

Is It Okay to EAT OUT on the Sabbath?

Over the decades that many of us have been Sabbath-keepers, we've observed many a debate about whether or not it's acceptable to dine in restaurants on the Sabbath. Is eating out on the Sabbath keeping the Sabbath day holy, or is it actually breaking the Sabbath? Today, I'd like to examine this issue with you.

Let's turn first to Amos 8:5, where the prophet condemned the wicked of Israel who said, "When will the New Moon be past, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may trade wheat?"

Though Amos was making a different point, the passage reveals that everyone, even the wicked, knew that conducting commerce on the Sabbath was forbidden. So, as the context reveals, the wicked yearned for the end of the Sabbath, so that they could go back to cheating and defrauding their fellow man.

Nevertheless, we can learn from this that doing business and conducting commerce on the Sabbath is against God's law. Does eating out on the Sabbath involve commerce? I'd say it does! But let's continue.

In Neh 10:29, we learn that Nehemiah the governor and the people of Judah took "an oath to walk in God's Law," and further vowed that, "if the peoples of the land brought wares or any grain to sell on the Sabbath day, we would not buy it from them on the Sabbath, or on a holy day" (v. 31).

Unfortunately, some time later, the people of Judah broke this oath to obey God and to keep His Sabbath holy. Nehemiah wrote in Neh. 13:15-21,

15 In those days I saw people in Judah treading wine presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and loading donkeys with wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. And I warned them about the day on which they were selling provisions.

16 Men of Tyre dwelt there also, who brought in fish and all kinds of goods, and sold them on the Sabbath to the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem.

17 Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said to them, “What evil thing is this that you do, by which you profane the Sabbath day?”

18 “Did not your fathers do thus, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city? Yet you bring added wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath.”

19 So it was, at the gates of Jerusalem, as it began to be dark before the Sabbath, that I commanded the gates to be shut, and charged that they must not be opened till after the Sabbath. Then I posted some of my servants at the gates, so that no burdens would be brought in on the Sabbath day.

20 Now the merchants and sellers of all kinds of wares lodged outside Jerusalem once or twice.

21 Then I warned them, and said to them, “Why do you spend the night around the wall? If you do so again, I will lay hands on you!” From that time on they came no more on the Sabbath.

The people of Judah had forgotten their oath and were buying food on the Sabbath. Nehemiah lambasted his people for profaning the Sabbath!

Has anyone ever managed to eat out on the Sabbath without buying food? Buying food is the whole point of eating out!

Some have attempted to discredit Nehemiah and condemn his actions in this matter, even though the Bible never condemns him in any way. Like King David (Psa. 69:9) and our Savior Jesus Christ Himself (John 2:17), Nehemiah was a man consumed with zeal for God! So let’s take a deeper look at this. What principles in God’s law did Nehemiah apply to those who were buying food and other goods on the Sabbath?

Number one, God made the Sabbath holy. Going out among unbelievers to buy food or other goods from them on the Sabbath isn’t keeping the Sabbath holy.

Number two, God commanded His people to work six days, to prepare for the Sabbath ahead of time, and to rest on the Sabbath. In Ex. 16, we discover that God commanded the Israelites to gather twice their usual portion of manna each sixth day (Friday), so that they would have food for the Sabbath. If they didn’t prepare ahead of time, they would have to go without food on the Sabbath! We read,

“Now it happened that some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather, but they found none. And the LORD said to Moses, ‘How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws? See! For the LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore He gives you on the sixth day bread for two days. Let every man remain in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.’ So the people rested on the seventh day” (Ex. 16:27-30).

Under normal circumstances, a person who finds it necessary to go out to eat on the Sabbath is one who hasn't prepared ahead of time. Under God's law, such people would either go hungry on the Sabbath or find someone else willing to share, and hopefully learn to be better prepared the next time!

Number three, we aren't to conduct business or make financial transactions on the Sabbath. Business, commerce, and work are inextricably linked together.

Number four, God commanded everyone to rest on the Sabbath, even the foreigners who dwelt among the children of Israel:

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 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 do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, **nor your stranger who is within your gates**” (Ex. 20:8-10).

In obedience to this command, Nehemiah kicked the Sabbath-breakers out of Jerusalem and shut the gates.

Today, just as it was then, we are surrounded by people who don't keep the Sabbath, who sell all kinds of wares and food on the Sabbath. Should we follow the righteous example of Nehemiah in refusing to buy from them on the Sabbath? Or should we help them break the Sabbath?

Remember, sin is still sin, even if committed in ignorance. Breaking the Sabbath, except in case of emergencies, is sinning, even if the offender doesn't realize it yet.

How many restaurants do you think will be open on the Sabbath in the Kingdom of God? How many businesses of any kind will be open on the Sabbath? If, during Christ's Millennial reign, any restaurant tries to open on the Sabbath, do you think any of God's servants will flock there to eat on the Sabbath? I think not! If it will be wrong then, it's wrong now.

Furthermore, if it's wrong for someone to work on the Sabbath, even if done in ignorance, then isn't it also wrong for us to knowingly hire someone to work for us on the Sabbath? In fact, that's an even greater sin, because we ought to know better! Would we hire a neighbor boy to mow our lawn on the Sabbath? Would we hire a crew to come re-roof our house on the Sabbath? It's no different if we hire restaurant staff to serve us on the Sabbath.

Some may argue that the restaurant staff would be breaking the Sabbath anyway, even if we weren't there. This is true, but irrelevant to the matter at hand.

If we knew a thief, and that thief offered to steal a 12-ft. HD television for us, would we agree? Would we justify it on the grounds that we weren't stealing it ourselves, and that the thief would steal it anyway? You see, it doesn't matter that we didn't steal it ourselves, or that the thief would steal it anyway. We're still partaking in the other person's sin, and encouraging that person to continue sinning.

Some have attempted to justify eating out on the Sabbath by citing the time that Jesus' disciples, while walking through the grain fields on the Sabbath, picked some ears of grain and ate them (Mat. 12:1; Mark 2:23; Luke 6:1). Today, if you had a cherry tree in your back yard and you wanted some cherries on the Sabbath, you might walk out to your cherry tree, pick some cherries, and eat them. There's no sin in that. No money exchanged hands, no work was done, and no one hired anyone else to work. So it was with Christ and His disciples. Their actions were not against God's law, and they had nothing in common with eating out on the Sabbath.

Others have pointed out that Jesus healed people on the Sabbath. Again, this has nothing to do with eating out on the Sabbath. I've never seen any paralytics walk, blind see, deaf hear, or anyone's life saved by going out to eat on the Sabbath!

Brethren, those are nothing more than pitiful excuses. At no time did Jesus ever break the Sabbath or any of the Sabbath commandments in the Old Testament. He never worked on the Sabbath, He never did business on the Sabbath, He never bought food on the Sabbath, He never hired anyone else to work for Him on the Sabbath. He taught people on the Sabbath and healed them on the Sabbath, but He did not break the Sabbath.

Remember, the Sabbath represents God's Kingdom, the soon-coming Kingdom of Jesus Christ, as Heb. 4 teaches us. Therefore, we ought to honor it accordingly and keep it holy!

In Isa. 58:13, God commands us, "Turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD

honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words.”

Eating out on the Sabbath is a voluntary and unnecessary act. It’s the very definition of seeking one’s own pleasure!

The Sabbath is God’s holy day. It’s not a day for us to seek our own entertainment, to go to the movies, to try an exotic new restaurant, to go shopping, or anything of that nature. It’s certainly not a day for us to work, do business, or knowingly and willfully cause others to work! It’s a day for us to come out of the world, to set aside the cares of the world, and to spend time with God in His presence.

Therefore, let us do just that and be diligent to keep God’s Sabbath day holy, looking forward to His Kingdom!

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