

Is it a Sin to Eat Out in a Restaurant on the Sabbath Day?

By Ed J. Szalankiewicz

This controversy has stirred in the churches of GOD for some time now. The question asked in the title of this article seems to be a straightforward issue - yet I find that it is not. For those that think it is a violation of the proper observance of GOD's Sabbath you may be surprised by the facts contained in this article. For those who think it is not a violation of the teaching of scripture - you too may be surprised by these same facts.

Lets begin with the key scriptures used to conclude that purchasing a meal in a restaurant on the Sabbath Day is a violation of the teachings of scripture.

Nehemiah 10:31 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: and that we would leave the seventh year, and the exaction of every debt.

Nehemiah 13:15 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.

Both of these verses relate to Sabbath-keeping and are sometimes perceived as teaching we should not eat out or partake of a catered meal on the Sabbath. A closer look reveals otherwise. The King James Version uses the translation "victual" in both verses. cursory research of 10:31 would make it appear that we should not buy a meal from "the people of the land" on the Sabbath.

It is important to note that there are two very different Hebrew words used in these two verses. In 10:31, the word is "sheber"(Strong's # 7668). This is the sole use of this word in the OT. Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew lexicon defines this word as "corn, grain, or food stuff-threshed." The NKJV translates it as "grain".

Nehemiah is not referring to individual prepared meals, but to grain, which suggests a quantity of grain to make into many meals. Grain is normally bought in a quantity, not in a small amount for one meal. The practice of the time was to purchase in the market place a quantity greater than for immediate use to place in storage (much as we do grocery shopping today) - a considerably laborious task. These kinds of market place negotiations and arduous tasks should not be done on the Sabbaths. Shopping for your "grocery order" today would be a violation of the Sabbath as there are six other days to do such work.

What is stated in 10:31 must also be considered in connection with the other matter stated as a violation - selling of "wares". This simply means merchandise. Clearly, there was full-fledged and vigorous "commerce" going on with callous disregard for the Sabbath. This verse is not addressing the purchase of an individual portion to be consumed immediately. Nowhere does the Bible condemn the exchange of money for any and all purposes on the Sabbath.

There is also the principle that God allowed the Israelites to give

foreigners an animal, which died of itself, showing that HE doesn't require that we require outsiders to do all that would be expected of us.

Deuteronomy 14:21 Ye shall not eat of any thing that dieth of itself: thou shalt give it unto the stranger that is in thy gates, that he may eat it; or thou mayest sell it unto an alien: for thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God.

You will also notice when looking again at the Sabbath command, that God is addressing the Israelites (Spiritual Israel today) and specifically those who are in the household or under the control of that household. The command addresses those who are "within thy gates" -- showing that the command is directed to those under our control - those whom we exercise authority over relative to what we require or don't require of them. Notice:

Exodus 20:10 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 maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates:

It is also of note that if we can take money to the place GOD chooses for the Feast of Tabernacles, and spend it for food, why didn't GOD say not to do it on the Holy Days or weekly Sabbath during the Feast of Tabernacles if this were wrong?

Deuteronomy 14:25-26 Then shalt thou turn it into money, and bind up the money in thine hand, and shalt go unto the place which the LORD thy God shall choose: And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth: and thou shalt eat there before the LORD thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household,

Nehemiah 13:15 contains a more common word that is translated "victual" in the KJV, but as "provisions" in the NKJV. The word is "tsayid." Strong's says it implies what is taken in hunting and can mean "lunch." Brown-Driver-Briggs, for definitions of the Hebrew, is reputed to be more complete, accurate, and scholarly than Strong's and provided the definition "provisions taken on a journey" -thus the better translation in the NKJV. Webster's defines provisions, when used in regard to food, as "a stock of food and other supplies assembled for future needs." Once again, we are dealing with stock-piling, not an individual meal.

It needs to be considered that the Brown-Driver-Briggs translation of "tsayid", referring to a time in the day of Nehemiah when a "journey" was not a simple hour's drive to church. It was normally a period of days and would have required preparation to an extent that we have always avoided on the Sabbath. A reasonable comparison is - it would be like packing the car to go to the Feast of Tabernacles.

In this time of Nehemiah, the entire civil government was under GOD's jurisdiction. He is addressing the nature of their departure from proper Sabbath observance. These verses in Nehemiah dealt with a problem extant in his time. They do not deal with the modern activity of eating a single meal in a restaurant in fellowship with brethren or family on the Sabbath. Rather, Nehemiah is dealing with sizable quantities of food being purchased in vigorous commerce and all kinds of merchandising activities blatantly ignoring the Sabbath prohibitions for such activities. These verses simply

are not applicable to the Church today living as "Ambassadors of Christ" living in a society, which simply is not under GOD's jurisdiction at this time.

However, if some among us are CONVICTED that eating out on the Sabbath is a problem then it is true that they must act according to the knowledge they have and not defile their conscience. But Paul CLEARLY STATES that they should have this believe "to thyself" No loving brother should take a position that causes division or serves to cause confusion within the body. Doing so by itself then becomes a sin and is severely argued against in scripture - particularly in Romans 16:17 and here in Romans 14

Romans 14:17-23 For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men. Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another. For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence. It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak. Hast thou faith - have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

We should not judge one another in this and we certainly should not cause disharmony among the brethren - that is clearly the greater violation in this matter. If a person believes he should not eat out on the Sabbath - let him alone to exercise his faith "to himself before GOD". Do not judge him and he, in turn, must not judge others who do not see it this way.

Ephesians 4:2 With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;

Christ said CLEARLY that the world would know we are HIS by the love we show one to another. And GOD loves harmony among the brethren - HIS sheep and children!

John 13:34-35 A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

Here brethren we see plainly the OVER-ARCHING- PRINCIPLE emphasized in scripture!

• John 15:12, 17 This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you. [17] These things I command you, that ye love one another.

• Romans 12:10 Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another;

• Romans 13:8 Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.

• Galatians 5:13 For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.

• 1 Thessalonians 3:12 And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you:

• 1 Thessalonians 4:9 But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.

• 1 Peter 1:22 Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently:

• 1 Peter 3:8 Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous:

• 1John 3:11 For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

• 1 John 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

• 1 John 4:11-12 Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

• 2 John 1:5 And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another.

Brethren, It is clear that Satan uses the divide and conquer strategy over and over again - lets turn to GOD and use the clear direction of HIS word to LOVE one another in this matter and dwell together in harmony before HIM! ~~~

Contributing material is from a study prepared by Larry Neff and with additional material and comment formed into this article by Ed Szalankiewicz