both acts require payments to be made.
- Both acts involve the pro-active involvement of God's people. In this case, without their involvement the specific target won't be killed and the specific meal won't be prepared.
- Both murder and Sabbath labor are CONDEMNED by God Almighty
- Both murder and Sabbath labor are acts that require those involved to REPENT.

Now we will readily admit that there is not any possibility of a true child of God succumbing to murder as reflected in our scenario. A real Christian knows full well the horrific nature of this act and can appreciate the gravity of this sin. However, we offer it to illustrate that the rationale for dining out on the Sabbath lacks the same moral clarity as that which was reflected in the "Hit Man" scenario. Whether this COG leader wants to admit it or not, every time he seeks out the services of restaurants on the Sabbath, he is soliciting a capital crime. The fact that they are habitual Sabbath-breakers changes nothing. With that said, let's try a different example.

Scenario II "The Thief"

Imagine that this COG leader wanted to purchase a large screen plasma television and was looking for a real good deal. A friend refers him to a small unassuming shop in a remote area that "specializes" in such things. After selecting the features he wants and negotiating a price, this long standing servant of God is advised that his new TV must be acquired from the company warehouse and that he may pick it up on Thursday. This is great news because he will have it just in time for the NBA finals.

However, while waiting for the big day, this leader does some research and discovers that some of the televisions being sold at this shop are stolen. There is no doubt whatsoever that this is true. Although he can't prove it, his information is totally reliable. During his investigation he even determines that his particular TV was going to be stolen from a warehouse of a large well known retail chain.

What Should He Do?

It is undeniable that the price this COG leader had to pay for his TV was fantastic—less than half of that charged by others. However, he now knows that the merchandise will be "HOT"—"RED HOT." This minister then ponders his dilemma. What should he do? Hmmmm. Let's think about this.

He first reasons that although his television is stolen, he isn't the one stealing it. As a Christian, he would never do such a thing. Furthermore, the real thief is ignorant of God's law and truly can't appreciate his crime. Even after being confronted, the thief rationalized that he did nothing wrong because no one got hurt and some rich insurance company will pay the retail chain for their loss.

This COG leader then reasons that because of the thief's lack of conversion, God holds him to a different standard. This man will have his chance after he is called. Therefore, if the thief is held to a lower standard by God for his "act," then God must also hold this minister to a lower standard for accepting the merchandise.

Now for the question.

Does God Almighty consider this COG leader complicit in theft if he knew that the TV he ordered and paid for, was going to be stolen?

Once again, we are certain that this COG leader would not succumb to the temptation portrayed in our hypothetical scenario. He can easily detect its moral defect. Furthermore, we are confident that he would be furious that we would offer it at all. Well, in fairness to him and others who agree with his endorsement of dining out on the Sabbath, let's try one last scenario.

Scenario III "The Restaurant"

Imaging that this leader is dining at an exclusive Five Star Restaurant on a Friday evening. He made reservations three weeks ago and was truly looking forward to sharing this time with a few close friends from his congregation. He realizes that the menu is a little "pricey" but it is more than worth it—the food is superb and the service is legendary. Additionally, the atmosphere is wonderful—soft music, candlelit tables and a very sophisticated clientele. Add to that, this was God's Sabbath and NOTHING is too good for God. That is why this leader selected this particular bistro. He honestly thought it would be the perfect setting to ring in holy time.

The Conversation

After ordering wine and selecting dinner the fellowship begins. At some point, the conversation turns to dining out on the Sabbath. This leader knows his companions are sympathetic to his view so he boldly explains why he, and they, are totally innocent of any trespass of God's law. He reasons that even though their server is working on the Sabbath, at least he and his guests are not. Additionally, if this leader wasn't there with his guests his server would be assisting someone else. Therefore they have not added to their server's burden. Additionally, although the entire staff at the restaurant are laboring on the Sabbath, they don't know any better. They are unconverted and totally ignorant of God's law. Because of this, the Almighty holds them to a different standard. That being the case, He must hold the believer who solicits their labor to a different standard as well. Anyway, it isn't as if these converted members can prevent their unconverted server from profaning the Sabbath. There is not one thing they can do about it. Add to that, by dining out they won't be burdened with their own meal preparation on holy time. Therefore, no trespass has been committed.

Here is our question. Actually, we have a few questions.

- Are restaurant workers breaking God's law when they labor for this leader and his party by preparing and serving their meals on the Sabbath?

If no, was the assassin or the thief breaking God's law when they performed their service?

- Is it possible for this leader to prevent restaurant workers from laboring for him and his guests on holy time? In other words, if someone offered his Church one million dollars if he could prevent restaurant personnel from working on his behalf this Sabbath, is there something he could do to insure they wouldn't? We can think of one thing.

- If this COG leader insists on soliciting the services of Sabbath breakers on the holy time, would God Almighty consider him complicit in the labor they performed for him?

This minister may argue all he wants that he bears no responsibility for the Sabbath labor performed for him by restaurant personnel, but this is simply not true. He directs that labor and benefits from it. That is why he seeks it out and pays for it! Although the employee would be working for someone else if he wasn't there, so would the assassin and the thief.

Thirty Excuses

Excuse IX Hating Sin

Question:

Isn't it more in keeping with Christianity to show compassion for those who sin out of ignorance than to show contempt for their trespass?

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In one of the most stunning arguments in defense of dining out on the Sabbath, the Advisory Committee for Doctrine of a major COG association stated that although they would never dine in a restaurant that knowingly profaned the Sabbath, they wouldn't hesitate dining in one that was unaware they were doing so. Here are their exact words as expressed in a letter to a member who questioned why they don't hate what takes place in a restaurant on the Sabbath and holy day.

We would not patronize the business of anyone who is knowingly and defiantly breaking the Sabbath. But in most cases, this does not apply to unbelievers.

So we do not agree with your assessment, nor do we HATE what is done in a restaurant. Rather, we feel sorry for those who do not understand the Sabbath and look forward to sharing the truth of this gracious gift of God to these people when God opens their minds to understand.

Minimizing Sin

The comment regarding not hating what takes place in a restaurant on the Sabbath may be the most disingenuous ever offered in this debate. Consider what these distinguished Bible minds are saying. Although it is appropriate to hate the sin but love the sinner, they don't hate the sin either. This comment reflects a HUGELY liberal view of a trespass God specifically identified as a CAPITAL CRIME (Ex. 31:14). Sadly, these ministers are not the slightest bit offended by it.

The obvious reason they don't hate God's Sabbath being trampled on by restaurant personnel is because to do so would totally contradict their own behavior. Therefore, instead of changing their behavior, they adjust the way they think about sin. In other words, instead of seeing this breach of God's law through the eyes of their Creator, these men have concluded that in their view profaning the Sabbath is not worthy of anyone's contempt.

But is this the proper response? For example, how would this prominent team of COG leaders answer the following questions, all of which relate to sins that are done because people don't know better?

- Does this COG hate what is done in abortion clinics?
- Does this COG hate pornography?
- Does this COG hate the lies taught by false ministers?
- Does this COG hate witchcraft?
- Does this COG hate greed and idolatry?
- Does this COG hate pagan holidays and customs?
- Does this COG hate pedophilia?
- Does this COG hate prostitution?

Does this COG hate drug trafficking?
Does this COG hate man's attempt to redefine marriage?
Does this COG hate child abuse?
Does this COG hate gang violence?
Does this COG hate divorce?
Does this COG hate obscene speech and profanity?
Does this COG hate terrorism?
Does this COG hate racism and bigotry?

What Does God Think?

There are literally thousands of sins that are committed simply because of Satan's power to deceive this world (Rev. 12:9), and every one of them God HATES. He hated what took place in the garden on Eden. He hated what took place during the days of Noah. He hated what took place in Sodom and Gomorrah. He hated the bondage inflicted on Israel by the Egyptians. And the list goes on and on.

Furthermore, does this COG honestly believe that Nehemiah didn't hate what the men of Tyre were doing on the Sabbath when he actually threatened to use physical force to keep them out of Jerusalem on that day? They were unbelievers who also were deceived, just like those who work in restaurants today. And what about the gentile city of Nineveh, who God described as "not knowing their left hand from their right" (Jonah 4:11)? Does this COG believe that God didn't hate the sin taking place there (Jonah 1:2), when He actually threatened to destroy them if they didn't repent (Jonah 3:4).

Human history is filled with acts that insult our Creator and Sabbath-breaking is high on that list. This sin deprives man the opportunity to know who God is, and to know about the wonderful Kingdom He is going to restore to this earth. Tragically, Satan has blinded the minds of unbelievers (2 Cor. 4:4). He has persuaded them that God is irrelevant and that His Sabbath doesn't matter. Does this COG actually refuse to abhor what Satan has sold to unbelievers every time they prepare and serve them their Sabbath meals?

While these learned men argue that what takes place in a restaurant every Sabbath and holy day does not warrant their contempt, God's approach to this sin is far different. He even offered His remedy to those who think they can pollute holy time.

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 upon them in the wilderness, to consume them. (Ezek 20:13)

Here, God declared that He would pour out His fury on Sabbath breakers. Our question for this COG group is this. Do you think the Almighty was threatening to take this action out of pity? Or does this reaction sound more like rage?

Hating the Sin and Not the Sinner

It is true that it is appropriate to pity the sinner, but this does not mean that we shouldn't HATE the sin. Sadly, in the case of these COG leaders, no real sin takes place in restaurants every Sabbath, because those who labor on this day are unaware of God's law.

The real tragedy is that until God's people can see what takes place in restaurants every Sabbath the same way God sees it they will continue to embrace this sin. In that regard, they advocate a practice simply because they DON'T WANT to know better.

Thirty Excuses

Excuse X Fine Dining

Question:

Doesn't God appreciate the fact that when His people select the type of restaurant to dine at on the Sabbath, they are considerate of His dignity and majesty?

~ ~ ~

In an attempt to dignify the practice of dining out on the Sabbath, numerous COG leaders encourage God's people to be mindful of the quality of the restaurant they select for this activity. After all, this is God's Sabbath and it should be shown the proper respect. This particular view was expressed in a study paper produced by a team of writers under the direction of a prominent Church leader. Here is how they expressed this "Biblical fact."

God condemns things that detract from or cheapen His Sabbath day. Today, this could include such things as going to sporting events or amusement parks, shopping, or to the beach to swim or sunbathe. It could also include going to a restaurant that provides an inappropriate environment—for example, a congested restaurant that places diners in a rowdy atmosphere of worldly chatter, cigarette smoke or loud, intrusive music. (Of course, there are some restaurants that a Christian should not visit on any day of the week.)

A more acceptable atmosphere would be a restaurant with spacious seating, subdued lighting and quiet, sensible background music.

This particular COG is not the only one to advance this argument. Another prominent association offered the following in a letter defending its position in favor of dining out on holy time.

It is important to consider the atmosphere of the establishment: Is it elegant and uplifting? Is music played and, if so, what kind? Is the air clouded with cigarette smoke? (If the establishment caters to those who smoke, this is something you should consider.) Are there wall-to-wall televisions? Will you be surrounded by loud, boisterous conversation?

If the atmosphere is conducive to a continuance of edifying fellowship with other brethren, in keeping with the intent of the Sabbath day (to rest from our day-to-day activities and to learn more about God and His ways), then it is perfectly fine to plan such a gathering.

Putting this in Perspective

Although this argument masquerades as good judgment, it most definitely is NOT. For starters it describes a Sabbath afternoon dining experience that doesn't resemble anything close to what really takes place. The overwhelming majority of God's people who dine out after services eat in family restaurants like "Marie Calendar's," "the Olive Garden," or "Denny's"—not some private club or upscale bistro described by these COG thinkers. Many with children will even go to a pizza parlor or fast food diner. In virtually every case the sounds all around are unmistakably worldly. For these men to hide

behind a mirage they have created to justify their position, is silly. We're just curious but can they name one restaurant with "spacious seating, subdued lighting and quiet, sensible background music" that caters to families going out to lunch after services? We don't think so.

Furthermore, these men omit something critically important to the scriptures and the God who inspired them. They base their conclusion on the premise that you can determine if a behavior is appropriate simply by employing your physical senses. In other words: what does something look and sound like? In truth, appearances can often be deceiving—and when it comes to dining out on the Sabbath they most definitely are. To illustrate this point, consider the following:

Example I "Working Girls"

Suppose that this elegant restaurant was a gathering place of numerous prostitutes. However, these "ladies of the evening" are not the typical "hookers" one might see on street corners in sleazy parts of town. These particular women are high priced "call girls" with very influential clients. Each of these "ladies" is highly educated. Most have graduate degrees and may speak several languages. They enjoy the opera and are well versed in literature and the arts. They can converse intelligently about politics and philosophy. Additionally, they command as much as \$10,000 an evening for their services. To put it mildly they are very sophisticated. But they are prostitutes nonetheless. Furthermore, at this particular restaurant they are everywhere—engaging in their craft, making contacts and networking. Add to that, dining with these very expensive "escorts" are men whose wives are at home with their children totally unaware that tonight their husbands will be spending some "quality time" with someone else.

Now here is our question.

- Is such a place conducive to honoring God's Sabbath?
- Or, would you recommend that God's people choose another place to dine?

Most would have to admit that such a restaurant is not an appropriate place to dine on the Sabbath or, any other day for that matter. After all, regardless of how you want to slice it, God's law is being trampled on with impunity by its patrons. Furthermore, adultery is a capital crime in the Bible. It attacks the very core of decency.

Now some may argue that such a hypothetical situation doesn't exist—and even if it did God's people would be unable to detect such behavior. After all, discretion is the stock and trade of such "ladies."

This may be true so lets try a different example—one a bit more real.

Example II "A Capital Crime"

Suppose you and your family are at another fine restaurant on the Sabbath and everyone there is desecrating God's holy day right before your eyes. At every table this sacrilege is taking place. Work is being done. Business is being transacted. The conversations all around you (even if you can't hear them) relate to the profane world. Even an occasional round of "Happy Birthday" is being sung by attentive servers.

Now here is our question.

- Is this a place that is conducive to keeping God's day holy?

- Furthermore, should God's people actually pay to be in such a place? In other words, should they do business with it, on God's Sabbath no less? Remember that profaning the Sabbath is also a capital crime in the scriptures.

Embracing Sin

The reason most people in God's Church dine out on the Sabbath is either 1) they never think about what is really taking place all around them or, 2) they don't regard what is being done as an egregious sin. Tragically, we have become desensitized by our contemporary world to accept what God condemns. Furthermore, by never questioning what restaurants do on this day, we never have to question what we do.

The bottom line is this. You can no more find a restaurant elegant enough to offset what is taking place in it every Sabbath than you could find a cathedral elegant enough to offset what it is doing every Sunday. No matter how fancy it is, no matter how exquisite its atmosphere, it is still POLLUTING what God Himself made HOLY! Here is the question we should ask ourselves. What does God Almighty think of what is taking place at this fine eatery every Sabbath and holy day? Furthermore, what does He think of His people seeking out and paying for this sacrilege?

A Final Thought

The argument that the atmosphere at a restaurant on the Sabbath can somehow rehabilitate what God's people are doing there is born out of human reasoning. It is not close to a "Biblical fact." God commands His people to come out of this world, not seek out a nice spot in it and think they can benefit from its lawlessness (Rev. 18:4).

Thirty Excuses

Excuse XI Eating is a Necessity

Question:

Don't restaurants operating on the Sabbath provide a vital service by preparing nutritious meals for God's people?

~ ~ ~

There are times when certain leaders in God's service think they can get away with treating their audience like fools. In this particular argument, one COG leader does just that. He implies that those who reject dining out on the Sabbath actually want God's people to go hungry on this day. He then argues that this practice is acceptable with the Lord of the Sabbath because it satisfies a critical need for sustaining life. We aren't making this up. Here are his exact words.

Do you grasp what these people are saying? They are equating the physical necessity of eating—ingesting food in order to obtain necessary nutrients for life—as entertainment and recreation. Who is missing something here? Should such a rift in logic or judgment not serve as a warning flag to reasonable, spirit-led minds? Should it not also be painfully obvious that these people simply do not know and understand the true God?

Now for a Little Honesty

Contrary to what this long standing minister claims, those who reject going to restaurants on the Sabbath are NOT against food. That is just silly. They are against this leader acquiring it on the Sabbath. Come to think of it, so is God (Ex. 16: 4-5). They are also opposed to him having his Sabbath meals prepared on the seventh day. Come to think of it, God is opposed to that as well (Ex. 16:23). What this COG leader is suggesting is tantamount to saying that the reason God prohibited His people from gathering manna on the Sabbath and preparing it on that day was that He wanted to deny His people the "necessary nutrients for life." Does anyone honestly believe that?

Another Example of Self-Justification

The argument just cited is not an isolated case of God's leaders attempting to justify their sin by cloaking it as a "necessity." In a letter advocating dining out on the Sabbath, representatives of a very prominent COG group offered a similar argument. Here is how they expressed it.

In the millennial rule of Christ on earth, everyone will learn to keep the Sabbath and reap its benefits, far beyond what we are able to enjoy today. Eventually all mankind will keep the Sabbath. Work will cease early on the sixth day with plenty of time to prepare for the Sabbath. Of course, there will be no restaurants or other business establishments open on the Sabbath. But neither will there be a need as there is today.

In this brief paragraph, some of the best minds in the Church have officially declared that what takes place in restaurants every Sabbath is a "NEED" in today's world. It is not a sin as originally believed. It is a real end-time necessity for God's people. This assessment is offered even though the fourth commandment vehemently prohibits the very work these Sabbath breakers perform (Ex 20: 8-11, 31:14, Lev. 23:3, Deut. 5:14, Jer. 17:22)

A Question Regarding Need

Although virtually every COG group advancing the argument of “need” is convinced that their understanding is based on God's word, we are puzzled by it. What is it about making dinner reservations for a Friday evening that falls into the category of a “need?” We understand the need for food on the Sabbath. But that need has always existed--even when the children of Israel were delivered out of bondage in Egypt. However, God had a way of satisfying this need without compromising His law. He did this by specifically commanding His people to acquire and prepare their Sabbath meals on the sixth day. Our question is: why can't God's people today do the same thing? Why can't they simply follow God's instructions? What is it about today's world that makes it a necessity to seek out Sabbath breakers to prepare our meals on holy time?

Furthermore, although many COG leaders characterize dining out on the Sabbath as a “need,” why doesn't everyone have it? In other words, how are some of God's people able to satisfy their food requirements on the Sabbath without seeking out unbelievers to acquire and prepare their food for them?

Legitimizing Sin

The argument that what takes place in a restaurant on God's Sabbath is a necessity today is absurd. Dining out on the Sabbath is a luxury—one that goes totally contrary to God's law. To try to cloak it as a critical component of human survival represents a desperate attempt to legitimize sin. God's law specifically forbids such work to be performed on the Sabbath. To suggest that soliciting this labor from unbelievers is endorsed by the same God is brazenly arrogant, whether the leaders of His Church believe it or not.

A Final Thought

God's word shouts out His displeasure at this sin and those who trifle with His command regarding the acquisition and preparation of food on the Sabbath (Ex. 16) would be well advised to consider that WORD. Perhaps Job said it best.

Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food. (Job 23:12)

Thirty Excuses

Excuse XII The Utility Defense

Question:

If God's people can subscribe to utility services that require Sabbath labor, why would it be wrong for them to purchase a meal that also requires Sabbath labor?

~ ~ ~

In his defense of God's people seeking out unbelievers on the Sabbath and purchasing the fruit of their labor, one of the Church's premier leaders argues that if it is permissible with God for His people to use electricity in their home on the Sabbath, then it is also permissible with Him for them to go out to restaurants on His day. After all, both require unbelievers to work. Here is how he expresses his view.

By their standard, should a Christian not refrain from turning on his lights or air conditioning (electricity) because someone at the power plant must be on the job for this to be possible?

Similarly, what about gas heat in winter? Should not a kerosene space heater—or heating by wood—be used instead? Then, should a Christian refrain from turning on the water, including showering, on the Sabbath so that others are not further burdened (the water is heated by supplied energy)? What about not flushing the toilet, and using a bucket instead, to eliminate any kind of additional work at the sewage treatment plant?

These examples are all under our control. Utility workers must be there to make available the services you are taking advantage of. In doing this, why are you not, therefore, “a partaker in other men's sins?”

Justifying Sin

It is amazing to see the lengths some people will go to when justifying themselves. In the case of this COG leader, he blurs the lines between two completely different acts. He does so because he desperately wants to believe that the Lord of the Sabbath respects the fact that he teaches God's people that they may 1) go back into spiritual Egypt on a day consecrated by the Almighty, 2) proactively seek out Sabbath breakers and 3) pay them for the fruit of their sin. He teaches this doctrine despite the fact that God specifically prohibits all three of these behaviors.

The Real Truth

While some insist that there is no difference between using energy for one's home on the Sabbath and going to a restaurant, this is simply NOT true. Consider the obvious differences. First, God's people do not, or at least they should not, seek out utility companies on the Sabbath. In other words, they should not subscribe to utility services on that day. However, when it comes to dining out on the Sabbath that is exactly what must take place. Those who engage in this practice MUST proactively seek out, on holy time, unbelievers who are profaning what God sanctified and place an order for the fruit of this sin. At this point it is important to understand that those who dine out on the Sabbath are paying exclusively for

Sabbath labor as opposed to Tuesday labor, or, Wednesday labor. In essence, whether they want to believe it or not, they are actually purchasing sin.

A Big Difference

However, when it comes to receiving power for a modern home it is TOTALLY different. In truth no Sabbath labor is required at all. That is not how utilities work. It is not as if someone at a power plant must crank a generator so that your home receives its power on God's day. As a matter of fact, power generated by utility companies can be sustained for considerable periods of time without the aid of any manpower. When one subscribes to receive energy, his home, which is already connected to a power source, is simply allowed access to that source.

The bottom line is this—when it comes to utilities, God's people do not require Sabbath labor any more than they need their bank to be open on Saturdays for their checking account to work. However, when it comes to dining out on the Sabbath, the opposite is true. Manpower is absolutely essential. Those who engage in this practice seek it out because they depend on that labor—without it they don't eat.

Purchasing Services on the Sabbath

Secondly, God's people do not, or at least they should not, pay their utility bills on the Sabbath. However, when it comes to dining out on this day that is exactly what they do. They are purchasing a specific service that was provided for them, at their request, on a specific day—GOD'S DAY! They do this even though God prohibits his people from purchasing such things on holy time.

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)

Vastly Different Behaviors

Finally, it can reasonably be argued that utilities represent an "essential service" and as such are a necessary part of the operation of a modern home. However, no such argument can be made about restaurants. Furthermore, although the Bible is silent on the issue of using utilities on the Sabbath, it speaks with great force regarding Sabbath meals. God's word specifically states that food is not to be acquired on the Sabbath, prepared on the Sabbath and that God's people are not to go outside their community of faith to procure it on the Sabbath (Ex. 16). The Almighty even stated that this specific command was given to prove whether His people would honor Him and His law (verse 4). However, instead of heeding the scriptures, this servant of God cites the "utility defense" to justify his defiance.

Thirty Excuses

Excuse XIII Rehabilitating Evil

Question:

How could God possibly be opposed to an act that makes it possible for His people to edify each other?

~ ~ ~

When defending the practice of dining out on the Sabbath, one COG leader contends that seeking out unbelievers, who profane what God made holy, can actually be an opportunity to encourage brethren as well as facilitate Christian love and service. He also argues that for some, dining out "offers the "ONLY POSSIBLE" opportunity for fellowship after services." If this is true, what happens on the Sabbaths when no one dines out—no fellowship?

This pastor concludes his point by claiming that no reasonable person could believe that God would not appreciate this practice despite the fact that He specifically prohibits it throughout the scriptures. Here is how this minister advances this argument.

One of the greatest ways of encouraging one another and communicating sincere love for the brethren has been to share a meal upon coming together on the Sabbath. Someone who is single or a widower hardly ever has the opportunity to serve others a meal. Yet, they can use the liberty to invite other brethren for a meal on the Sabbath or High Holy Day at an appropriate restaurant

Dining out on the Sabbath (in moderation) has always been a special treat for those honored to serve others, as well as for the guests. The motive should always be to lift up, encourage and show other brethren that they are appreciated. For many brethren, who are scattered in various locations, eating at a restaurant offers the only possible opportunity for fellowship after services.

No reasonable mind believes that the God who said that "the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" would forego wonderful, vital fellowship among His children on the Sabbath so that worldly restaurant employees will still render the exact same service anyway—but now at someone else's table.

Human Reasoning vs. God's Law

These words reflect human reasoning at its very worst. The minister who offers them is suggesting that if an act of "charity" can be integrated into an act of disobedience, it nullifies the disobedience. By the way, this is the same reasoning advanced by the Protestant world when defending a host of traditions that fly in the face of scripture. Sadly, this line of thinking does not reflect God's wisdom. Instead, it is a desperate attempt to make something God hates look like something He loves.

The Bible declares that God takes no pleasure in sin (Psa. 5:4) and this holds true for the sin of others. This leader, on the other hand, not only embraces the sin, but asserts that partaking of its fruit advances the cause of Christian charity. Jesus Himself warned against this type of reasoning and explained what God thought of such arguments. Suffice it to say, it is not pleasant. When describing a time of judgment,

the Messiah explained that hiding behind good works to justify sin carries no moral weight with the Almighty (Mt. 7: 21-23).

It's Been Tried Before

This is not the first time someone has tried to justify sin by cloaking it as an act of righteousness. King Saul of Israel did the same thing when rationalizing his failure to follow God's instruction concerning how to prosecute a war with the Amalekites. Consider the similarities between what Saul did three thousand years ago and what this COG leader advocates today. They are striking.

Rehabilitating Evil

King Saul of Israel	COG Leaders
God commands Saul to go to war with king Agag and the Amalekites	God commands His people to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy
God specifically instructs Saul to utterly destroy the Amalekites and everything they possess. Nothing is to be spared. I Sam. 15:1-2	God specifically directs His people to acquire and prepare their Sabbath meals on the sixth day (Ex. 16) and to not solicit the labor of others (Ex. 20) or to purchase anything on holy time (Neh. 10:31).
Saul decides to spare Agag, and to retain the best of the livestock and other valuables. (I Sam. 15:9)	Many Church leaders decide to teach that God's people may now seek out Sabbath breakers and purchase their meals from them.
Saul proclaims that he has been faithful to the Lord and has obeyed Him. (I 15:13)	Church leaders proclaim that they faithfully keep the Sabbath and teach God's people to do the same.
Samuel then asks Saul, "What is this bleating of sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of oxen which I hear?" (I Sam. 15:14)	God asks His Church leaders, "What are these sounds of business I hear all around—the sounds of labor and the words of the world all about? Who are these 'strangers' that labor for you? And why are you in this place on My Sabbath?"
Saul explains to Samuel, "We have kept the best things so that we may offer them in sacrifice to God. But everything else we have destroyed." (I Sam. 15:15)	God's leaders explain, "We are here for your people. We fellowship and encourage them. Surly you can't object to that. By the way, we do hold Sabbath services and worship you every week."
Samuel responds to the king, "Does the Lord delight as much in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obedience? Behold to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." (I Sam. 15:22)	God's word cries out to His leaders. "Has the LORD of the Sabbath as great delight in your "acts of charity" as in obeying His commandments? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than to do what you think is good."

A Crushing Pronouncement

As Samuel prepared to leave the king, he issued a final observation concerning what Saul had done and the consequences he would suffer for his disobedience. Notice what Samuel says.

For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has also rejected you from being king. (1Sam. 15:23)

In these thirty-two words, judgment was pronounced on the first king of Israel. All that Saul had been given was going to be stripped from him because of his own pride and arrogance. Because this leader of God's people thought he had a better way of doing things than the One who made him, his throne was going to be given over to someone who understood that Israel belonged to God, not to a king.

With this in mind, God's leaders today would be well advised to consider that although the Sabbath was made for man (Mk. 2:27), it is God's Sabbath, not theirs. Furthermore, Jesus is its Lord (v 28), not them. This fact alone should inspire all His people to take serious pause before attempting to improve on God's instructions regarding holy time. King Saul thought he could do God one better as well and we all know how that turned out.

Thirty Excuses

Excuse XIV Hiding behind the Feast

Question:

If God would consent to His people spending money at the Feast of Tabernacles, why would He prohibit them from doing the same on the weekly Sabbath?

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In an attempt to justify dining out on the Sabbath, some invoke God's command regarding the Feast of Tabernacles. One COG leader employed this festival when presenting two arguments he thought proved God's acceptance of his sin. First, he contends that if God's people are responsible for the Sabbath labor of those who serve them at a restaurant, then they would also be responsible for the Sabbath labor of hotel staff during the Feast of Tabernacles.

The second argument claims that because God's people were permitted to convert their assets to cash when traveling to the pilgrimage feasts, they must have been able to spend that money on holy time.

In the interest of clarity, we will address these arguments separately, beginning with the first. Here is how this leader expresses it.

But let's go further. Suppose one goes to the Feast of Tabernacles intending not to "sin" by eating out on the Sabbath. According to this standard, he would be sinning by renting a hotel room during that time. Even if he requested that his room not be cleaned on the Sabbath, he still benefits from what the hotel has to offer—water and electricity, security, heating, air conditioning, use of elevator, use of phone and daily updating of charges. These are all paid for, and require a support staff to do them.

This man is not the only one to employ this stream of logic. One of the more prominent COG groups advanced the argument this way.

There are other areas that would be affected if one takes the position that eating in a restaurant on the Sabbath is a violation of the Sabbath. For example, when one goes to the Feast of Tabernacles, would we expect him to check out of his hotel room on Friday evening and not return until Saturday evening in order to keep from violating the Sabbath? By staying in a hotel on the Sabbath you are being served and you are being charged for that service. An entire staff of people is on duty 24 hours a day to serve your needs.

Here, these two COG associations hide behind God's command to keep the Feast of Tabernacles in order to defy God's prohibition against soliciting the labor of Sabbath-breakers on holy time. What both fail to acknowledge is that although God commands His people to keep the feast, He prohibits them from acquiring and preparing their food on the weekly Sabbath (Ex.16). Additionally, He forbids them from purchasing any goods and services on holy time (Sabbath or High day) (Neh.10:31).

Despite this fact, these groups are convinced that going to a restaurant on the Sabbath or a holy day is the moral equivalent of staying in a hotel during the FOT. They then reason that if God's people may do

one, they may also do the other. But is this really true? Although some leaders make no distinction between these two behaviors, it is clear that God does. For starters He permits one and forbids the other.

A Glaring Omission

With respect to their assertion that "an entire staff of people is on duty 24 hours a day to serve you," an important point is omitted. Although a staff is there, God's people do not have to avail themselves of their service on the Sabbath any more than they have to avail themselves of golf course personnel at a resort during holy time. The bottom line is this: God's people no more need hotel staff working on holy days during the Feast of Tabernacles than they need the restaurant they patronize to offer shrimp on the menu. The fact that it is there is irrelevant.

However, when it comes to dining out on holy time the opposite is true. This is because Sabbath diners ABSOLUTELY require labor in order to engage in this practice. Therefore, they MUST pro-actively seek out unbelievers for the express purpose of WORK, because without that WORK they can't do what they desire.

Something to Think About

The reason God's people should not dine out on the Sabbath is the same reason they should not check in or out of their festival housing on a Sabbath. The appropriate time for arriving at and departing from the FOT is prior to its start (a Sabbath) and after its conclusion (another Sabbath). Sadly, just as so many of God's people take a more casual approach when it comes to dining out on holy time, many of them also take a more casual approach to honoring this special festival.

Spending Money on the Holy Days

As was mentioned earlier, another argument advanced in defense of Sabbath dining is that because God's people were permitted to convert their assets to cash to be used at the feast, they must have been permitted to spend it on the Sabbath and holy days as well. Here is how one COG leader expressed it.

Now notice God's instructions concerning the Feast of Tabernacles, which includes annual and weekly Sabbaths:

And you shall eat before the Lord your God, in the place which He shall choose to place His name there, the tithe of your corn, of your wine, and of your oil, and the firstlings of your herds and of your flocks; that you may learn to fear the Lord your God always. And if the way be too long for you, so that you are not able to carry it; or if the place be too far from you, which the Lord your God shall choose to set His name there, when the Lord your God has blessed you: Then shall you turn it into money, and bind up the money in your hand, and shall go unto the place which the Lord your God shall choose" (Deut 14:23-25).

Food for the Sabbaths and annual Holy Days could not always be prepared on the day of preparation. Often, on long journeys, their food supplies were, of necessity, converted into money, which was spent upon arriving at the festival.

Manipulating Scripture

Although this COG leader wants to convince his audience that God permitted His people to purchase food and labor on holy time during the pilgrimage feasts, He did no such thing. On the contrary, the only mention of engaging in such a practice is thoroughly CONDEMNED by the Almighty.

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)

When was the Money Spent?

It is true that God's people often converted their assets to money when traveling to His annual festivals. However, it is totally FALSE to suggest that they spent their money on the Sabbath or holy day. Upon their arrival, God's people would purchase provisions for the feast—but not on the Sabbath. Jesus' disciples even thought that is what Judas Iscariot was going to do when he left to betray the Messiah (Jn. 13:27-29). They obviously drew this conclusion based on experience. However, this took place on a Tuesday evening. The “high” day did not occur until Wednesday evening in that year.

History Supports the Truth

Even the historical record supports this view. When describing the annual holy days, renowned scholar, Dr Alfred Edersheim states that provisions for the feast were purchased prior to the Sabbath and holy day. Here is how he described the preparation day.

No fresh business was then undertaken; no journey of any distance commenced; but everything purchased and made ready against the feast, the victuals being placed in a heated oven, and surrounded by dry substances to keep them warm.

A Final Thought

While all too many attempt to find a way to mitigate God's Sabbath law, the truth contained in scripture only reinforces it. God's word is clear. His people are NEVER to pro-actively seek out others to labor for them on the Sabbath or the holy day.

Thirty Excuses

Excuse XV It Lightens Our Burden

Question:

Why would God prohibit His people from engaging in an activity that actually reduces their own burden on the Sabbath?

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Virtually every COG leader who defends Sabbath dining claims to base his position on God's word. One such leader even titled his position paper, "Dining Out on the Sabbath—What Does the Bible Teach?" However, when presenting his case, this man seemed content on parading an endless stream of arguments that actually contradict the scriptures. He even asserted that going to restaurants on the Sabbath served an important purpose because it relieved women in the Church of the burden of Sabbath labor. Under the sub-title: *Should Women Never Get a Break?*, this man had the audacity of accusing those who reject Sabbath dining of being inconsiderate "chauvinists." Here is how he advanced this argument.

These modern critics seek to make the Sabbath a burden, especially upon the women. They fail to recognize that their misguided zeal in not adding to the burdens of restaurant employees on the Sabbath automatically transfers over to their wives, mothers and daughters—who labor in cooking, re-heating, setting up tableware, etc. Like chauvinists, these critics do not take into consideration the fact that their wives, mothers and daughters would appreciate an opportunity to occasionally have their burdens lightened on the Sabbath. Ironically, the critics give this consideration to the restaurant employees—unbelievers who have no regard for, or understanding of, this holy time!

Distorted Logic

This might actually be a new record in distorted logic. According to this leader, the issue here is who should bear the burden of laboring on the Sabbath. His wisdom suggests the burden should go to the unbeliever, because they don't know about the Sabbath anyway. This "scriptural fact" is offered up by a man who just acknowledged that God's people MAY burden their women with exhausting labor on the majority of Sabbaths. After all, he only believes it is appropriate to dine out in moderation.

The folly of this man's argument is that it is he who has made the Sabbath a burden and his own words bear this out. The Bible, on the other hand, declares that the fine women he mentions should NEVER be burdened with meal preparation on God's Sabbath, occasionally or otherwise!

He is Not Alone

The real tragedy is that this COG leader is not alone in his defense of paying Sabbath-breakers to prepare his meals on holy time. Other prominent groups have advanced similar arguments when justifying their defiance of God's law. One of the largest COG associations rationalized their behavior this way,

It is actually less work for many to eat in a restaurant and pay for the meal than it is to have a group of people in your home to eat on the Sabbath.

Ignoring the Preparation Day

Although these leaders draw consolation from their arguments, it is clear that God Almighty isn't the slightest bit impressed. 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 expressed 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.

Contrary to what many Sabbath diners believe, God never intended for His people to be engaging in the Sabbath labor described by this COG leader. Furthermore, the scriptures he claims to base his teaching on, declare that the Almighty would personally make sure His people had a way to keep it HOLY—and His remedy did not involve soliciting the labor of unbelievers.

So important is the Sabbath to God that He even leveled a blistering indictment against the children of Israel for failing to properly prepare for it. He did this when they attempted to acquire their food on holy time. Consider the emotion of God's words.

How long refuse you 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 you 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.

Food was not to be acquired on the Sabbath
Food was not to be prepared on the Sabbath
His people were not to leave "their place" on the Sabbath.

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 the community of faith to procure the food as well as to consume it on the Sabbath. Tragically, many Church leaders teach that every one of these practices is now acceptable with God because it lightens their burden.

Thirty Excuses

Excuse XVI Strict Obedience is Pharisaical

Question:

Didn't Jesus denounce the Pharisees for crafting endless laws concerning the Sabbath, including the prohibition against buying and selling?

~ ~ ~

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. Rather, it is a condemnation of those who would suggest otherwise.

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 devoid 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 an activity 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 this practice?

One of the largest COG associations commissioned its doctrinal committee to produce a position paper defending the practice of dining out on holy time. In it, these Church thinkers claim that the Pharisees tediously legislated Sabbath observance by crafting endless regulations concerning how it should be observed—including not buying and selling. After setting up this argument, they suggest that just as the Messiah took issue with the Pharisees of His day, He would also take issue with those who believe that buying and selling on the Sabbath is a sin in our time. They even suggest that any prohibition against buying and selling on holy time is a "tradition," not a Biblical mandate. Notice their words.

In addition to the Biblical account of Sabbath keeping, in the Jewish community there exists the oral law, to be interpreted by the Sanhedrin. Of course the Sanhedrin disappeared over 1,700 years ago, but its influence is still felt today. The oral law (now written in the Talmud) contains 39 categories of forbidden work on the Sabbath. Some of these are specified in the Bible, but not all, yet they were enforced by the Sanhedrin during the time of Christ. As in all matters, we must be careful to separate Biblical fact from tradition. In his book *Sabbath—Day of Eternity* Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan writes this about commerce on the Sabbath:

The Sanhedrin legislated a prohibition against all forms of buying, selling, trading and other commerce for a variety of reasons. The Sabbath must be a day when all business stops. 1 Kaplan, Rabbi Aryeh, *Sabbath — Day of Eternity* (Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America: New York, New York) 2002.

A prime rule given to the Sanhedrin was to “make a fence around the Torah.” Jesus Christ did not support the many rules and regulations developed by the Sanhedrin to legislate Sabbath observance. He denounced many of these traditions (Mark 7:9, 13). This should give us reason to pause when it comes to Jewish rules and regulations concerning Sabbath observance.

Manipulating Scripture

It is interesting that the verses these ministers cite have absolutely NOTHING to do with the Sabbath or “buying and selling.” The tradition Jesus denounced involved ceremonial washing. Despite this fact this COG group offers it as evidence that the Messiah denounced the Pharisees Sabbath “regulations.” This subtle deception speaks volumes concerning how defenders of this sin manipulate God’s word in order to advance their case.

It is also interesting to note that the very source they quote acknowledges that the Sanhedrin “legislated against ALL forms of buying and selling on the Sabbath.” The point here is that during Jesus’ life no Jew ever engaged in such a practice. Furthermore, there isn’t a syllable in scripture that even hints that Jesus took issue with this “regulation”—and for good reason. He was the Lord who inspired Nehemiah’s words prohibiting ALL commerce on the Sabbath and the holy day (Neh. 10:31).

Guilt by Association

Furthermore, these COG leaders attempt to link genuine obedience to God’s Sabbath law with the self-righteous hypocrisy of Jesus’ greatest antagonists. It is interesting that this is exactly the same approach employed by the Protestant world when attempting to rebut keeping the Sabbath at all. According to their reasoning, the Pharisees kept the Old Testament feasts, they didn’t eat unclean meats, they tithed, and they wouldn’t work on the Sabbath. Protestants then conclude that because Jesus issued a scathing indictment against them, He must have disapproved of everything they did. It is doubtful that Sabbath dining advocates would “buy” this argument. However, they have no problem “selling” it when it suits their purpose.

Taking their lead from God

What this doctrinal committee fails to understand is that those who reject the practice of dining out on the Sabbath are not taking their lead from the Pharisees, but rather from God Almighty. It was He who specifically prohibited His people from acquiring their daily meals on the Sabbath, preparing their meals on the Sabbath, and from going outside their community of faith to obtain their meals on the Sabbath (Ex. 16). Furthermore, the Almighty was so emphatic when giving these instructions that He actually said that failure to comply was proof that His people rejected Him and His law (verse 4). Today that is exactly what this COG position advocates. We realize this is not their intent, but what they are teaching directly contradicts the enduring moral principle of God’s command to His people after leading them out of bondage. The point here is that this issue is not about “Jewish rules and regulations,” it is about obeying the Lord of the Sabbath and honoring His word.

Additionally, this COG fails to acknowledge that what takes place in a restaurant every Sabbath is an act of sacrilege and desecrates the very day God made holy at the beginning. Remember, the activity they are advocating requires God’s people to:

- Go back into spiritual Egypt (Re. 18:4),
- Seek out slaves to sin (Ro. 6:16) and their slave master (2 Cor. 4:4)
- Pay these slaves for the fruit of their sin (Neh. 10:31).

Despite this fact, these COG leaders contend that those who think such a practice is wrong are just like the Pharisees.

A Final Thought

The bottom line is this. 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. 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.

God’s instructions are firm. His law is absolute. His word does not require man’s “spin,” it requires man’s OBEDIENCE. Going outside your spiritual camp on the Sabbath to acquire your meals and have them prepared for you by slaves to sin (Rom. 6:16) is a practice that God specifically forbids (Deut. 5:14-15). He even identified it as a test to prove His people's loyalty to Him (Ex. 16:4). The self-righteous will ignore that test. Those who tremble at His word will heed it (Isa. 66:2).

Which best describes you?

Thirty Excuses

Excuse XVII Yeah Buts and What Ifs?

Question:

Don't the complexities of today's world demand that allowances be made for God's people to engage in certain practices that will no longer be necessary in the Kingdom?

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In an attempt to justify the sin of seeking out unbelievers and paying them for their Sabbath labor, virtually every advocate of this practice advances the argument of "moral equivalence." However, one particular COG takes this approach to new depths. They actually contend that going to a restaurant on the Sabbath is morally no different than going to a hospital because both involve people working. Therefore, because God would never condemn the act of calling 911 if someone had just been hit by a car on the Sabbath, he would never condemn it if someone called a five star restaurant and made Sabbath reservations for his family and friends. After all, work is work.

This COG also presents a host of examples where Sabbath labor is involved and argues that if it is permissible to engage ANY labor on the Sabbath then it must be permissible to engage ALL labor, or at least the labor of those who work in restaurants.

But is this true?

We will first present their argument in its entirety—after which we will respond to each point, omitting nothing. Once again, remember, the issue is whether or not God condones the practice of dining out on His Sabbath. Here is how these COG leaders advance their point.

In the Church we rent halls on the Sabbath for services. In some cases we are required to have a janitor present. If one believes he is "doing business" by eating in a restaurant on the Sabbath, then, in principle, this would also be a problem.

The Church has also met in VFW halls where veterans are smoking elsewhere in the building during services. We've met in movie theaters where carnal movies were shown the night before or after the church service as well as advertised on the walls of the building during the service. Nehemiah certainly would not allow this and neither would we if these businesses were under the Church's jurisdiction, as they were in Nehemiah's day.

What about people who rent a home or apartment? The rent does not cease on the Sabbath. These examples and questions support our position that eating in a restaurant does not violate the Sabbath.

Another area of concern would be a nursing home or a hospital setting. A fee is charged for the meals in both locations and someone has to serve those meals. Are members of the Church who live in nursing homes or find themselves in a hospital over the Sabbath violating the Sabbath by eating their meals? We do not believe they are.

Justifying Sin

It is amazing to see the lengths people will go to when justifying sin. In the case of this large COG organization, they argue that there is no difference between the behaviors they presented above and going to a restaurant on God's day. They do this because they desperately want to go back into spiritual Egypt on a day God consecrated and purchase the fruit of its sin.

However, in the interest of fairness, let us take a closer look at the examples presented by this Church when defending their behavior. As we do, it will become abundantly clear that there is virtually no comparison between their examples and dining out on God's Sabbath. Notice what they argue. As you do, imagine presenting this wisdom to God Almighty when explaining your Sabbath behavior.

Example I

In the Church we rent halls on the Sabbath for services. In some cases we are required to have a janitor present. If one believes he is "doing business" by eating in a restaurant on the Sabbath, then, in principle, this would also be a problem.

NOTE: It is interesting that this COG states that they "rent halls ON the Sabbath." It is our understanding that this is not true. In truth, they do not sign leases or pay rents on the Sabbath. Therefore, their words would be more accurately stated, "We rent halls FOR the Sabbath." With that said here is the problem with their argument.

Now for the TRUTH

Although this COG fails to admit it, there is a HUGE difference between renting a hall for services and seeking out Sabbath-breakers to prepare their meals on holy time. First, the halls which are rented by COGs around the world are specifically dedicated to the service of God's people and their worship of Him. Furthermore, although some halls require their personnel to be there, it is not a requirement of the Church. The Church does not need facility staff in order to conduct services. In essence, such personnel provide NO SERVICE whatsoever to God's people. They are simply protecting the interests of those who own or manage the hall. In truth, the Church is renting space, not manpower.

When it comes to dining out on the Sabbath the opposite is true. The manpower working at a restaurant is absolutely essential to what this COG is advocating. Labor is what is being contracted. In other words, there must be people there to prepare and serve the food as well as a host of other functions.

If this COG really believes their point, here are some questions for them: What would happen if the halls you use for services gave you the option of not having any of their people present? Would your services be able to go on without them? The answer should be obvious--of course they would! Now let's suppose that the restaurant you go to on the Sabbath gave you the option of not having anyone serve you or prepare your meals on God's day. Do you see the difference now?

Example II

The Church has also met in VFW halls where veterans are smoking elsewhere in the building during services. We've met in movie theaters where carnal movies were shown the night before or after the church service as well as advertised on the walls of the building during the service. Nehemiah certainly would not allow this and neither would we

if these businesses were under the Church's jurisdiction, as they were in Nehemiah's day.

Denying the Obvious

This attempt to justify the SIN of going to restaurants on the Sabbath illustrates how far people will go to deny the obvious. Their purpose in this particular piece of silliness is to prove that if it is acceptable with God for His people to hold services in a theater where an inappropriate movie was shown the night before, then it must also be acceptable with Him if His people proactively seek out Sabbath-breakers and pay them to labor for them at a restaurant. Once again these COG leaders attempt to blur the lines between two entirely different behaviors.

What they refuse to acknowledge is that their Sabbath and holy day services are not the least bit dependent on smokers in adjoining rooms or, the promotion of inappropriate movies on walls. The same however, cannot be said about the sin that takes place at a restaurant every Sabbath. When it comes to dining out on holy time, these COG ministers are totally dependent on lawlessness--without it they don't get to do what they desire. In other words, while these men don't require smokers in the room next door in order to hold services, they do require people to profane the Sabbath in order to eat at a restaurant. That is what they are seeking out and paying for.

The [human] reasoning offered by these Church leaders to justify their sin may fool them, but it doesn't fool the Almighty. In truth, it OFFENDS Him. There is no command prohibiting God's people from holding services where those outside may be sinning. However, the Bible absolutely condemns soliciting sin, which is exactly what takes place whenever God's people dine out on the Sabbath.

Example III

What about people who rent a home or apartment? The rent does not cease on the Sabbath. These examples and questions support our position that eating in a restaurant does not violate the Sabbath.

The Real Truth about Renting

The only thing these examples and questions prove is that the objective of this prominent COG is not to seek out the Lord's will in this matter, but rather to justify their own behavior. Furthermore, these points don't possess a hint of honesty. According to this logic God's people can spend money all day on the Sabbath because they rent their apartments all day as well. Even this COG doesn't believe that.

The truth that this prominent Church wants to ignore is that rent on apartments as well as the mortgage on homes is accrued over specified periods of time. There is nothing that compels God's people to seek out these products and services on the Sabbath, let alone pay for them. If these COG leaders want this example to be consistent with their argument, they must conclude that God would actually approve of His people going apartment hunting for an hour or two on the Sabbath, including filling out applications and giving deposits. Why? Because that is exactly what they do when dining out on the Sabbath. First, they go out into the world and seek out a restaurant of their liking. They then look at a menu to determine which product(s) appeal to them. They then place their order and consume it—all on holy time. They also pay for it on the Sabbath, including a tip for the service.

At this point it is important to understand that when one rents or buys a home it is done so with the purpose of spending a protracted period of their life in it. Dining out on the Sabbath is totally different. It is an activity that only involves the buying of goods and services to be consumed on HOLY TIME. This entire transaction involves the profaning of God's Sabbath. While this COG sees no difference between living in an apartment and seeking out Sabbath-breakers to prepare their meals, the differences are HUGE.

Example IV

Another area of concern would be a nursing home or a hospital setting. A fee is charged for the meals in both locations and someone has to serve those meals. Are members of the Church who live in nursing homes or find themselves in a hospital over the Sabbath violating the Sabbath by eating their meals? We do not believe they are.

The Hospital Defense

This is one of the most self-serving arguments any COG has ever offered when justifying their behavior and these leaders should be ashamed of themselves for presenting it. In essence, they are hiding behind the weak and infirmed in order to excuse indulging their own appetite for pleasure on God's Day.

While they fail to see the difference between their scenarios and dining out on the Sabbath, the differences are considerable. For example, who would ever consider staying in a hospital "a wonderful way to spend a portion of the Sabbath"? But that is exactly how this particular group characterized dining out on holy time. Furthermore, what member of their doctrinal committee would describe being confined in a nursing home by saying "it can be one of the highlights of a person's week"? But, once again, that is how they described going to restaurants on God's day. Furthermore, if given a choice between being able to live a life filled with vibrant health and living in a nursing home, what would these men choose?

An OX in a Ditch

God's word makes it clear that there are circumstances that may necessitate labor on the Sabbath, but this is an exception, not a rule. Jesus spoke of this exception when dining at the home of a prominent Pharisee (Lk. 14: 1-5). Also there, was a man suffering from "dropsy," an abnormal and painful accumulation of fluid in the tissue of the body.

Jesus seized upon this moment to teach a valuable lesson about compassion. He began by asking these religious leaders if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath. When they did not answer Him, Jesus healed the man. Perhaps anticipating a reaction from the guests, 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)

The Messiah's question silenced these men because it not only appealed to their understanding of the scriptures, but also 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.

Other Examples

This principle can be applied to other situations in life as well. For example, there may be a time when the car breaks down or an injury occurs on God's Sabbath. 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 set up an auto repair business that is open seven days a week.

Buying on the Sabbath

There are also times when purchasing something on the Sabbath would 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 doing good 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.

Finally, 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 His teaching regarding mercy 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 emergency that may arise on holy time?

Thirty Excuses

Excuse XVIII No More Manna

Question:

Wasn't God's prohibition against acquiring and preparing Sabbath meals only in effect until the manna ceased?

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In an attempt to justify the practice of seeking out unbelievers who profane the Sabbath and paying them to work on his behalf, the leader of a prominent COG group advanced what just might be the most contrived argument in the history of this debate. According to him, God only prohibited the Israelites from gathering manna on the Sabbath, not from gathering food altogether. Here is how he advances his point.

By way of review, as manna was first given to Israel, the instructions were to gather enough manna on the sixth day to cover for the Sabbath, as well as enough for two days (vs. 23). Note this instruction specifically applied to the gathering of manna [nothing else]. Then, Exodus 16:25-26, 29 continued with further instructions to not gather manna on the Sabbath.

Protecting the Manna

Here, this minister is suggesting that God's purpose in Exodus 16 was to protect manna, not His Sabbath. According to his reasoning the Great Creator of heaven and earth allows His people to dine out, but prohibits them from ordering a coriander seed muffin with honey, when they do (Ex. 16:31). Does anyone honestly believe such reasoning?

The Statute of Limitations

He then claims that the Almighty's instructions regarding Sabbath meals were only in effect for as long as manna was being provided. Once it ceased, God's people were then free to do whatever they deemed necessary to feed themselves on holy time. Sadly, he doesn't offer one drop of legitimate scriptural evidence to support this claim. He just declares it a "Biblical fact." Here is how he expresses his theory

As noted above, gleaning [other food] in order to fill one's hunger on the Sabbath was not forbidden for all time, especially after manna was to cease at some future time.

Sadly, this minister is not the only one to advance such an argument. One of the largest splinter groups expressed this same view in a letter defending Sabbath dining. Here is how they put it.

You ask, '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)?' The simple answer is that God does not deposit manna on our property six days a week.

Who is Your Provider?

What these leaders assert in this argument is despicably arrogant and shows utter contempt for God as a provider. The fact that He no longer rains down manna does not mean He no longer gives us our daily bread (Mt. 6:11). In essence, what these men are saying is: "God, if you want us to not acquire or prepare our food on your Sabbath, then you need to keep providing us with manna the other six days. Otherwise, we have no obligation to obey you in this matter." Can you imagine the audacity of such a statement?

God's command regarding the acquisition and preparation of food on His Sabbath is so clear that only the defiant would conclude otherwise. Furthermore, when COG leaders advance this kind of argument in defense of their SIN, they must rely on a patent rejection of the obvious.

Thirty Excuses

Excuse XIX Nehemiah Never Prohibited It

Question:

Wasn't Nehemiah's issue with the nobles of Judah solely over making the entire Sabbath a market day?

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Virtually every advocate of dining out on the Sabbath has a slant on Nehemiah's prohibition against buying and selling on holy time (Neh. 10:31). Most Church leaders claim that this great servant only condemned spending the entire day profaning the fourth commandment, not just an hour or two enjoying a meal prepared by paid Sabbath-breakers. In other words, according to them this sin is a matter of degrees—and in their view, anything as minor as dining out in a commercial restaurant is not worthy of being considered a violation of God's law. Here is how the doctrinal committee of a prominent COG begins to express this argument.

There is a huge difference between opening up a market or going to market on the Sabbath day and eating a meal in a restaurant.

Responding to the "Huge Difference" Theory

There is also a huge difference between working all day on the Sabbath in a coal mine and working two short hours as a part-time receptionist in an air conditioned office. But does this difference mean that one of these behaviors is not violating the fourth commandment? Furthermore, there is a huge difference between being a bank robber and being a pick pocket, but which of its practitioners is not a thief?

What these Church leaders are doing is nothing more than a desperate attempt to manufacture an artificial line between the sin they wish to commit and the sin of others. This is done to deflect attention away from their own transgression. It is also a form of denial. Sadly, this approach goes totally contrary to God's word which cautions believers from comparing themselves to others (2 Cor. 10:12). The fact that some sins may appear more severe does not mitigate anything.

Additionally, this COG attempts to masquerade their profaning of the Sabbath by referring to it as simply "eating a meal" at a restaurant. What they subtly fail to acknowledge is that they are the ones seeking out Sabbath-breakers and hiring them to prepare that meal. They take this approach because they want you to believe this debate is only about eating—which God's law permits, as opposed to soliciting the Sabbath labor of unbelievers (strangers) which He forbids (Ex. 20:10).

Some Honest Perspective

The great tragedy in this argument is that these self professed Sabbath-keepers refuse to acknowledge what God thinks of the work that takes place every Sabbath in the restaurants they patronize. Additionally, they fail to concede the obvious. There is not one chance in a trillion that Nehemiah would have allowed one restaurant to remain open on God's Sabbath. Furthermore, there is not one chance in a trillion that he would have allowed God's people to buy their goods. Despite this fact, these COG leaders continue to argue that God is only opposed to profaning the entire day not just a small portion of it. They justify this thinking by concocting their own version of what was taking place in Jerusalem at that time.

Suffice it to say the labor was intense. However, according to them, there wasn't a restaurant to be seen anywhere. Therefore, God is silent on the subject of restaurants. Here is how they put it.

Nehemiah saw people treading grapes on the Sabbath—working in clear violation of the Sabbath command (Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15). They were loading up their produce and bringing it into Jerusalem to sell. They had again made the Sabbath a market day. All of these activities mentioned here (Nehemiah 13:15-17) dealt with a market day. This is not a restaurant nor does it have anything to do with eating a meal. It was a market day! Notice the items mentioned here: wine, sheaves, grapes, figs, provisions (corn and other items of sustenance), fish and “all kinds of goods.”

A Striking Resemblance

Here, these leaders want you to believe that God saw the issue of profaning the Sabbath as limited in scope. It was about markets, nothing more. But is this true? Contrary to what these men claim, what took place in Nehemiah's time has a striking resemblance to what takes place in a restaurant today. Every Sabbath these dining establishments rely on the delivery of the products they sell. Bakery trucks deliver breads and pastries. Produce trucks deliver fresh fruits and vegetables. Beverage trucks deliver a variety of drinks and spirits. Meat trucks provide significant amounts of beef, poultry and seafood products. Some fine bistros even have their linens (tablecloths and napkins) delivered. Despite this fact, these Church thinkers cling to the notion that God is only opposed to His people setting up supermarkets on the Sabbath, not setting up restaurants. Notice how they continue their point.

The prohibition was against setting up a market on the Sabbath or a Holy Day. There is no mention of eating or not eating on the Sabbath. The Jews had made the Sabbath a secular day in which it was acceptable to go to market.

The claim by these men that there is no mention of eating on the Sabbath is wishful thinking, not a Biblical fact. 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 COG may assert that it would have been great amounts of food, but that is pure speculation, not to mention totally irrelevant.

An All Encompassing Command

Although these ministers want to make this issue about the amount of time spent engaging in profane activities on the Sabbath, this was clearly not what concerned Nehemiah. Nowhere does this true and faithful servant 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 several hours 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.

Furthermore, this COG conveniently omits that Nehemiah forbade the Jews from buying ANYTHING on holy time (Ne. 10:31). NOT ONE THING! This is because doing business on the Sabbath was, and is, an act of desecrating the holy, regardless of the degree. God's command is simple and direct. He doesn't want His people to touch any part of this sin. Here is how Nehemiah put it.

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)

Regarding Unbelievers

At this point, it is also important to note that those who were selling food on the Sabbath were “non-believers” just like those who work in restaurants 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)

These vendors 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 he would take. He expelled every merchant from the city and warned them in the strongest words possible to NEVER come back on the Sabbath or holy day (Neh. 13:17-20).

The example of Nehemiah’s uncompromising love of God’s law is a great lesson for all Christians. 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.

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 Commitment to Defiance

These COG thinkers have become so committed to defying God’s law they even trivialize certain aspects of it. Notice their observation regarding Nehemiah’s prohibition against doing business on the Sabbath.

This is the first mention of a prohibition concerning commerce on the Sabbath. Jewish scholars contend that it was the first time the issue of buying and selling on the Sabbath was even addressed.

Jeremiah’s Warning

The claim by these leaders that Nehemiah is the first to mention the trafficking of food and merchandise in Jerusalem on the Sabbath is patently FALSE. When this great champion warned the nobles of Judah about the “evil” they were bringing upon the Jews (Neh. 13:17-18), he was referring to the calamity Jeremiah warned their fathers about nearly 100 years earlier. In that warning Jeremiah quotes God Almighty’s rage at this very SIN. His words should stand as a chilling reminder to all generations that His Sabbath is not a day to trifle with. And it is certainly not a day where profane labor should be sought out and paid for. God even cautioned that obedience in this regard was a matter of life and death. But don’t believe us, here are His words.

Tell the kings and all the people of Judah and everyone who lives in Jerusalem and enters these gates, to listen to what I say.

Tell them that if they love their lives, they must not carry any load on the Sabbath; they must not carry anything in through the gates of Jerusalem

or carry anything out of their houses on the Sabbath. They must not work on the Sabbath; they must observe it as a sacred day, as I commanded their ancestors.

Tell these people that they must obey all my commands. They must not carry any load in through the gates of this city on the Sabbath. They must observe the Sabbath as a sacred day and must not do any work at all.

But they must obey me and observe the Sabbath as a sacred day. They must not carry any load through the gates of Jerusalem on that day, for if they do, I will set the gates of

Jerusalem on fire. Fire will burn down the palaces of Jerusalem, and no one will be able to put it out." (Jer. 17:20-22, 24, 27 Good News Translation)

A Terrible Price to Pay

Tragically, the leaders of Judah refused to heed God's word and they would pay dearly for their defiance. For you see, God was not bluffing. And His people would find this out the hard way. Both the scriptures as well as secular history reveal that a powerful Chaldean army would attack Jerusalem and leave it in ruins.

Here is how Jeremiah described its utter destruction and the price it would have to pay for not heeding God's warning.

Now on the tenth day of the fifth month, which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan the captain of the bodyguard, who was in the service of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. He burned the house of the Lord, the king's house and all the houses of Jerusalem; even every large house he burned with fire. So all the army of the Chaldeans who were with the captain of the guard broke down all the walls around Jerusalem. (Jer. 52:12-14)

The Result of Defiance: CAPTIVITY

The book of Lamentations bewails what happened to this once great city. Here is how Jeremiah expressed his sorrow at its destruction.

How lonely sits the city that was full of people! She has become like a widow who was once great among the nations! She who was a princess among the provinces has become a forced laborer! (Lam. 1:1 New American Standard Version)

God's people were thrust into captivity because they thought they could trifle with the Sabbath. They did so because like so many today, they would rather embrace their traditions than listen to the truth. They thought they could decide for themselves how the Sabbath could be observed. They thought they could make up their own rules concerning this holy convocation. But in the end all they got was bondage. This was the warning of Nehemiah to his generation. And that warning is being repeated today.

A Final Thought

When God delivered the children of Israel out of bondage in Egypt, He introduced them to His Sabbath. In the sixteenth chapter of Exodus He explains how He planned to nourish them physically. He would do so by providing them with food every day--with the notable exception of the Sabbath. He would not rain down manna on the seventh day because that day was holy.

God then gave His people three specific instructions concerning food on this day. Furthermore, He said that these instructions were given to prove whether His people would obey Him (Ex. 16:4). The three instructions God gave were:

- Food was not to be acquired on the Sabbath v.5.
- Food was not to be prepared on the Sabbath v.23.
- His people were not to leave "their place" on the Sabbath v.29.

In reality, the position advanced by Sabbath-dining advocates contradicts every aspect of God's command with respect to eating on His day. Consider what they teach. First, they assert that they may acquire their Sabbath meals on the seventh day by purchasing them from Sabbath-breakers. They also assert that Sabbath meals may be prepared for them by chefs who profane this day. Finally, they teach

that God's people may go outside their community of faith to procure their food as well as to consume it. It is interesting that the phrase "going out to eat" is used when describing this activity.

It is also interesting to note that Nehemiah not only locked the vendors out of the city, he also locked God's people inside its gates. Is it possible that with this bold move Nehemiah was enforcing God's command that His people were not to go out of their place on the Sabbath—even if it was to procure food?

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 out restaurants and prevent them from selling their products 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, actually seek out these Sabbath breakers and purchase the fruit of their sin.

Thirty Excuses

Excuse XX We're Not Nehemiah

Question:

How can God's people today be expected to do what Nehemiah did, when the civil law empowered him with authority over Sabbath observance?

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When rationalizing the practice of dining out on the Sabbath, a very prominent COG association argues that the world we live in today is so radically different from the time of Nehemiah that it would be impossible for God's people to administer His law the way Nehemiah did. Therefore, they contend that because the Church is powerless to enforce Sabbath observance on everyone, it may now seek out Sabbath breakers and buy their products and services on holy time. Here is how they present their argument.

Nehemiah's reaction to those who violated the Sabbath came in a time when the civil power controlled the keeping of the Sabbath. We do not live in such a time today. Obviously there are aspects of Nehemiah's conduct that cannot be applied directly to our lives today.

We must be careful when extracting principles that we do not jump to conclusions in our comparisons to modern-day life when civil law is not in the hands of Sabbath keepers. One cannot transfer the events of that day to our day.

The Smokescreen Defense

What this COG has employed in this argument is nothing but a smokescreen. Simply because you cannot enforce God's Sabbath on a world dominated by a God-rejecting devil, does not mean you are powerless to obey for yourself.

Here is something this COG and its leadership should seriously consider before advancing this point. The Sabbath is HOLY! It was made so by a HOLY GOD. The Lord of the Sabbath consecrated it at the very beginning (Gen. 2:2-3). Furthermore, the law governing its observance has always prohibited God's people from seeking out Sabbath-breakers and paying them for their labor. Simply because we live in a society dominated by such people does not mean we may now seek out their sin (Eph. 5:11) any more than it now permits us to occasionally work on the Sabbath because our employers demand that we do so.

A Lesson in Righteous Indignation

Sadly, while this COG dismisses Nehemiah's relevance to God's people today it omits a very important lesson from his example of righteous indignation (Neh. 13:15-21). That lesson is simple but very telling. God's people not only have the right but the moral duty to HATE what takes place in restaurants every Sabbath and holy day. This is the point Nehemiah's passion is illustrating. This wonderful servant saw what was taking place in Jerusalem as vile and a genuine threat to God's people. Our questions to this prominent COG and every other Sabbath dining advocate are these: Do you HATE what is done in

restaurants every Sabbath? Do you see it as an egregious sin against God's law and a threat to His people? If not, why not? Furthermore, do you believe Nehemiah would see this sin differently if he was powerless to change it? Do you honestly believe his zeal was shaped by his authority, or was it REAL?

A Final Thought

What takes place in a restaurant every Sabbath may appear innocent but it most assuredly is not. Satan himself is the force behind Sabbath breaking (2 Cor. 4:4, Rev. 12:9). This is a fact many of God's people today simply refuse to accept.

Despite the clarity of God's Sabbath law, many leaders remain defiant to Him and actually teach others to not take His word too literally. This is a tragic manifestation of this era of God's Church—one that all too many embrace.

These COG thinkers can offer their theories all they want, but when it comes to their Sabbath conduct, God's word THUNDERS out His will. God's people are not to acquire their meals on the Sabbath. They are not to prepare them on the Sabbath. And His people are not to go outside their community of faith to obtain them (Ex. 16:29). Not only is this command alive and well today, but its enduring moral principle is alive as well. To teach otherwise is a HUGE mistake.

Thirty Excuses

Excuse XXI The Flagman

Question:

Isn't it simply impossible to avoid causing someone, somewhere to work on the Sabbath?

~ ~ ~

At one point in an essay defending dining out on the Sabbath, a team of writers for a prominent COG association offers an interesting hypothetical situation in an attempt to prove that God doesn't hold His people responsible for the labor of restaurant personnel who prepare and serve their meals—even though they are the ones directing that labor. When doing so this group portrays those who reject dining out on the Sabbath as hypocrites. Here is how they express their point.

"The Flagman"

Consider the following analogy: Suppose that, while driving your car on the Sabbath, you approach a highway construction site en route to services. As you draw near, a flagman waves for you to stop. Then, a few minutes later, he waves you on through the construction zone and back into free-flowing traffic. By driving through the work zone, you caused extra labor for the flagman.

Though it might not be proportionate to the work that restaurant employees do in accommodating an additional customer, the fact remains that (in this analogy) you caused the flagman an extra measure of work—thus making you cause him to break the Sabbath. Work is work. This analogy cannot be dismissed.

Those who oppose dining out on the Sabbath yet would drive through a highway work zone on that same day would be guilty of utter hypocrisy! If one truly opposed eating out on the Sabbath on the grounds that extra labor might be produced, then he would be obliged to bypass all construction zones during Sabbath time.

The Perfect Loophole

Here, this COG group claims that because a flagman labors to direct you as a motorist, God now permits His people to consciously seek out unbelievers who work in restaurants, and hire them to prepare their Sabbath meals. Through this blast of "intellectual wisdom," these men have discovered the perfect loophole. Because it would be impossible to not cause someone, someplace to labor in some form on the Sabbath, these men believe God now permits what He once prohibited. What a deal!

"Moses and Arm Waving"

Well here is a hypothetical for these Biblical thinkers. "You are an Israelite wandering in the Sinai desert. While there, God Almighty informs you that you are not to go out and find food on His Sabbath. He then informs you that you are to prepare all your Sabbath meals the day before—not on the Sabbath. Finally, He informs you that on the Sabbath you are to stay within the camp of His people. He then explains that this command will stand as a test to prove whether you will "walk in His law or not" (Ex. 16:4). On the

following Sabbath you ask Moses if he has seen your son. Moses points you in your son's direction. Here is our question. Because you caused God's faithful servant to work by lifting his arm, may you now go outside the camp and hire an unbeliever to gather and prepare your Sabbath manna?"

These COG writers know full well that their hypothetical is totally contrived. They offer it in an attempt to blur the lines between something that is totally beyond your control (the flagman) and something that is totally within your control (the restaurant worker). Sadly, their logic holds about as much moral weight as suggesting that because a person's vital organs (lungs, heart, kidneys etc.) work on the Sabbath, it must be okay for God's people to labor as well.

Finally, here is what these writers omit in their piece of Biblical trickery. When one is driving a car on the Sabbath, he is not seeking out construction workers who are profaning holy time. However, when it comes to going to restaurants on this day, the opposite is true. These men and their dining companions are CONSCIOUSLY seeking out Sabbath-breakers to do their bidding.

Thirty Excuses

Excuse XXII You Can't Know for Sure

Question:

Doesn't our modern world make it impossible to know if God's people are partaking of the sin of others?

~ ~ ~

In an attempt to justify the practice of seeking out unbelievers to prepare their Sabbath meals, a prominent COG group claims that there is no moral distinction between going to a restaurant on the seventh day and shopping at a supermarket on Tuesday. They offer this argument based on the belief that groceries purchased during the week "may" have required Sabbath labor just like that performed at a restaurant on the seventh day. Here is how they advance this "Biblical insight."

We do not consider eating out on the Sabbath as paying for 'the fruit of their sacrilege.'
Much of the food sold in grocery stores may have been harvested or packaged on the Sabbath. By your definition, these products would also be "the fruit of their sacrilege."

Totally Missing the Point

In this brief statement, these COG leaders argue that there is no moral difference between going to a market on Monday and purchasing food that "may have been" the product of Sabbath labor, and then going out to a restaurant on the Sabbath where it is absolutely essential that profane labor be done. In other words, in order for them to dine out on the Sabbath, they absolutely require someone to break God's law. On the other hand, God's people who shop during the week don't require any such thing. Furthermore, there is no Biblical prohibition against unknowingly purchasing products that may have come into contact with Sabbath labor. However, when it comes to dining out on the Sabbath these COG leaders are placing an order they fully expect to be filled by WORK. In other words, they are literally seeking out this sin.

To illustrate how disingenuous this COG argument is consider the following. Suppose that these COG leaders go to a market on Monday and see two produce areas. One has a sign that reads "This produce is the product of Sabbath labor." The other area has a sign that reads "This produce required no Sabbath labor." Which one would these COG leaders select?

Now let's suppose that these men want to dine out on the Sabbath and see two restaurants. On the door of one is a sign that reads "Closed for the Sabbath." The door on the other eatery reads: "We Don't Keep the Sabbath." Which of these restaurants is the one these men are seeking?

Thirty Excuses

Excuse XXIII Jesus Dined Out

Question:

Didn't Jesus dine out where His Sabbath meal was actually prepared by paid Sabbath breakers?

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In a lengthy letter defending the practice of dining out on the Sabbath, a long standing Church member presents what just might be the most innovative argument in this debate. According to this man, Jesus actually engaged in a dining experience that was nearly identical to that of going out to a restaurant on the Sabbath today. He does so by manufacturing a Sabbath experience involving the Messiah in which every manner of evil is taking place.

Although this member claims to base his position on strong Biblical evidence, he totally fails to do so. There isn't a hint in the scriptures or the historical record that even remotely suggests that such a thing took place. On the contrary, the opposite is true. Virtually every drop of Biblical scholarship declares that what this man represents as a "Biblical fact" never could have occurred.

This long time member begins his fantasy by citing the fourteenth chapter of Luke's gospel. Here, Jesus is dining at the home of a prominent religious figure ("a Chief Pharisees").

He then offers a theory of what this particular meal would have required. Suffice it to say, the labor was considerable, and according to him, was probably provided by paid non-believers. Once again, there is absolutely NO proof for this conclusion whatsoever; he simply claims it to be the case. The point he is obviously trying to sell in this argument is that Jesus was attending a Sabbath banquet complete with everything but the USC marching band. Furthermore, he draws only one possible conclusion with respect to the labor involved in serving the guests. To him it clearly profaned the Sabbath.

This member then suggests that the Pharisee hosting the meal must have been a ruthless man driven by a huge ego as well as a bitter hatred of the Messiah. Additionally, his home was nothing short of a first century culinary labor camp. It was also a spiritual den of iniquity. One commandment after another was being trampled on by the host and his friends—including the Sabbath—and there in the middle of it all was none other than Jesus of Nazareth. He then argues that if the Messiah could spend an occasional Sabbath surrounded by people who brazenly trampled all over God's day, then God's people today should be able to do the same thing in a restaurant. Here is how he advances his argument.

According to Harmonies of the Gospels, there are more than 25 episodes, which reveal an established, continuing conflict between Christ and the Jewish leaders well prior to this Sabbath feast in Luke 14. Not only had Christ and the leaders exchanged harsh labels about one another, but there had already been attempts and plots on Jesus' life (Luke 4:16-31; Jn. 7:11-52; Jn. 8:21-59)!

Invitations from them to eat (Lk. 7:36-50; Lk. 11:37-54; Lk. 14 :) were blatant traps, not warm hospitality. The leaders were violating numerous of God's commandments attempting to trap Jesus. They coveted the respect the public was giving him (#10, and the spirit of #8); they bore false witness to Him and about Him through inviting him to eat under false pretenses (#9); they were acting in a hateful spirit of murder (#6); they were

rejecting the lead of the true God and serving Satan (#1); and they claimed to bear the name of the true God as "God's people," but dishonored both Father and Son (#3). Such misbehaviors likewise dishonor one's parents (#5). These sins are unmistakable; and -- even though all sin carries a death penalty -- as a direct assault on the Most High and His Son, they are extremely serious Sabbath violations (#4) done on the Sabbath day.

So, this Bible account shows Jesus Christ participated in a meal provided by Sabbath-breakers, and which very likely cost money or required servant work on the Sabbath. Yet Jesus and his disciples partaking of it did not violate the Sabbath. He ate with His evil opponents ... without sin, without dishonoring God's Sabbath. Though the Pharisee should've hosted the meal on another day, Christ demonstrated it wasn't wrong for Him and his party to partake of it.

Christ's example in the circumstances this passage describes virtually match the question of eating out on the Sabbath exactly. He ate out; he let Sabbath-breakers feed Him. He could have declined the invitation, but He did not do so. Frankly, I would not do what the Chief Pharisee did. The Chief Pharisee unwisely chose his date; yet Christ, the perfect Sabbath-keeper, innocently consumed a Sabbath meal provided by Sabbath-breakers! How much more relevant and clear could an example be?

A Distorted View

This COG member has painted a very bleak picture of Jesus' hosts and the Sabbath they kept. He then argues that the Messiah saw nothing wrong with dining in such an environment, which in many ways was far worse than that provided in most restaurants today. Therefore, he concludes that God's people may now dine out in a facility where the Sabbath is being violated because Jesus set that very example.

However, if this gentleman insists on clinging to his "theory," we have a question for him. Would Jesus ever require the Sabbath to be violated as a condition of Him accepting the invitation to dine at the home of His host? In other words, would Jesus ever tell this religious leader, "The only way I will attend this meal is if it requires exhausting labor be performed by paid Sabbath breakers"? We ask this question because when it comes to going to a restaurant on the holy time that is EXACTLY what MUST take place. Breaking the Sabbath is the ONLY way this man eats.

A Real Irony

At this point it is interesting to note that in this member's portrayal of Luke 14 it is the Pharisee who hires and pays for the labor of unbelievers—NOT JESUS! The irony here is that when it comes to dining out in restaurants on the Sabbath that is EXACTLY what this member is doing. In essence this man is emulating the behavior of those he holds in contempt as opposed to emulating the behavior of the One he claims to worship. Furthermore, although he claims the invitation to the Messiah was a "blatant trap" motivated by unspeakable evil, there is nothing in Luke's account that supports this conclusion.

The Real Truth

The dining experience recorded by Luke, that this COG member audaciously claims to be a "perfect match" to eating out on the Sabbath doesn't come close. In truth, the scriptures strongly suggest that the host and his guests may actually have been sympathetic to the Messiah. Certainly such men did exist. Nicodemus, a Pharisee himself and a ruler of the Jews, clearly had pro-Messiah leanings and acknowledged there were others like him (Jn. 3:2).

Furthermore, everything in Luke's account of this experience suggests a high level of decorum. It is true that Jesus offers a critique of both His host and the guests, but His words as well as their reaction were

not rancorous and no one became offended. The Messiah's comments appear more like the wisdom of a man for whom all in attendance had considerable respect.

Additionally, the historical record clearly states that Sabbath life in Jesus' day was vastly different than what this member describes in the home of Jesus' host. Remember, this man was a spiritual leader with a reputation to uphold. If he had held the banquet this member describes, his days as a rabbi would have been over.

In truth, what took place on a Sabbath in Jesus' day is described in the words of credible scholars who have no ax to grind in the Sabbath dining debate. Consider what Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan writes about commerce on the Sabbath during the time of Christ.

The Sanhedrin legislated a prohibition against all forms of buying, selling, trading and other commerce for a variety of reasons. The Sabbath must be a day when all business stops. Kaplan, Rabbi Aryeh, Sabbath—Day of Eternity (Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America: New York, New York) 2002.

The Sanhedrin was the governing judicial body among the Jews during Jesus' life. There isn't a chance in a trillion that what this COG member describes would have been tolerated by them in the home of a "Chief Pharisee" (Lk. 14:1). If this Jewish leader had hosted a meal requiring the paid labor of Sabbath-breakers he would have been drummed out of the synagogue.

Now consider the words of Dr. Alfred Edersheim, an internationally recognized 19th century scholar who has written prolifically on Jewish practices. Dr. Edersheim is regarded as one of the foremost authorities on the temple and its service during the time of Christ. Here is what he says about the Sabbath during Jesus' day.

The approach of the Sabbath, and then its actual commencement, were announced by threefold blasts from the priests' trumpets. When the priests for the first time sounded their trumpets, all business was to cease, and every kind of work to be stopped. The second time the priests drew a threefold blast, to indicate that the Sabbath had actually begun.

The "Chief Pharisee" who hosted the meal Jesus and His disciples attended would have been acutely aware of the rules governing Sabbath observance. Furthermore, he would have been extremely disciplined in their observance. The point here is that the portrayal of intense work and an atmosphere of chaos in his home offered by this member, doesn't come close to what actually took place. He simply offers it because he needs it to be that way in order to justify his own Sabbath-breaking appetite.

Setting the Record Straight

Although this man argues that the Sabbath feast described in Luke 14 clearly violated the fourth commandment and should have been held on another day, the scriptures suggest otherwise. Notice that Jesus Himself addressed the host and exhorted him concerning what was taking place there. However, His issue was not with massive labor or treacherous plots that would have caused the profaning of the day. Why?—because these things didn't happen. The Messiah simply suggested that if the master of the house hosts a Sabbath meal in the future he should change the guest list. Here are His exact words.

"When thou make a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbors; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee. But when thou make a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: And thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just." (Lk. 14:12-14)

Can you imagine Jesus expressing these words to a man who was profaning the Sabbath with impunity, not to mention one who harbored such unbridled contempt for God Almighty and His Son?

Remember, the Messiah is speaking to him about being recompensed at the resurrection of the JUST. If he was the despicable monster this member portrays, Jesus' words would make no sense at all. For this reason it seems clear that the meal Jesus shared with these Jewish leaders was not some contentious ambush, but rather one that was in total keeping with appropriate Sabbath observance.

A Final Thought

Finally, if this had been the great labor intensive feast this COG member suggests, Jesus' reaction would have been considerably different and the host would have been thoroughly disgraced. The real Biblical evidence suggests that at the end of the day, the Messiah graciously thanked the master of the home for his hospitality, after which He left. Nothing more, nothing less. However, even if it was another way, it still makes no difference. Jesus had a reasonable expectation that these religious leaders would keep the Sabbath. At a restaurant the expectation is just the opposite. When this member dines out, he expects and even requires the Sabbath to be broken.

Thirty Excuses

Excuse XXIV Redefining Sacrilege

Question:

Didn't God Himself bestow the privilege of dining out on the Sabbath?

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There are times when people can be so committed to sin that they will actually declare it is a gift from God. One COG member did just that when describing dining out on the Sabbath. Here is how he makes this point.

Eating out [on the Sabbath] is God's gift to us for Sabbath-keeping in the current distress. How awful for you to call this blessed, beneficial, God-bestowed privilege for the appreciation of His holy Sabbath a "symbol of slavery and captivity!" May God have mercy on you and lead you to sounder thinking.

For this COG member to call dining out on the Sabbath a "gift" and a "God-bestowed privilege" is audacious to say the least. Imagining what he is declaring. According to him God Almighty has bestowed on His people the "privilege" of going back into spiritual Egypt to seek out Sabbath-breakers and pay them to labor on holy time. What is it about God's word that would lead a true Christian to embrace such a belief? Furthermore, the frustration in this man's words speak volumes regarding how desperate people can become when rationalizing their behavior.

Now for Some Honesty

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. That's right, we were once in bondage—the same bondage those who work every Sabbath in a restaurant are in. Whether this long standing member believes it or not, everything about the restaurants he patronizes on God's Sabbath is drenched in slavery. Furthermore, every member of God's Church should reject this practice because we were all once a part of that slavery ourselves.

With this in mind, God's people must understand that our 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 this man wants to go back into 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 BONDAGE! In other words, God's people are not to be a part of the very sin that once gripped their lives.

Finally, although this member proclaimed: "May God have mercy on you and lead you to sounder thinking," it is he who genuinely needs to rethink this practice. When doing so we would encourage him to consider the words recorded by Isaiah.

Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! (Isa. 5:20)

A Final Thought

Those who refuse to acknowledge that Sabbath labor is a reflection of bondage are simply in denial. In truth, what takes place in the restaurant this member patronizes on holy time is exactly that. Furthermore, the apostle Paul specifically identified those who break God's law as SLAVES to the very sin they commit (Rom. 6:16). Simply because this member is intoxicated with the pleasure he derives from their SIN does not make it a gift from God.

Thirty Excuses

Excuse XXV Doing Good on the Sabbath

Question:

Didn't Jesus teach that His people should do that which furthers the cause of righteousness and proper Sabbath observance even if it requires God's law to be modified?

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Virtually every Church leader who embraces the practice of dining out on the Sabbath claims to take his lead from the scriptures. Sadly, the scriptures are never quite what they seem to be. In other words these ministers invariably modify God's word in order for it to prove their point(s). In essence they must twist them to say what they don't, or they will claim that although Bible doesn't say a particular thing, it should have said it. One COG member, who described himself as a "critical thinker," took this approach in a letter defending Sabbath dining. In it, he claims that this practice is the moral equivalent of Jesus healing on this day because both acts advance the cause of righteousness. When doing so, he suggests that Jesus' Sabbath miracles would normally go contrary to God's law, but were done by Him in the interest of a greater good. However, nowhere does he support this view with scripture. Here is how he makes his point.

We normally view Matthew 12:10 as the principle "it's ok to do good on the Sabbath." That's fine. But is there not more than one principle conveyed by this passage, too? I'd like to point out Christ could have waited. Surely the man's hand hadn't withered the same day. Nor was the withered hand life threatening. (Probably to make His point, He had to do that particular healing on the Sabbath.) But, in not waiting, he provides a variant of the above principle: You may, and you should, do a thing of which other Sabbath-keepers with a too-negative view do not approve, if it actually furthers the cause of righteousness and Sabbath observance. This is exactly what those who believe dining in restaurants enhances.

A Perfect Match

Let's see if we understand the point here. According to this believer, going back into the world and seeking out a place where the Sabbath has to be profaned in order for him to buy its products, "furthers the cause of righteousness and Sabbath observance," is that it? And because by healing on the Sabbath, Jesus made that day better, this man contends that he may now purchase the services of unbelievers because it makes his Sabbath better as well. Therefore, according to the last sentence of his quote, this man believes he is doing "EXACTLY" what Jesus did.

It sure would be easier if this Bible "scholar" would simply provide an example of the Messiah, or any other man of God, buying their food on the Sabbath—or, soliciting the labor of unbelievers on holy time. Unfortunately, no such example exists, which leaves him to compose his own Biblical proof.

This argument illustrates how far some will go to justify sin. In this case, it is offered to "prove" that its proponent's behavior is just like that of his Savior. However, if this long standing member truly wants to emulate Jesus' Sabbath behavior, we recommend he try visiting a hospital or nursing home and

encouraging the less fortunate—not go out to his favorite Italian restaurant and be catered to by unbelievers.

Jesus' Sabbath Miracles

Furthermore, contrary to what this man asserts, there is NOTHING about healing on the Sabbath that requires a “variant” to Sabbath observance. In other words, there is not now, nor has there ever been a prohibition against healing on God's day. In truth, healing on the Sabbath is an act that actually proclaims the very Kingdom this day pictures (see: Isa. 35)

A Final Thought

While Jesus' Sabbath miracles proclaim a message of great hope revealed in His Kingdom, going to a restaurant does not. Everything about Sabbath dining is an insult to both that Kingdom and its King. What takes place in restaurants every Sabbath and holy day is a perfect example of bondage and is a reflection of spiritual Egypt. The real tragedy here is that those who profane God's Sabbath by laboring on this day don't know any better. God's people, on the other hand, have no excuse.

Thirty Excuses

Excuse XXVI Paul Sanctioned It

Question:

When writing about eating meat offered to idols, didn't the apostle Paul teach that certain practices that may have been wrong in the past could be permissible in the present?

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One of the most disappointing arguments presented in defense of dining out on the Sabbath, was offered up by the doctrinal committee of a very prominent COG association. According to them, because Paul permitted the Corinthians to partake of food consecrated to a pagan god, under "different circumstances," God's people today may seek out Sabbath-breakers and partake of the fruit of their sin, because our circumstances are different as well. Here is how they put it.

However, this example [eating meat offered to idols] would be germane to the subject if it were sinful, in one context but permissible in different context [as we believe].

Yet Paul permitted the eating of meat offered to idols under different circumstances, therefore they were not an accessory to the sins committed while the food was prepared. Each situation has to be weighed individually.

At this point it is interesting to note that this prominent Church never explained what the "circumstances" were that prompted Paul to present this teaching. They didn't. But we will.

Furthermore, the facts pertaining to Paul's words on this issue disprove the very practice these leaders are advocating. In truth, he doesn't come close to doing what these learned men suggest. Furthermore, his teaching stands as incontrovertible proof that God's people should NEVER dine out on the Sabbath or holy days. To better understand this, a little background is necessary.

The Jerusalem Conference

One of the most significant events in the history of God's Church took place in Jerusalem in 49 AD. At that time a conference was held pertaining to the issue of Gentile converts and what was required of them as new members of the Christian faith. The conference was prompted by a severe debate that had emerged over the issue of circumcision. As a result, the leading apostles, including Paul, came together to resolve the conflict.

Ultimately, the Church concluded that circumcision was not required for salvation, or for inclusion in the body of Christ. However, in addition to this pronouncement, four other decisions were rendered by the conference. Each of these decisions was announced by James, the brother of Jesus, and the bishop of the Jerusalem Church. Notice that James referred to them as "necessary things."

For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; That ye (1) abstain from meats offered to idols, and (2) from blood, and (3) from things strangled, and (4) from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well...(Acts 15:28-29, see also: Acts 21:25).

While the Church leadership agreed that Gentiles were not required to be circumcised, they WERE ABSOLUTELY required to abstain from meat offered to idols! On this there can be no doubt. Furthermore, Paul was in total agreement with this decision and was even commissioned to bring it to the Churches in Antioch (Acts 15:22-32).

What did Paul Teach?

The question for us to consider today is: What did Paul teach Gentile converts concerning this ruling? The answer lies in his first epistle to God's Church at Corinth. This letter was written approximately four years after the Jerusalem conference. Therefore, it is obvious that the Gentiles under his care must have been well aware of the Church's position regarding this issue. However, there was a problem.

How Can You Know?

Although we do not know for certain what prompted Paul' to write on this subject, it is reasonable to conclude that various Gentile converts in Corinth were reluctant to purchase any meat sold in the open market because it might have been used in a sacrifice to a false god. Since there was no way for them to know which meats may have been used in pagan worship, they were uncertain of what to do.

The reason for their concern may actually have been prompted by Paul himself when teaching about how the True God views sacrifices to Him. He even alluded to this teaching in his letter. There, he explained that, in God's sacrificial system, the offerings were accepted and symbolically eaten by the Eternal as well as the one who brought the offering (1 Cor. 10:18). In doing so, the person who brought it became a partaker of the altar. For this reason, some may have wondered how this teaching would apply to them if they had inadvertently eaten a pagan sacrifice.

Paul not only addressed their concern, but also offered some keen insight into the heart of the matter. In doing so he explained how the pronouncement at the Jerusalem conference should be applied.

As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one. For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him. (1 Corinthians 8:4-6).

Here, Paul is explaining that the idol to which the meat MAY have been offered is not really a god at all. In truth, it is NOTHING. This is because there is only one TRUE God. Therefore, if these Gentile converts inadvertently ate something that was offered to an idol, no sin would be imputed to them. After all, the idol does not contaminate the meat. The point here is that this issue is not about food, but rather the act of willfully partaking of a pagan sacrifice.

A Grave Misunderstanding

There are some who contend that Paul was teaching that because the idol is worthless, God's people were now free to seek out these sacrifices if they desired. This is totally FALSE. Paul gave absolutely no dispensation for consciously purchasing food consecrated in pagan worship. On the contrary, he forbade it, as did the apostles in Jerusalem. Paul even explained that these sacrifices were actually to devils, and as such, followers of Christ were to have nothing to do with them.

What say I then? that the idol is any thing, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing? But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot

drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils. (1 Corinthians 10:19-21)

Not Causing Offence

Although meat offered to an idol cannot defile God's people, the same cannot be said about proactively seeking it out. To suggest that Paul taught otherwise is a distortion of the Biblical record. In truth, Paul was upholding the teaching of the Church which prohibited such things (Acts 15:28-29, 21:25). However, when exhorting the Corinthians, he also offers another reason for refraining from this practice. It involves how it could be perceived by those who may have doubts.

Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled (1 Corinthians 8:7)

The "knowledge" Paul was speaking about is the understanding that an idol cannot defile the meat because the idol is nothing. Therefore, to UNKNOWINGLY eat meat offered in a pagan sacrifice was not a sin.

However, God's apostle was also aware that there were some who still felt uncomfortable with making that mistake. Simply put, they didn't want to take any chances. Because of this, Paul presents a wonderful lesson to those who were strong. At the core of this lesson is Christian charity. Notice what he says.

But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak. For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. (1 Corinthians 8:9-12)

Here, Paul is saying that even if you could innocently consume the meat because you are totally unaware if it was used in a sacrifice it would still be wrong to do so if it would offend someone who was weak in the faith. He then punctuates this point by offering a personal example of how he shows consideration toward others.

Wherefore, if meat makes my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world stands, lest I make my brother to offend. (1 Corinthians 8:13)

The point God's servant was making is that in order to prevent his brother from stumbling, he would not only abstain from eating meat that may have been offered to an idol, he would abstain from eating meat altogether.

A Lesson to God's Ministers Today

With this said, is there a lesson from the example of Paul for God's ministers today? In other words, what would Paul do as a pastor if he knew members of his congregation were offended by him dining out on the Sabbath or holy days—assuming that such a practice was lawful? Would he still do it? Or, out of respect for the "weak," would he abstain? In other words, would Paul bring a meal on holy days and eat it with those who, for conscience sake, will not dine out? Or, would he go to a local restaurant and let the "weak" eat by themselves?

Are You Required to Investigate?

We now come to another problem requiring Paul's attention. What responsibility did the Corinthians have in determining whether or not, food was offered to an idol?—since the meat offered to idols was often sold in public markets right along side other meat that was not used in such a way? Paul acknowledges this dilemma and provides the perfect answer. He explains that because the sacrifice could not contaminate the meat, there was nothing wrong with unknowingly eating it. Furthermore, it was not even necessary to ask if it was offered in a pagan sacrifice.

Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake:
For the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof. (1 Corinthians 10:25-26)

In essence, Paul is saying that since the meat itself is not affected by the process of offering it to an idol, it may be eaten, provided one DOES NOT consciously seek it out. Furthermore, it isn't even necessary to ask. It is totally irrelevant to the purchase. In other words, your purchase does not require someone to commit idolatry. You could just as well have selected food that was not sacrificed.

What About Dining Out on the Sabbath?

However, this is NOT the case when one dines out on the Sabbath. When God's people engage in this activity they are relying on the fact that God's law is being VIOLATED. Why?—because it is ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL that someone profane the Sabbath in order for them to enjoy their meal. In other words, in order to dine out on the Sabbath, God's people must actively seek out those who desecrate what God has made HOLY—without that sin they can't eat. Does anyone honestly believe that Paul was teaching that God's people may proactively seek out a pagan altar and partake of its delicacies simply because the false god is nothing but a piece of wood? Sadly, this is exactly what defenders of Sabbath dining appear to be asserting.

At this point it is important to understand that contrary to what this COG claims, Paul's ruling contradicts NOTHING in God' law or the pronouncement of the council at Jerusalem. In other words this act was not “sinful in one context but permissible in another context” as they assert. Paul was NEVER giving permission to seek out idolaters and solicit their sin. As much as this Church wants it to be true, in order to justify their own Sabbath dining trespass, it just didn't happen. What Paul was saying in effect was if you go shopping for food on a Monday and unknowingly selected something that required Sabbath labor, no sin would be imputed to you. However, if you consciously seek out Sabbath labor that is a different case altogether—and according to Paul is forbidden.

Returning to the Argument

The whole point this prominent COG is attempting to make when invoking Paul's teaching, is that just because they dine out on the Sabbath does not mean they are complicit in the Sabbath labor of the employees serving them, any more than Gentiles living in Paul's time were complicit in idolatrous worship if they inadvertently ate food that was used in a pagan sacrifice. However, this assessment is totally FALSE. What this COG is advocating and what Paul was teaching is light years apart. In order for their assessment to be correct this is what Paul would have to teach.

Because you enjoy the taste of food offered in sacrifices to Baal, you may now enter his temple and request that they offer a sacrifice for you, because, you know that Baal is a false god and has no power whatsoever, and you don't even believe in him. Furthermore, these pagans would be offering their idolatrous sacrifice for someone else if they didn't do it for you, so it's not like you are making them sin. Therefore, feel free to seek them out and place your order.

Does anyone honestly believe this is what Paul was teaching? We ask this question because it describes exactly what scores of God's people do when they dine out on the Sabbath. These Christians believe that

they can actively seek out, on holy time, sinners who profane the day the true God consecrated, and pay them for the fruit of their labor simply because any god the employee might worship isn't real anyway. These Sabbath-diners then argue that they play no part in the unbeliever's trespass even though they are partakers of the very sin being committed. .

What part of this thinking sounds like it came from God's apostle? Our answer: ZERO! Furthermore, when these COG leaders attempt to rehabilitate their sin by associating it with one of God's most faithful servants, they reflect an attitude of desperation. There isn't a hint in Paul's words that remotely suggest this is how he would approach eating meat offered to an idol, let alone dining out on the Sabbath. The bottom line is this. Contrary to what these Church leaders assert, Paul never changed anything based on the "circumstances." In truth, NOTHING changed. God's people were never to knowingly seek out the ungodly and partake of their sin like so many do whenever they dine out on holy time.

Thirty Excuses

Excuse XXVII Moderation and Balance

Question:

Isn't the central issue concerning how God's people keep His Sabbath one of balance?

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One of the most common arguments advanced by Sabbath dining advocates 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 should be done in moderation and balance.

At this point it is interesting to note that virtually every proponent of this particular argument also contends that Sabbath dining is absolutely essential to Christian fellowship. The problem with this stream of logic should be obvious. If dining out on God's Sabbath is necessary for fellowship, why should it only be done in moderation?

In truth, this argument is just another attempt to dress up a practice that goes totally contrary to the scriptures. Remember, God's word specifically prohibits His people from acquiring their food on the Sabbath, preparing it on the Sabbath, and from going outside their place (spiritual camp) to obtain it. When issuing this directive, the Almighty even revealed that these instructions would stand as a test of their obedience (Ex. 16). Furthermore, God prohibited His people from soliciting labor on this day. Despite this truth, scores of God's people, including their leaders, find comfort in the notion that they can do each of these things in moderation.

The Plain Truth About Moderation

To be sure, the scriptures do encourage moderation. This quality is a virtue that reflects discipline and self-control, which are essential components to the Christian walk. However, God's word doesn't remotely suggest that He 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?

To illustrate this point, ask yourself how God would respond if His people wanted to go to an amusement park once every six months on the Sabbath? Or, play golf once a year on His day? What about painting a room every few years? Or working on the family car every 5000 miles during the time He 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 bully in the sky, but rather because He is a Master Architect who created the Sabbath for a holy purpose.

When the Almighty 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 the services of Sabbath-breakers—even in moderation, is permitted on this day. It simply is not there.

On the contrary, God's word indicates that profaning 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 (Neh. 13:15-21).

Moderation or Compromise

The fact is that when it comes to the Sabbath, God's law prohibits working in moderation, doing your own pleasure in moderation, speaking your own words in moderation, even thinking your own thoughts in moderation (Isa. 58:13-14)—and it most definitely prohibits seeking out unbelievers and paying them to prepare your meals in moderation.

A Final Thought

The Sabbath is a day that provides a glimpse into a Great Kingdom. That Kingdom will reflect a time of great peace, great prosperity, great health, and great hope. It will also be a time when ignorance and superstition will be replaced with the knowledge of a loving God and Father. Honoring the Sabbath as God commands pictures that Kingdom.

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 point here is that the day will come when his words will be a reality. For now, God's people are able to act out the hope of that Kingdom every week. 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."

Thirty Excuses

Excuse XXVIII A Matter of Conscience

Question:

Doesn't the Bible teach that God will not impute an act as sinful if it can be done in faith?

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In its defense of dining out on the Sabbath, a prominent COG association suggests that this issue is a matter of personal conviction, not Biblical mandate. When doing so, they invoke a teaching of the apostle Paul to make their point. At first glance, what they say may sound plausible. However, it lacks one very critical component. It anchors its argument on an assumption that is found nowhere in the scriptures. As a matter of fact, this COG intimates something that actually contradicts God's word.

Their assertion centers on the belief that if something can be done in good conscience it is acceptable with God. Notice how this particular group advances their argument.

The issue of eating out on the Sabbath has been raised occasionally over the years. Clearly Christianity involves personal choice for conscience sake.

In the book of Romans Paul offers a statement about conscience. "But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin. (Romans 14:23)

Manipulating Scripture

Imagine for a moment that this debate was not over dining out on the Sabbath, but rather whether one may eat pork or some other unclean meat. Those who believe it is acceptable with God to eat such things could employ this COG's position word for word. They could argue that eating a ham sandwich was a matter of conscience just the same as whether one was a vegetarian or not. As a matter of fact, many Protestants use Paul's words to make that very argument. However, it is doubtful that any member of God's Church would be persuaded by this use of scripture. This is because Paul is NOT addressing unclean meats in this chapter. He is also NOT addressing dining out on the Sabbath, conscience notwithstanding.

Putting the Issue in Perspective

Consider for a moment what is taking place when God's people engage in this behavior. First, they must go out into the world (spiritual Egypt) and consciously seek out those who are profaning what God made holy. They must do this because it is absolutely essential for someone to be breaking the Sabbath in order for them to do what they contend is acceptable with their Savior. This is done despite the fact that His word emphatically forbids His people from going out of their place (spiritual camp) on the Sabbath (Ex. 16:29. See also Re. 18:4). But it doesn't end there.

Those who dine out on the Sabbath must also direct Sabbath-breakers to prepare a meal for them according to their specifications. This is done despite the fact that God Himself prohibited food from being

prepared on this day (Ex. 16:23). He actually proclaimed that this aspect of His Sabbath law was to test whether or not His people would obey Him (Ex. 16:4).

Finally, those who dine out on the Sabbath must pay Sabbath-breakers for their labor. This too is done, despite the fact that God adamantly prohibited His people from patronizing those who sell their products, including food, on His Sabbath. Furthermore, His prohibition was all encompassing. It included ALL food. Notice the use of the word "ANY."

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

Tragically, the majority of God's people, including His ministers, reason that because they can engage in this activity without feeling a tinge of guilt, it must be acceptable with their Savior. But is this understanding born out of Biblical truth or human reasoning?

A Great Misunderstanding

There is a great misunderstanding in the Church concerning Paul's instruction regarding faith as recorded in Romans 14. In truth, this great apostle NEVER said that faith makes everything right, he said the absence of faith makes everything wrong.

Sadly, a significant number of God's people incorrectly assume that Paul was making two points when writing about this issue. First, many contend that he was teaching that if you can't do something in faith it would be a sin to do it. This understanding is absolutely correct. That is what the apostle was declaring.

However, some then manufacture a corollary to Paul's words by implying something that is not there. They argue that Paul was also teaching that if something could be done in good conscience it would not be imputed as sin. This is absolutely FALSE. Simply because a person believes something is right does not make it so. If such a belief was true then every well intended sin, such as keeping Christmas, Easter, and even Sunday worship would be acceptable with God. It most definitely is not.

Those who believe their conscience will carry the day concerning this issue are greatly mistaken. Consider the words God inspired Solomon to write.

There is a way that seems right to a man, but the ends thereof are the ways of death.
(Pro. 14:12)

The argument that dining out on the Sabbath is a matter of personal belief does not have Paul's words to support it. They simply are not there. To be sure, faith is a driving force in our Christian walk. But faith in sin is worthless.

Thirty Excuses

Excuse XXIX It's Not Business

Question:

Didn't Nehemiah's prohibition against God's people engaging in commerce on the Sabbath only apply to the provider of services, not the consumer of them?

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There are few times when an argument in defense of dining out on the Sabbath has come across as more self-serving than the one presented by one of the leading COG associations. According to the "research" offered up by its doctrinal committee, doing "business" on the Sabbath only involves the providing of services, not the consuming of them. In other words, although they readily admit it is wrong to sell products on the Sabbath, they claim it is not wrong to purchase them. This assertion is made despite the fact that Nehemiah condemned both behaviors (Neh. 10:31; 13: 15-21).

What this COG advances as Biblical truth is a remarkably silly observation and one that must truly disappoint God Almighty. Watch how they make their point by ignoring the obvious. However, before you do, consider the following sign posted on a prominent outdoor mall in the Great Northwest. Within that mall are four restaurants—two of which would be considered 'high end.' Notice that the world has no difficulty understanding that consumers are conducting BUSINESS as well.

Notice!

This Is Private Property

Persons not conducting authorized business within this complex and/or specific business with its tenants are considered trespassing. Violators will be subject to arrest and/or citation for criminal trespass pursuant to B.C.C. 10A.53.080 or RCW 9A.52.070 or 9A.52.080

However, this Church of God asserts the following:

Question:

Aren't you participating in a business transaction when you eat out on the Sabbath? You most certainly will be expected to pay for the meal that you consume on the Sabbath.

Answer:

This is not running your business on the Sabbath. It is simply paying for the meal you received. There is nothing in Scripture that declares this act to be a violation of the Sabbath.

Justifying Sin with Semantics

Consider what these leaders are actually saying about the True God and His great Sabbath Law. According to their wisdom, the Almighty forbids what is being done at restaurants every Sabbath, but permits His people to proactively solicit the very act He forbids.

This argument makes about as much sense as a get-away driver for a bank robber claiming he doesn't break the eighth commandment ("thou shall not steal") because he does not participate in the actual robbery. He only drives the car, and there is no mention of get-away cars in the Bible.

Here is a question for all of God's people today. If God told you He absolutely detested the labor being done in restaurants every Sabbath, do you think He would be pleased if you told Him you seek it out and actually pay for it?

You Are Responsible

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 patronize that labor rests solely in the hands of those who purchase their goods and services. To assert that the consumer of services plays no part in the business being conducted is TOTAL NONSENSE! It also misses a greater point. The Sabbath is a profoundly sacred day. It was created by a Holy God as a memorial of both His physical and His spiritual creation. It demands to be hallowed.

God gave the fourth commandment to ensure that His people would render the proper level of respect the Sabbath deserves. Furthermore, He has made it abundantly clear that labor profanes His day and as such should be avoided. When this COG doctrinal committee dines out on the Sabbath, they are purchasing services that trample on something their God made holy. They may find consolation in the fact that restaurant personnel would be trampling on God's Sabbath anyway, but as Ambassadors of His Kingdom, that shouldn't make any difference.

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 this day!

Thirty Excuses

Excuse XXX An Ox in a Ditch

Question:

Didn't Jesus' teaching about an ox in a ditch establish a precedent for dining out on the Sabbath?

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When rationalizing the sin of dining out on the Sabbath, a prominent COG leader claims that because Jesus healed the sick on this day, God's people may now seek out unbelievers who profane the holy and pay them for their Sabbath labor. As you read his point, it is important to understand that there is absolutely no prohibition in the scriptures (Old or New Testament) against healing on the Sabbath. However, there are multiple prohibitions against going out into spiritual Egypt and purchasing their goods, which is exactly what this pastor is advocating. He begins his point by citing the story of the Messiah healing a woman on the Sabbath and how He explained the role of compassion on this day.

As we will begin to see, from God's point of view, working on the Sabbath is not the stopping of work altogether of oneself, nor of others, but to draw attention as to what the work is, and why one is doing it on that day. It makes all the difference in the world.

The Lord then answered him, and said, You hypocrite, does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? Luke 13:15

So the question is this: If God, under certain circumstances, shows that meeting animal needs is required, what about human needs on the Sabbath? You see, Jesus is making a comparison that ought to be obvious to any one of us.

Blurring the Lines

What this Church leader is attempting to do is blur the lines between what Jesus did when healing those who suffered from a genuine physical affliction (one beyond their control), and what this minister wants to do because of the pleasure he derives from it.

This is a hugely self serving argument. It is made even more reprehensible because it attempts to exploit the Messiah's compassion for personal gain. In essence, this minister wants God's people to believe that going to a restaurant is the moral equivalent of taking care of a helpless animal, or, a helpless woman. In essence he is saying: "If Jesus would show compassion on the afflicted, he most certainly would show compassion on His people's need for food on the Sabbath." If this man's logic sounds reasonable, consider what he doesn't tell you.

God Almighty and Sabbath Meals

When God led the children of Israel out of Egypt He made provisions for their meals, He did so because He did not want them to go hungry. However, He also gave them specific instructions regarding those meals and His Sabbath. He declared, in words that are crystal clear, that His people were to gather their

Sabbath day food on the sixth day—not the seventh (Ex. 16: 4-6). Additionally, He commanded them to prepare their Sabbath meals on the sixth day as well (v. 23).

We now come to the question of the day. What would have happened if the Israelites decided to gather their food on the Sabbath, instead of the sixth day? Would God show compassion because of their "NEED" for nourishment? Would He provide an alternate food source? NO! We know this because that very thing took place. Furthermore, the Almighty's reaction was anything but conciliatory. Not only did He allow them to go hungry that day (Ex. 16:27), but He also issued a blistering indictment against them. Notice what He said.

How long refuse you to keep my commandments and my laws? See, for that the Lord hath given you the Sabbath, therefore He gives 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
- 3) His people were not to leave "their place" on the Sabbath.

Regrettably, this minister claims that because God is compassionate, He now permits His people to engage in all three of those prohibitions. According to him, God's people may now go out into the world to seek out Sabbath-breakers and pay them to acquire and prepare their meals. In essence the Sabbath-breaker has become his alternate food source.

More Excuses

Despite the obvious Biblical prohibition against dining out on the Sabbath, this COG leader presses his point with another example of Christ's mercy. This time it involves healing a man with dropsy. He begins by quoting the Messiah's words.

And he answered them, saying, 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?
Luke 14:5

To extricate an ox from a cistern or a pit would cause a considerable amount of work when you think about how big those animals are, and that they would fall into a cistern.

Jesus is showing then that if that occurred, the life of the animal and probably the prosperity of the family is deemed more important than breaking the Sabbath through the hard labor of rescuing the animal from its agony and its fears.

Now for the Truth

Although this argument was addressed earlier it bears repeating. 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 been responsible for the man being there in order to convey a significant point regarding the role of compassion on this day.

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 their 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)

The Messiah's question silenced these men because it not only appealed to their understanding of the scriptures, but also to rabbinical law which 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 genuine suffering or 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.

The Ox in a Ditch Today

The principle of an ox in a ditch can be applied to situations that occur in our modern life as well. For example: there may be a time when the car breaks down or an injury occurs. These are not planned events. No one made a reservation to have an accident. It would be ridiculous to do so.

The point here is that the ox in a ditch is the exception, not the rule. What this long standing minister is suggesting is that the exception may now BE THE RULE. In other words, God's people may now actively

orchestrate the exception. For example, they may decide that it would be a nice change from their Sabbath routine to dine out in three weeks. Therefore, they may make reservations at a nice restaurant and look forward to their ox falling into a pit. Does anyone honestly believe this was Jesus' intent when giving this teaching? To put this into perspective ask yourself, "How many times does an ox fall into a ditch?"

Legitimate Exceptions

As was stated in a prior point, there are also times when purchasing something on the Sabbath might 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 doing good 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. To put this into perspective ask yourself, "How many times does an ox fall into a ditch?"

Finally, 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 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?

Thirty Excuses

Appendix

Directory

“Amending God’s Law”

“The Devil’s Diner”

“Taking a Stand in the Millennium”

“An Interesting Hypothetical”

“Parlor Games”

“Who Do You Think You Are?”

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 your 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, 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”

The Devil's Diner

Open 24 Hours

“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 because he looks nice. 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.

With that said, here is a little advice for these COG 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.

In one sense the response of these Church leaders actually 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).

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:

~ ~ ~

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."

COG 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."

COG 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."

COG 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."

COG 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.

COG 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."

COG 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."

COG 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.



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 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?