

Eating Out On The Sabbath

The Policy Was Set By HWA — Hold Fast

John W. Ritenbaugh

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Since Herbert Armstrong died in 1986, many individuals have contributed to the disunity and scattering of the church after the same manner as did the doctrinal issues raised by the Tkach group. This subject that we are going to go into is one of those doctrinal issues, and it looks into the subject of going out to eat on the Sabbath.

An article appeared on the Internet and then was mailed to many without any request required. I know I received one, and I never asked for it, but that article triggered this subject. I read the article, and I was immediately unimpressed. As far as I know, Church of the Great God lost maybe one person to it, but the subject is a good vehicle for instruction for understanding certain important principles.

My treatment of this subject touches on four areas important to us personally, as well as to the church of God as a scattered body. It will not necessarily touch on these areas in the order that I give them, nor will equal time and space be given to each of them. These four areas are:

First: The disunity of the church of God.

Second: The disunity in discerning the intent of God's law.

Third: Where does the Bible show God has appointed to make policy by discerning God's intent?

Fourth: What does God expect of us?

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

There were no restaurants in the ancient world as we know them today, and in addition, people did not have to travel the distances for Sabbath services and fellowship that we do today. They lived in small villages, and they walked to the local synagogue. Even Jerusalem was not a very large city. We know, mostly from secular history, that people

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often fellowshiped in one another's homes on the Sabbath.

In addition, there are several warnings that we must take Sabbath time and use seriously so that we do not defile it. It is not an ordinary work day like Sunday through Friday.

This issue involves the proper use of one's time. It is an issue, because in some doctrinal areas of the scattered church of God, there are wide variances in understanding and application, and therefore a continuing erosion of the church's unity. I want us to be informed as to what I believe, and what the church of God's policy should be regarding this.

We are going to begin in I Corinthians 11:1. It is a very brief verse, and I know that you all know it.

I Corinthians 11:1 Be you followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.

Since there are no "Thus saith the LOORD" scriptures, who qualifies as being able to discern God's intent that we should follow their examples? There is a similar issue regarding eating addressed in I Corinthians 8—10. That particular issue was actually more serious, I think, than the one we are addressing, because eating is something that is done every day. We will not reference that subject, but I do want you to turn to Romans 14:1-2.

Romans 14:1-2 Him that is weak in the faith receive you, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believes that he may eat all things; another, who is weak, eats herbs [or vegetables].

Paul here is referring to vegetarians as being spiritually weak. Their diet that avoids meat is not biblically supported. For our purposes today, the overall spiritual content of this chapter is a warning to members against splitting hairs over non-salvation issues because it accomplishes no good spiritual end. In fact, it stands a very good chance of destroying the unity of a congregation.

Note what Paul wrote in verse 17:

Romans 14:17 For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink [or food and drink]; but [is] righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Paul is saying that the offense created by overly-critical self-righteousness is worse than the weak understanding and practice of those in the congregation who are criticized by the supposedly strong people for being vegetarians. Why is it worse? Because it was dividing the congregation along unimportant lines.

Lovingkindness in judgment and getting oneself ready for the Kingdom of God are more important because those things heal and unify. God does not require vegetarianism. In fact, Paul said those people are weak if they are basing their vegetarianism as being something that God requires. So, who then should we look to for leadership?

As you are beginning to see as I lay the foundation here, this is a governmental issue, and particularly a problem of Israelitish people, at least partly because of one of the basic features of Israelitish culture. I do not know whether you will be able to pick this up. Maybe those of you who were at the Feast in Columbia, Missouri, will remember, though, that this basic feature was the main theme of Gilbert Boyer's sermonette at the Feast. Not the eating, but the governmental issue.

Israelitish culture, at least partly because of the Bible's influence on the culture, provides its citizens with a great deal of individual liberty. The Bible promotes living by faith in a theocracy under God. But because unconverted men cannot see God, they promote individual liberty under a democracy or a Parliamentary system.

Now this has a good and a bad side to it. The good side is that these forms of government tend to promote individual achievement and thus economic prosperity. The bad side is that because of human nature's characteristics, it also tends to produce people who feel that they are a government unto themselves. It produces a great deal of individualism, and this creates unity problems.

I recall reading a book that I would be surprised if anybody here ever read it. It was Barbara Tuckman's *Stilwell and the American Experience in China, 1911-45*. The book is about the opening days of WWII. In it, Tuckman quotes General George Marshall who, during the Second World War, was American's highest-ranking general. Marshall said that overall, the most difficult combat training task the army faced during the Second World War was to destroy the citizen-soldier's individualism in order to get him to take orders and to fight the war as a team.

I want you to see what our human nature is capable of doing even within a converted person. It is a cultural thing as well as a human-nature thing.

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I Corinthians 2:16 For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.

When Paul says "we," he means that all of the sons of God have the mind of Christ. That needs to be modified. I think you will agree that not everybody "having the mind of Christ" is on the same level in regard to maturity, knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. Just as an example, Paul was far above the members of this fractured congregation there in Corinth in terms of those qualities. The content of I and II Corinthians shows with great force that the Corinthians were all over the map regarding understanding and application.

To compensate for the people God calls into the Family being all over the map in terms of personal belief and understanding, does not God give some gifts for the purpose of their guidance? Yes, He does.

I Corinthians 12:4 Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.

That ought to tell us something. Not everybody is given exactly the same gifts in the same measure.

I Corinthians 12:4-5 Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord.

All spiritual gifts come from the same source, but they are not allotted equally to everybody. I hope we are not offended by that, because the Giver of the gift is Jesus Christ Himself, and He apportions them as He sees fit because He understands, He knows from the beginning to the end what He is forming in the church and in the people.

I Corinthians 12:6-7 And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.

The gifts are not given for personal gain. They are given for the good of the entire group.

I Corinthians 12:8 For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to

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another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit.

We are getting the drift. We have laid a foundation here. In between verses 4 and 28, Paul launches into the illustration, using the human body as his guide to help us understand that the Body of Christ is put together in an orderly system. Not every part of that orderly system does the same thing or has the same responsibility. Each part of that orderly system contributes to the overall good of the entire Body. It is a wonderful illustration.

I Corinthians 12:28-30 And God has set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

That is very clear. So, as an overall instruction to everybody, he says:

I Corinthians 12:31 But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet show I unto you a more excellent way.

This way, of course, is the way of love, and every one of us here is equipped to love every other. So in that sense, none of us is behind anybody in gifts. We can all love, but we have to grow into that.

We are going to connect this to Ephesians 4. Remember, the purpose of this is to show you that God has set some in the congregation to be teachers, examples, or whatever, and to make decisions regarding things that may not be clear. In Ephesians 4, Paul is again talking about gifts.

Ephesians 4:7-8 But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he says, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.

Ephesians 4:11-16 And he gave some apostles; and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers. [This sounds just like I Corinthians 12.] For the perfecting [or the maturing or the completion] of the saints, for the work of ministry [meaning service] for the edifying [the building

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up] of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplies, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, makes increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

I Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4 establish this fact about gifting, and that not everybody is gifted equally, and not everybody is given an equal amount of the same gifts.

Now why does God provide gifts and examples to follow? The answer is simple: to produce unity. The church of God is not united, and the subject of this sermon is one of the reasons why it is not united. It is an area that we are not united on.

I Corinthians 12:28-31 emphasizes primacy regarding teaching and administration within the Body. Then Ephesians 4:12-16 amplifies that and defines it.

Understand, God is not saying these gifted persons are better than others. They are simply gifted differently according to His will. He is saying they are more gifted by God for the purpose of the unity of the Body. Their abilities are not something they have earned, they are something they have been given by God for God's purposes. There is no doubt though that these people have worked to develop the gifts given. Is that clear?

Those to whom gifts are given are responsible for developing them through using them. This thought is directly connected to Paul, an apostle, who commanded in I Corinthians 11:1 that we should follow *him*, as an apostle, as he follows Christ, who was also an Apostle.

In our day, only Herbert Armstrong was an apostle. Herbert Armstrong occasionally ate out on the Sabbath, and he set the policy for the Worldwide Church of God that permitted it. The article that I referred to at the beginning of this sermon strongly urges people *never* to eat out on the Sabbath, because, they claim, it is a sin.

Let us briefly compare some qualification of the writers of this article in question. Who

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are they, and what are their credentials? What gives *them* the authority to teach the church of God?

I have been in the church now for 48 years, and I have seen a number of fads blow through the church. It is almost like they are on a cycle. Things like speaking in tongues, the sacred names issue, white sugar as a dietary issue, makeup, the calendar several times, and now here we are with the "eating out on the Sabbath" issue.

The original article was written by Dennis Fisher and Art Braidic. I know both of these men. One of them I knew personally for many years, and their track record in the church is not sparkling with an "apostle sheen." Dennis Fisher has been replaced by another man as the co-author of this article, and I do not know why.

One of them started out with us in the Church of the Great God in 1992, but he left us when he could not agree with the matter of how things should be run. In a conference that we held within the first two years (I do not know exactly when it was, if it was 1992 or 1993), he, along with several others, wanted to leap pell-mell into a huge costly work on radio, television, and other media. They wanted us to hire writers straight out of the world, not out of the church, to fashion spiritual articles that would appear in our publications. Well, he left us and went with Global. I am not real sure if he went with Living later on, but along the way, he was divorced by his wife and was disfellowshipped from Global. I do not know what the reason was.

I knew of the other man as a student at Ambassador College, where he was a fellow-student along with Joe Jr., Mike Feazell, and others of that age bracket. I do not mean that they were good friends. They certainly knew one another. They had class experiences together with one another, and then with that group that took over the church when Mr. Armstrong died. After graduating, he kind of disappeared from my radar screen, and then he showed up again in my life about ten years later. From the limited amount of contact I had with him, I would not judge that he was anything but very liberal in his views. However, this paper is anything but liberal, and it causes me to wonder what happened to cause this attitudinal turn-around.

Please understand I am not saying that these men are evil. However, I do not see evidence that either of these men was gifted, appointed, and qualified by God to teach us this sort of thing in the church of God. But somewhere along the line, it seems to me that these two men "got religion," as we might say, and their behavior and attitude pendulum swung all the way from a fairly liberal position to the other extreme of an almost radical conservatism that touches on the Pharisaism of Jesus' day.

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The point is this: God used Herbert Armstrong, an apostle, to establish the pattern on this issue in this era of the church of God, not Art Braidic and Dennis Fisher, nor this other late-comer. The present era of the church of God began with Herbert Armstrong, and it continues right on. Remember that.

II Timothy 1:7 For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

My concern is with the word "sound." The overall issue is not merely what the word "sound" directly means. The underlying Greek word literally means "discipline." There is nothing wrong with being disciplined. It means "self-control." There is nothing wrong with that at all. Both of them are fine characteristics.

I do not want you to think that somehow "sound" is a bad translation. It is not; it is all right. However, the *New Testament Commentary* by Hendriksen and Kistemaker says that the entire context is an encouragement and exhortation from Paul to Timothy to recover his mental balance. If you are sound, you are balanced. Therefore, for Timothy to be of sound mind, he would have to be more spiritually balanced than he presently was when Paul wrote the epistle to him. What was Timothy's problem? He was timid. He was a very gifted man, fine in virtually every respect, but he had a weakness. He was timid, and Paul said he needed to do something about it and grow in that area.

During a ministerial conference in Pasadena, I once heard a lecture from Raymond McNair who was one of the first men ordained by Herbert Armstrong. He spent more time with Herbert Armstrong than any of us could imagine. He remarked that Herbert Armstrong said that demons always influence people toward an extreme position rather than a biblically balanced one.

This "not eating out on the Sabbath" position shown in these papers is not biblically balanced. You will see, as we go along, that it is highly selective in its determination. It is not in alignment with what Jesus Himself said and did, and the Sabbath, Jesus showed, was created for man as a help, not a burden to bear or to wall him in so tightly that his freedom is removed.

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

Luke 13:15 The Lord then answered him, and said, You hypocrite, does not

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each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering?

You can just guess what this issue was. It was what was permissible to do on the Sabbath. What kind of work does God say is okay to do? The issue here is a man working to serve a dumb animal that does not know its left side from its right. Thus, we can see, from God's point of view, that a dumb animal has a higher priority among one's Sabbath responsibilities than doing nothing at all simply because it is only an animal. Man is required to take care of his animals.

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

Luke 14:5 And he answered them, saying, Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath day?

To extricate an ox from a cistern or a pit would cause a considerable amount of work when you think about how big those animals are and that they would fall into a cistern. You might wonder how in the world they would fall into a cistern. Here is how: It is not that they are not sure-footed at all. They are far more sure-footed than you and I! But a cistern would be dug to collect water, and then to make it safer for humans, the cistern would be covered over with tree branches and limbs and things like that, which if a person stepped on it, it would probably hold him. There would be no problem, and the person would jump to safety. But if a dumb animal, which might weigh seven or eight hundred pounds, stepped on it, it would go crashing right through because it could not discern that it was not solid ground.

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

The Pharisaic Jews' Sabbath regulations had become so unbalanced that they held it permissible, indeed merciful, to assist a donkey or a horse having difficulty giving birth to a colt on the Sabbath, but to give aid to a human was unlawful in many occasions.

Matthew 12:1-8 At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the

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corn; and his disciples were an hungered, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, your disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day. But he said unto them, Have you not read what David did when he was an hungered, and they that were with him; How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the law how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless? But I say unto you, That in this place [meaning Himself] is one greater than the temple. But if you had known what this means, I will have mercy and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day.

Even the Pharisaical Jews considered the work of a priest to circumcise a baby permissible on the Sabbath because of the reason the circumcision was done. Jesus agrees with them, and He cites the labors of the priests on the Sabbath as acceptable for this same reason—that is, the reason He explains here in Matthew 12:1-8. Legitimate priestly responsibilities on the Sabbath are not sin. Some of these responsibilities required a great deal of labor.

Are you beginning to see that *what* the person does and how much energy the person expends are not always the issues? *What* they are doing and *why* it is being done is what matters with God, because that brings a right judgment to mind.

Jesus also approved of Abiathar's sharing of the showbread with David and his men. It does not say this in Matthew, but we learn by going back into the Old Testament that the priest was involved in this. It was actually his decision to do it. So Jesus approved of Abiathar's sharing of the showbread with David's hungry men as right and good, even though written law, such as this sharing, was not permissible. Jesus is showing that legitimate human need overrides ceremonial law.

Right in this context, does not Jesus permit His disciples to go through the field to pick and perform the simple preparations required in order to feed hungry men on the Sabbath? I am sure that this did not occur every Sabbath, but on this unusual occasion it did, and He met the situation in the manner described. Mercy, brethren, is greater than the sacrifice of going hungry.

What we are seeing, then, are reasons why the work performed is what matters. It carries the greatest weight in making the judgment. Jesus is clearly showing that even

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the law of God contains room for interpretations, because the "black and white"-appearing law does not cover greater needs in every situation that might pop up in six thousand years of man's history.

Consider the proposition that we must not do work to earn money on the Sabbath. Right? Right! In this case, which is of greater importance, working or earning money? What does one do regarding income gained from profits *earned* on the Sabbath? In other words, profits that are directly tied to the labors one did the other six days of the week? For example: wheat, barley, hay, and all vegetables and fruit—all farm-grown products—are continuing to grow and earn money for the farmer on the Sabbath.

Let us expand this from this principle to other things with which you might be more familiar. What about rental income for those of you who might have a home or something to rent? What about interest from dividends, stocks and bonds, and savings accounts? Does one make calculations on his income figures and subtract any Sabbath earnings given on that income? In other words, one-seventh goes back to God and the remaining six-sevenths goes to you? God does not require that. Can you see what I am getting at? Hair-splitting can be used as a tool to justify such a thing.

By the same token, the idea that just by eating out at a restaurant on the Sabbath one is making or employing a servant is also nothing more than a hair-splitting procedure that is not justified by Scripture. Let me prove that to you. Every one of you knows what John 6:44 says, that no man can come to Christ unless he is called of God.

Matthew 13:10-13 And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speak you unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever has, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever has not, from him shall be taken away even that he has. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.

Apply this principle to this working on the Sabbath by the unconverted. One must be called of God to believe and obey His Word. How can one say the Sabbath-keeper is making the restaurant people work as *his* servants when he enters the restaurant and takes a meal? He is not *making* the person work. Keeping the Sabbath is a voluntary act of submission to God by a *believing* person.

If the Sabbath-keeping person were responsible, and voluntarily of his own free will

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went to labor in the restaurant, he would not come up in the Great White Throne Judgment having that kind of attitude and conduct because it would be a deliberate flouting of God's commandments. The attitude alone would condemn him.

God says that each person is held responsible for obedience in his own order: I Corinthians 15:23. But I want you to turn to Luke 12, for this very principle came up, and this is how Jesus responded.

Luke 12:47-48 And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his [God's] will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he [the ignorant person] that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.

It is those who *know* God's will who are held responsible for not working on the Sabbath. That is so clear. Our responsibility in this is far greater.

Jesus shows that responsibility varies. Read the whole portion of Luke 12. We just read the last two verses. Jesus shows that responsibility varies according to the gifts given, and the teaching also shows that the ignorance of the uncalled is not an absolute. In other words, if we want to get real particular, God is going to dish out punishment to them for working on the Sabbath, but they only get a few stripes. They do not get away with breaking God's law. They are not held responsible the way we are. We are not making them work. That is their choice for not believing what God says.

The issue for you and me is that we are not capable of judging their level of responsibility. Those uncalled will work or use the Sabbath as they please until God calls them and opens their minds to Sabbath-keeping responsibilities. Furthermore—***and this is important***—because the unconverted are not breaking their belief-system, their conscience is not defiled; therefore their mind is still open to conversion. So a Sabbath-keeper is not making them work.

Some complain that just the use of their service is breaking the Sabbath. Let us just set the table for you here. If one still believes that we are responsible, then are *they* willing to do without the use of the toilet on the Sabbath because it takes the services of the water company and its employees to keep its use available in one's home? Are the services of the water company any different in principle than the services of the restaurant's employee?

Let us carry this further. How about the use of electricity in your home on the Sabbath, because one is using the services of the people who are working on the Sabbath to supply you with electricity? So what about the Internet that allows one to listen to sermons right in one's own home? What about the telephone? What about drinking water service? And what about the gas service that keeps one warm and enables one to heat food on the Sabbath, and all the other public safety devices like traffic signals?

What about the motel where the meeting room is used for the services? When we go to the Feast of Tabernacles, it covers at least two Sabbaths and sometimes three. What do we do on those days? Do we just go out into an empty lot in order to hold our meeting?

Can you see, brethren, how selective they are in regard to this subject? It is just nothing but narrow-minded, critical judgments being made by people who are not really thinking this thing through. It would virtually wipe out any opportunity of fellowship if you are really going to follow it.

This complicated Babylonish system has created situations that require a new discernment of God's Word on this subject. Herbert Armstrong made that discernment for the church of God in this era.

Let us turn to Exodus 16:15. Why could such a regulation have been made in ancient Israel since there is no doubt that Sabbathkeeping was a great deal more stringent in those days than it is for us in regard to this subject that we are talking about?

Exodus 16:15 And when the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another, It is manna: for they knew not what it was. And Moses said unto them, This is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat.

So we are talking about the falling of the manna. Let us drop down to verse 27, because you know what happened in between.

Exodus 16:27-30 And it came to pass, that there went out some of the people on the seventh day for to gather, and they found none. And the LORD said unto Moses, How long refuse you to keep my commandments and my laws? See, for that the LORD has given you the sabbath, therefore he gives you on the sixth day the bread of two days; abide you every man in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day. So the people rested on the seventh day.

Do you understand that one of the major things that enabled this sort of regulation in Israel was that they were, what I have chosen to say, "a *closed* society."

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

Exodus 12:15-16 Seven days shall you eat unleavened bread; even the first day you shall put away leaven out of your houses: for whosoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel. And in the first day there shall be an holy convocation, and in the seventh day there shall be an holy convocation to you; no manner of work shall be done in them, save [except] that which every man must eat, that only may be done of you.

Notice this, that even in a closed society, God relaxed the rules when the situation changed, as it did during the festivals. They were away from their home areas and were in Jerusalem. So this relaxing of the normal Sabbath restriction allowed them to prepare food on the Sabbath during that different circumstance—something expressly forbidden in a normal home-setting situation.

Are you beginning to see that when the situation changed, in order to establish a principle by which we could judge whenever the situation *radically* changed, such as in this church era, He showed us the principle that He is willing to bend and not require of us what He would require of us were we in Israel in Exodus 16. Do you get the point? The principle is shown by which we can use to judge.

Do you understand then, that in *this* Christian era when only specific ones are called out, we are not in the same situation as Israel was in then, and in addition to that, we are scattered all over the earth? We do not walk three blocks and go to the synagogue, so thus the application of God's law has to be interpreted to our circumstances.

Again, I ask you, as I did at the beginning of this sermon, who is qualified to interpret them? Well, God's Word gives us the answer to this too. Turn to Exodus 18. This is when God told Moses to set up a system of judges in Israel.

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Exodus 18:26 And they judged the people at all seasons: the hard causes they brought unto Moses, but every small matter they judged themselves.

Brethren, does any nation on earth allow its citizens to interpret its laws anyway they feel good and well-pleased to do? Not on your life, and neither does God. That is why there are courts all the way up to a supreme court in every nation, and in the church, the apostles are the supreme court. Do you want to see proof of that? Let us go to the book of Acts.

Acts 15:1-2 And certain men which came down from Judea taught the brethren, and said, Except you be circumcised after the manner of Moses, you cannot be saved. When therefore Paul [who was already an apostle] and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem [right to the supreme court] unto the apostles and elders about this question.

There is the pattern. It is exactly the same in principle as Exodus 18:26. Just the names of the position have changed. So the matter was brought up before the apostles, not those on the level of Art Braidic and Dennis Fisher—two men who have spiritually spotty records and different jobs to perform than those within the body.

Brethren, God has appointed the Sabbath a day to do good. I want you to understand that I am not in any way supporting that people should keep the Sabbath like the Protestants keep Sunday by going out to a restaurant virtually every Sabbath after services.

Evelyn and I do a lot of our shopping on Sunday morning. We try to go early because we know that when noontime comes, the traffic is going to increase, and the stores are going to be filled with people who are doing *their* weekly shopping, but they are doing it on *their* holy day. So we go early to avoid the rush. I am not here talking about that sort of keeping of God's holy day Sabbath.

I want you to know that last evening, even with all of these visitors here from other lands, we did not go out for an evening meal on the Sabbath. We had it right here as a church family. We brought in the food, put it on the table, and used paper plates because it was more conducive to keeping God's Sabbath. I am not saying that you can never go out on the Sabbath. Please understand that. We determined it would be the

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best thing for us to do in our circumstance even though we may have had the privilege of going out and doing it because of the different situation.

The Sabbath, and going out to a restaurant, can present an opportunity to go out with a widow or maybe with a family that does not have much cash jingling around in their pockets. It would be something that maybe we would not be able to have the opportunity to do without making a real long trip somewhere, because we live pretty well scattered out.

We come together in one central location on the Sabbath day, and before separating for the day, we can occasionally go out on the Sabbath and entertain somebody there. I would caution you to be as selective as you can in choosing a restaurant—one that would allow you to communicate with one another and talk. Good luck on that, by the way. It is hard to find a restaurant like that.

The going thing in restaurants now here in America these days is that they always have a bar area right close to the eating area, and so there are all kinds of noises from football games, basketball games, plus the noise of people talking in there, and it is going right into the dining area. It is awfully hard to find a quiet place to talk. Some of us do not project our voices very well, and so all night long you are saying, "Huh?" "What" "Pardon me? I did not hear what you said," or whatever. You get the point.

This paper regarding Sabbathkeeping is nothing more than a tool to create confusion and division amongst the brethren. Satan's aim is to draw brethren into arguments and to create cells of self-righteous judging within the camp. How do I know this? First of all, the Bible tells me, because it is a proclivity of mankind. It is part of human nature to do this kind of thing.

Mark 7:1-2 Then came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem. And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashed, hands, they found fault.

That sounds like a really big transgression there, to eat with hands that they considered to be defiled. We probably never even stop in many cases. We just go right ahead without even thinking. That is what the disciples did. They did not see any problem with it, but to the Pharisees, it was offensive. In this case, Jesus needed to straighten them out and to get their priorities in the right order, at the right level.

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

He called the Pharisees, who made every appearance of being more righteous than everybody else, "hypocrites" who rejected the commandments of God.

Brethren, to the Pharisees, Jesus was very liberal, but who was it that God honored? It was the "liberal" Jesus. Jesus was not really liberal. He was balanced right down the line with everything, but in this issue, He was way to the left of them, so they considered Him liberal.

Now because Jesus' labors on the Sabbath were mostly aimed at meeting human need—and that need covered areas that were spiritual, psychological, and physical—through His teaching and His activities, He taught them the right balance.

Jesus had many run-ins with the Pharisees, and they were almost always to the right of Him. Matthew 23 is really a powerful condemnation of their self-righteousness. Notice the language in Matthew 23:23.

Matthew 23:23 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought you to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

They were unbalanced in the way that they made judgments regarding what was important and what was less important. So in verse 24 He calls them "blind guides." Here they were, teaching people these things, and yet He said they themselves were blind. And then the next thing He says is "You strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel." Their sense of proportion was all out of whack.

Matthew 23:25-26 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. You blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is

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within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.

The cup and platter here represent the Pharisees themselves.

Matthew 23:27-28 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like unto whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

And yet they were the ones who were judging everybody according to false standards that were their own!

From the beginning, I mentioned to you that people in the book of Romans were making judgments—wrong kinds of judgments—that were similar to this. They were straining at gnats and swallowing a camel, and Paul told them to get their judgments right and work toward creating unity within the congregation. Their self-righteousness was driving the congregation apart over something that did not even matter spiritually.

In one sense, Paul came down on the side of the strong rather than the weak, but he corrected the strong right as he went along. He said right off the bat that the ones who were vegetarians were wrong to begin with. He called them the weak. They were weak spiritually.

Here at the end we are saying that what the Pharisees did for the public made them appear righteous, but it was misleading to the ones who followed their way. This kind of radical thinking subtly draws people's hearts into positions of looking down on others and blinds them to the really important issue of lovingkindness. The Pharisees' sense of proportion was completely out of kilter.

Let us go to Ecclesiastes 7:16. We have a verse here that is worded very poorly in the *King James*.

Ecclesiastes 7:16 Be not righteous over much; neither make yourself over wise: why should you destroy yourself?

I am going to read this to you from the *Amplified Version*, because they get it right. This

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is actually a warning against self-righteousness—the kind which the Pharisees had in abundance. It is a warning against one thinking that one has somehow achieved righteousness. Listen to the *Amplified*.

Ecclesiastes 7:16 [Amplified Version] Be not [morbidly exacting and externally] righteous overmuch, neither strive to make yourself [pretentiously appear] overwise—why should you [get puffed up and] destroy yourself [with presumptuous self-sufficiency]?

That is a mouthful. Solomon knew a thing or two, if he would have just done it.

The apostle Paul guides us. Some twenty years after he became an apostle, he said: "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death?" If he called himself wretched, and what he said about himself was true, where do we stand? You can be sure that he was a man greatly beloved by God for this kind of humility. He did not lord it over people. He showed strength and sternness and courage in the right places, but he was a humble man. Of that there is no doubt. This verse shows that he had a good hand on reality, and he allowed it to keep him humble. So what does God require of us?

God provides us with a model in the biblical record to guide us by the outstanding characteristic of this person's life. It was Joshua. Just think, in a sense, what that man had to live up to. He followed in the shadow of one of the greatest men who ever lived on earth—a man who talked face to face with God. I want to look at Joshua. Turn to Joshua 11 and see what God says about him.

Joshua 11:15 As the LORD commanded Moses his servant, so did Moses command Joshua, and so did Joshua; he left nothing undone of all that the LORD commanded Moses.

That man had the humility to follow a great leader and not try to change things on his own.

Now look at Joshua 13:1. Here we get the record of Israel.

Joshua 13:1 Now Joshua was old and stricken in years; and the LORD said unto him, You art old and stricken in years, and there remains yet very much land to be possessed.

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Joshua 13:13 Nevertheless the children of Israel expelled not the Geshurites, nor the Maachathites: but the Geshurites and the Maachathites dwell among the Israelites until this day.

Joshua 15:63 As for the Jebusites the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the children of Judah could not drive them out; but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Judah at Jerusalem unto this day.

Joshua 16:10 And they drove not out the Canaanites that dwelt in Gezer: but the Canaanites dwell among the Ephraimites unto this day, and serve under tribute.

Joshua 17:12 Yet the children of Manasseh could not drive out the inhabitants of those cities; but the Canaanites would dwell in that land.

God did not hold Joshua responsible for the rest of Israel's failures. There is only so much that one man can do. God left Israel's failures as a witness to us of the tragic result of faithlessness as compared to Joshua's personal faithfulness. What a contrast!

It is interesting that the man at the top was the best follower in the entire nation. Joshua was no innovator. We have got people in the church of God that are coming out with calendars like they are growing out of their ears, and people calling themselves prophets—"that Prophet"—and apostle, and then innovating all kinds of things that they have no right to do, but they do them. Joshua's faithful example is what God is calling us to do, and if we do, we will be prepared for His Kingdom when He sends the visible leadership of Jesus Christ.

I want to leave you here with the thought of Revelation 14:4.

Revelation 14:4 These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goes.

That ends the sermon, and I thank you for your attention.