

A Sabbath Test Part I

Seven Biblical Keys

An examination of the scriptural reasons God gave for prohibiting His people from going to restaurants on the Sabbath and Holy Days

Dear Friends,

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

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

A Test Commandment

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What follows are seven Biblical keys proving that God's people are commanded to refrain from buying and selling in any form (even purchasing food) on His Sabbath. As you proceed through each key, it is important to understand that the authors are not trying to judge God's people. This work is not an attempt to condemn the wonderful community of believers who are called according to His purpose. Instead, it is written with the profound hope that these believers will carefully examine their approach to a day God Himself calls "HOLY." It is intended to challenge you to consider your attitude as well as your behavior concerning the fourth commandment. It asks one very important question concerning your obedience.

What price are you willing to pay?

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Seven Biblical Keys

Introduction A Worldly Tradition

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

2 Corinthians 6:17

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

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

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

The Bible also indicates that God’s true Sabbath has been honored by the great heroes of faith down through the ages. Moses kept it. King David and the prophet Samuel kept it. Ezra and Nehemiah kept it. John the Baptist kept it. Joseph and Mary kept it. Peter, James, and John, as well as all of the apostles kept it. Paul and the New Testament church, including the Gentile churches, kept it. Jesus kept the Sabbath. Additionally, the Bible reveals that God Himself rested on this day (Gen. 2:1-2). The point here is that the Sabbath is alive and well, and has been so throughout human history. Furthermore, God’s Sabbath is still honored by His true church today.

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

A Day of Recreation?

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

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

What does God Almighty think of this tradition?

The Sabbath is a critical part of God's great moral code, the Ten Commandments. Each of these wonderful laws reflects the very mind of God Himself and was written personally by Him (Ex. 31:18). It is also important to understand that God's word provides very specific instructions concerning how His Sabbath is to be kept. It outlines appropriate as well as inappropriate activities for this day.

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

The First Key The Sabbath is Holy

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy
Exodus 20:8

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Why Did God Sanctify the Sabbath?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A Gateway to Holiness

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

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

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

Remember the Sabbath

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

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

The Sabbath Belongs to God

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

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

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

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

A Millennial Government

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

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

A Millennial Lesson on Sabbath Dining

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

However, it is now time for them to be taught these great truths by God's resurrected saints. With this in mind, imagine that you are commissioned to teach these people about the Sabbath. As the lesson begins, one of them asks you the following question. "If it was wrong for me to work in a restaurant on the Sabbath, why did you permit me to work for you?" Now imagine that Jesus Christ is standing next to you as you prepare to respond. After all, He is the Lord of the Sabbath (Mk. 2:27). He should be very interested in what you have to say. This being the case, how would you answer this question? What would you tell this young millennial citizen?

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

is that if a representative of God's Kingdom went to a restaurant on His Sabbath or holy day, that person would be engaging in a practice that contradicts the very Kingdom he or she represents. To do so would be nothing short of rank hypocrisy.

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

A Wonderful Lesson

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

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

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

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

Notice what God is revealing to Israel in this verse. Immediately after instructing them to not compel servants or strangers to work on His Sabbath, He tells them why. It is because they (the Israelites) were once enslaved. Imagine what is being conveyed by this Great Law-giver. Israel was enslaved by a nation that had no clue regarding the true God. Egypt worshiped idols. This pagan nation practiced a faith that was light years from that described in the pages of your Bible. Furthermore, it did so because it did not know better (2 Cor. 4:4). Tragically, when the Israelites lived in Egypt, they eventually lost the faith that filled the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. As a result, they too, engaged in the same idolatry as their masters.

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

Deliverance from Egypt

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

However, our calling reveals that a Great Deliverer has again rescued His people from a world that does not know Him or His way. For this reason, God's people today should never compel the unbeliever

to work on their behalf on the Sabbath. They must refrain from this practice because they were miraculously delivered from this very practice themselves.

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

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

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

Come Out of Egypt

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

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

The Second Key A Day of Rest

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

Hebrews 4:1

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A Point of Agreement

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

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

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

A Command Regarding Strangers

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

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

With this in mind, consider the "stranger" spoken of in the days of Moses and those who work in restaurants today. The similarities between them are truly striking. Both are ignorant of God's law and His plan for mankind. Both, because of that ignorance, will break God's law, including His Sabbath, unless prevented from doing so by someone who knows better. Additionally, both the "stranger" of the 15th century B.C. and the 21st century restaurant worker are bound to comply with directions given to them by their masters – those who exercise authority over them. This being the case, should God's people ever order the "stranger" to work on their behalf on God's Sabbath? The fourth commandment says NO! The "stranger" should never be compelled to work on behalf of the "believer." God forbids it. Furthermore, the day will come when that stranger will know why God gave such a command – and will deeply appreciate what God's people did on his or her behalf. In reality, this obedience on the part of God's people demonstrates a profound respect for both God's law as well as the "stranger" who does not yet understand it.

"Within Thy Gates"

There is another term included in the fourth commandment that is very interesting. The expression "within thy gates" has been at the center of some discussion among many people in God's Church. Actually, this term can have several meanings. For example, it can mean "inside your house," "on your property," or even "within the city walls." The implied meaning of this verse takes the principle even further. In essence, it is saying that God's people are not to compel anyone under their sphere of influence to work on the Sabbath. Therefore, if you have the power to prevent someone from laboring on your behalf on God's Sabbath, you must exercise that power.

It is true that you may not be able to prevent people from working for others on God's day, but you most assuredly can prevent them from working for you. And God's command is to YOU.

Another Technicality

There are some who have suggested that the fourth commandment is not prohibiting God's people from compelling the unbeliever to work on the Sabbath, but rather from compelling the unbeliever to work against his or her will on that day. In other words, God's people are not to force their religion on those who do not believe as they do. Therefore, if the stranger truly wishes to labor on behalf of the believer, he should be permitted to do so.

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

The Manservant and the Maidservant

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

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

More Technical Arguments

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

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

A Matter of Life and Death

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

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

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

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

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

Picking Up Sticks

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A Stern Warning

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

The Third Key

A Matter of Business

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

Nehemiah 10:31

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

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

A Lesson from a Fire

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

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

An Unthinkable Practice

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

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

However, God’s instructions regarding the proper observance of His Sabbath went far beyond commanding His people to refrain from labor on this day. Because the Sabbath is HOLY, God provided specific examples of how it could be contaminated. One such way was to engage in business on this day. God said such behavior is wrong and that it profaned His Sabbath.

Buying and Selling

Nothing more clearly defines a commercial enterprise than the exchanging of money. Simply put, it is fees for services, supply and demand, a market-driven economy. But what does God’s word say about this practice on His Sabbath?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

More Technicalities

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

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

A Scathing Indictment

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

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

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

A Commercial Enterprise

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

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

Would Nehemiah think differently about buying and selling today?

The Fourth Key A Matter of Pleasure

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

Ezekiel 20:13

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Some Interesting Facts

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

Additionally, according to the ANRA, the most popular day of the week for dining out is Saturday. With this in mind, God's people must ask themselves: Is the Sabbath their favorite day to dine out? If the answer to this question is "yes," then consider for a moment why. Is it to fulfill God's word, or is it to satisfy our own pleasure?

Making the Sabbath Special

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

The point here is that for many the Sabbath is regarded as a unique time—and it is totally consistent with God's way to make our environment as well as our behavior reflect that uniqueness. Additionally, preparing for God's Sabbath is a way of showing this time the dignity and respect it deserves. Here is something to think about. Can your family tell that it is the Sabbath simply by looking at your home? Many can.

Sadly, some argue that the Sabbath can also be made special by dining out at a nice restaurant. But how is that possible? And why would God bless an activity that requires His people to solicit the services of Sabbath-breakers? In truth, those who justify dining out on the Sabbath by claiming it is their way to honor God and this holy time are actually keeping a counterfeit version of the Sabbath. It is not genuine as God defines genuine.

The Sabbath is Honorable

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

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

The Sabbath Is to Be a Delight

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

Such an interpretation is a HORRIBLE DISTORTION of the scriptures! God did not create the Sabbath to insure that man would have one day of personal enjoyment every week. He created this day so that our natural pursuit of personal desires would not so consume our lives that they would estrange us from

the very God who made us. In other words, the Sabbath is not a day to seek personal pleasures, but rather to reject them. It is a day dedicated to embracing that which is holy.

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

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

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

Those who believe they need to go to a restaurant on the Sabbath to "delight" in this day fail to grasp the great joy of this sacred time. As a result, they feel a need to do something "worldly" on this day to make it more joyous. What a terrible mistake.

God created the delight that fills each Sabbath. His instruction to His children is to recognize that joy and celebrate it in their worship of Him. The Sabbath is a day to look forward to with great anticipation. It is not a day of inconvenience. It is a day of joy and hope when God's children assemble together and appear before their King.

An Exquisite Exception

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

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

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

A Day of Liberation

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

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

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

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

The Fifth Key **A Day of Preparation**

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

Deuteronomy 31:12

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

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

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

On the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for one man: and all the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses. And he said unto them, This is that which the LORD hath said, Tomorrow is the rest of the holy Sabbath unto the LORD: bake that which ye will bake today, and seethe that ye will seethe; and that which remaineth over lay up for you to be kept until the morning. And they laid it up till morning, as Moses bade: and it did not stink, neither was there any worm therein. And Moses said, Eat that today; for today is a Sabbath unto the LORD: to day ye shall not find it in the field. Six days ye shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is the Sabbath, in it there shall be none. And it came to pass, that there went out some of the people on the seventh day for to gather, and they found none. (Ex. 16:22-27)

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

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

But what about the Israelites who failed to prepare adequately? What were they to do? Were they to go out and buy food from someone else on the Sabbath? Absolutely not! God did not give them an alternative food source when they failed to prepare on the sixth day. The scriptures state “they found none” (Ex. 16:27).

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

The Significance of the Preparation Day

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Where Do We Belong on the Sabbath?

Notice that God said, "let no man go out of his place" on the Sabbath. With these words, He did not mean that individuals could not leave their tent for any reason as evidenced by the fact that they left their tents when Moses assembled them on the Sabbath and holy days (Num. 10: 3-10). Additionally, Jesus Himself dined at the homes of others on the Sabbath (Lk. 14:1-6).

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

Breaking Every Rule

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

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

Virtually every person working in a restaurant on the Sabbath is breaking God's command. Furthermore, they trespass against this wonderful law every time they comply with orders given to them by their patrons, including God's people. With this in mind, do you really want to give that order?

The Sixth Key **A Mark and a Warning**

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

Hosea 4:9

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Consequences of Disobedience

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

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

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

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

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

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

A Warning of Captivity

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

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

A Horrible Mistake Repeated

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

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

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

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

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

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

A Misguided Opinion

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

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

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

Men of Tyre

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

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

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

Nehemiah’s Options

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

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

However, the faithful and uncompromising Nehemiah did not hesitate when addressing what he saw was an egregious evil. And make no mistake about it, that is exactly how he viewed buying or selling on the Sabbath. To him this practice represented a mortal threat to God's people. Furthermore, he realized that the very future of his nation hung in the balance on this issue. Therefore, He took immediate action. Notice what he did.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Legislating Righteousness

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

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

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

Jesus' words should make every true and faithful servant of God carefully consider the things he does as well as the things he teaches others to do. The scriptures are very clear on this. God's ministers are duty-bound to represent Him, not man. Because of this, God's judgment on them will be greater (Jas. 3:1). The bottom line is this: the ministry is responsible for proclaiming God's word to His children – whether it is popular or not.

A Minor Point

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

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

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

Returning to Nehemiah

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

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

The Seventh Key A Perfect Example

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

Philippians 2:5

Virtually everyone who considers himself a true Christian would acknowledge that Jesus Christ is the example God's children must follow in their spiritual walk. The apostle Paul affirmed this truth in his epistle to the Church at Philippi. There, he exhorted believers to put on the very mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5). Additionally, the apostle Peter wrote that Jesus left His followers an example that should be emulated (1Pet. 2:21). It is hard to imagine anyone being a greater authority regarding the proper conduct for God's children on the Sabbath than the Messiah. After all, He is the "Lord of the Sabbath" (Mk. 2:28). He is the Master Architect of this day and its great purpose. Every step He took on the Sabbath was dedicated to fulfilling that purpose. So the logical question must be:

How did Jesus honor the Sabbath?

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

- He assembled with other Jews in the synagogue.
- He healed the sick.
- He shared meals.
- He took walks with close friends.
- He criticized self-righteous religious leaders.
- He inspired hope in the weak.
- He stayed in constant contact with His Father.

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

An Extraordinary Example

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

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

What God did with respect to this act may be far more special than meets the eye. Most believe God rained a double portion of food for the Israelites on the “preparation day” (Friday), because He did not want them to work on His Sabbath. Although this is true, is it also possible that by this act, God was honoring His own law. In other words, what Israel saw was that even God will not profane His Sabbath by engaging in profane labor on that day.

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

Privileges and Restrictions

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

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

A Final Thought

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

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

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

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

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

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

A Unique Sign

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

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

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

WILL YOU PASS IT?