

The United Church of God
VS
A Sabbath Test

An analysis of the official position of the United Church of God
regarding dining out in restaurants on the Sabbath

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The United Church of God vs A Sabbath Test

Overview “Some Perspective”

By Dennis Fischer

Summer, 2007

Dear Friends,

On April 16, 2007, the United Church of God's Advisory Committee for Doctrine sent me a 17 page letter addressing ***Blow the Trumpet's*** position concerning dining out on the Sabbath, and our strong opposition to a study paper they published on this subject in 2003. To better understand why they would take the time to produce such a letter, as well as understand the letter's content, a little background is necessary.

In the fall of 2004 ***Blow the Trumpet*** appealed to various COG leaders, including those in the UCG, to rethink their position concerning God's people seeking out those who profane the Sabbath and Holy days, and actually paying them for this sin—which is exactly what takes place when they dine out in restaurants on Holy time. Regrettably, this practice has grown dramatically over the past several years.

For the most part our appeal has been rejected. However, what is truly disappointing is that the arguments these leaders advance in defense of this practice are saturated in contorted logic and human reasoning, not Biblical wisdom. At every turn, these men have discarded the clear instruction revealed in God's word, and have instead, embraced the most self-justifying collection of nonsense ever offered in defense of a theological position in this era of the Church. It is simply mind boggling to think that their arguments would ever resonate with any of God's people. Sadly, most people believe what they want to believe. This now brings us to the United Church of God.

Taking Our Case to UCG

Because of the close relationship many of us at ***Blow the Trumpet*** enjoy with the United Church of God, as well as numerous requests from UCG members to press this issue, a decision was made to commission a response to their study paper. After several months, ***Blow the Trumpet*** produced a comprehensive rebuttal titled "The United Church of God vs A Sabbath Test." This work represents a thorough examination of the UCG position on this issue. In it, we present the fallacy of their arguments and expose them to be nothing more than a desperate attempt to justify a behavior that flies in the face of God's Sabbath law. Quite frankly, their defense of this practice is built on a foundation of "What ifs?" and "Yeah buts" and reflects a mindset that is so foreign to the scriptures it shouldn't be called "research." On a personal note I have never been more embarrassed for God's Church than I am over this. At one point these leaders actually suggested that if it is acceptable with God for one of His children to go to a hospital on the Sabbath, then it must be acceptable with Him if they go to a restaurant. After all, both acts require non-believers to labor on their behalf. Can you imagine such reasoning? I can't.

Presenting Our Case

Upon its completion, we posted our rebuttal on **Blow the Trumpet's** web site. We also sent a copy to Mr. Clyde Kilough, UCG's president, repeating our appeal for him to address this issue. The cover letter attached to our rebuttal was signed by me and Mr. Randy Vild. We offered our signatures because of the roles we play at **Blow the Trumpet** as well as our personal relationships with, and respect for, the UCG.

Mr. Kilough advised us that it was UCG policy that such papers go through a submission process and that in order for it to be considered, we would have to submit it through our local pastor. Because I attended UCG's Seattle, Washington congregation, I submitted our rebuttal to Mr. Dennis Luker. Mr. Luker has been a minister in God's service for several decades and is highly respected among numerous COG groups. He also serves as a UCG regional pastor. On a personal note, I have never known a finer man in God's Church. Both he and his wife serve with grace and dignity and I consider it a great honor to be a part of their congregation. This is not to suggest that we agree on everything, for indeed, we do not. However, we do have a mutual respect for each other and consider ourselves friends. I certainly am his.

Even though Mr. Luker does not share my view regarding dining out on the Sabbath, he informed me that **Blow the Trumpet's** paper warranted a response and that he would send it on to UCG's doctrinal group. He actually said something to the effect of "The Sabbath is important and this topic deserves to be addressed." This was done in January of this year (2007). Approximately a month later he informed me that I could expect a response in two months. Almost two months to the day I received the UCG letter. Additionally, during this period I requested that **Blow the Trumpet** pull our rebuttal from its web site as a courtesy to Mr. Kilough and the UCG Doctrinal Committee. This was done to give them an opportunity to seriously address the issues we raised concerning their position.

At this point it is important to understand that I don't believe for one second that the UCG wrote their counter argument because of me or **Blow the Trumpet**. They did it as a courtesy to Mr. Luker, and for that I am thankful. What is disappointing is that instead of offering genuine Bible based arguments for their belief, they simply paraded out the same old excuses. Their arguments ring a very Protestant tone, only Protestants employ them in defense of not keeping the Sabbath at all.

Three Differences

As I carefully read the UCG letter it occurred to me that it is vastly easier for God's leaders to explain away passages that threaten what they wish to do, or say, or think, than it is to face up to the reality that they have done wrong, and have taught others to do so. This is where the UCG finds itself today. Additionally, it also occurred to me that there are three basic differences between the United Church of God and **Blow the Trumpet** with respect to this particular issue.

- First, we can understand the UCG position on this issue because we once thought as they do. However, they cannot understand our position because they have never agreed with it. This is similar to a Protestant's view of Christmas. We understand their position because we came out of that sin, but they can't relate to ours because they are still in it.
- Second, the UCG does not want their membership, or any of God's people for that matter, to read *A Sabbath Test* or any other material that challenges the practice of dining out on Holy time. Although they will offer many reasons for this, the reality is that they fear the persuasive arguments presented in them. We, on the other hand, want people to examine arguments like those produced by the UCG because they illustrate how contrived they are.
- Third, the UCG will never publicly debate this issue with those who offer a contrary view because they know they would be thoroughly embarrassed in such a forum. **Blow the Trumpet**, on the other hand, is totally confident in the true Biblical position on this subject and is prepared to present it at any time, in any place, and in any COG forum.

Because the UCG declined our invitation to publically address this issue in the spirit of Acts 15, we are compelled to continue our defense of God's word over the internet. Therefore, we are re-publishing our rebuttal to the UCG study paper with one notable addition. We have also included the counter arguments they presented in their letter to me, as well as my personal response to their counter points. Although this presentation is quite lengthily it is extremely thorough and well worth investigating. I encourage you to read each point carefully.

Finally, it gives me no pleasure in pressing this issue with the leaders of God's Church. Quite frankly, it grieves me to do so. However, this issue is simply too important to dismiss. The stakes are just too high.

Respectfully,

Dennis Fischer



Note from Blow the Trumpet

What follows is the initial series of arguments presented by ***Blow the Trumpet*** when refuting UCG's 2003 study paper defending the practice of dining out on the Sabbath. Our rebuttal was submitted to them in January 2007.

Additionally, we have provided the "Counter Argument" offered by the UCG in their letter to Mr. Fischer, as well as Mr. Fischer's response. This series begins with an introductory letter by ***Blow the Trumpet***.

The United Church of God vs A Sabbath Test

Introduction “Dear Brethren”

Spring, 2006

Dear Brethren,

In March of 2002, Messrs. Art Braidic and Dennis Fischer published an extraordinary book addressing the issue of dining out on the Sabbath. *A Sabbath Test*, which is showcased in our library, presents an overwhelming argument for refraining from this practice—one that has now become commonplace in the Church. Virtually thousands of God's people have read this work, and scores, including ministers, have been changed by its straightforward and uncompromising Biblical presentation on this issue.

At this point it is important to understand that *A Sabbath Test* does not try to spin an argument in an effort to make a point. It does not attempt to justify a position by employing semantics, human reasoning, or technicalities. This book is radically different from the numerous position papers produced by a host of COG groups on this subject. Quite frankly, it is one of the easiest publications to understand ever written in God's Church. As one reader put it, "*A Sabbath Test* makes so much sense. It shed a light that gave me a new respect for the meaning of this wonderful day. I will never treat it the same again." Even one of the leaders of a prominent COG group conceded, "You can't argue against it Biblically." Perhaps this is why *A Sabbath Test* is so frustrating to its detractors. The book's simplicity and honesty is so apparent that its message cries out to be heard. It proclaims a beautiful truth—one that will not be silenced.

Furthermore, *A Sabbath Test* is a remarkably respectful work. It shows great deference toward God as a loving Father and the wisdom He displayed when creating holy time. Despite its opposition by some, there isn't a word in it that could offend Him.

In the aftermath of the book's release, some leading COG associations have attempted to deflect its message by offering their own ideas concerning what the Bible says on this critical end-time issue. However, instead of honestly applying the scriptures when advancing their case, each group presents what can only be construed as an avalanche of human reasoning and contorted logic with each point masquerading as Biblical scholarship. These words may sound harsh but any objective examination of the numerous COG position papers on this subject shout out this truth. We at ***Blow the Trumpet*** encourage all of God's people to compare the words of those who defend the practice of dining out on the Sabbath with those contained in *A Sabbath Test*. As you do, ask yourself which case would YOU rather present to God Almighty? In other words, which one truly honors Him?

Exhorting God's Church

For nearly two years (2004), ***Blow the Trumpet*** has exhorted God's Church to seriously address the issue of His people seeking out those who desecrate the Sabbath and actually paying them for this sacrilege. Tragically, this is exactly what takes place every time one dines out on a day that was set apart as HOLY from the very beginning.

For the most part, leaders of His Church have attempted to dismiss this topic as unimportant. Some groups have even directed their members to refrain from discussing it altogether on the grounds that it is

"divisive." Others have warned members that failure to conform to the Church's position could result in expulsion. Most have taken a softer approach, calling it "a matter of conscience." However, what every one of these groups has utterly failed to do is present a legitimate Biblical argument in defense of this practice. Instead, they obfuscate the clear intent of God's law. One example of this self-justifying mindset is reflected in a document produced by the United Church of God.

In February 2003, UCG's doctrinal committee published a paper entitled Principles of Sabbath Observance/Eating Out on the Sabbath. This document, which defends dining out on the Sabbath, claims to present the Biblical view on this issue. However, it doesn't come close to doing so. Instead of presenting God's wisdom on this topic, this team of UCG thinkers employs what would best be described as sophistry when making their case.

Throughout their paper, the UCG argues that God's word is silent on this issue. After all, there is not one reference to "restaurants" in the scriptures and only two references to "buying and selling." Additionally, they claim that those who labor in restaurants on the Sabbath are not "their servants," but rather the servants of restaurant owners. Therefore, God doesn't care if His people seek them out and pay them to labor on their behalf on holy time. After all, they would be working anyway. At one point, the UCG actually argues that dining out on the Sabbath can be more in keeping with the fourth commandment than eating at home. Here is how they put it.

"It is actually less work for many to eat in a restaurant and pay for the meal than it is to have a group of people in your home to eat on the Sabbath. Even if you work diligently to prepare everything the day before, there will still be work involved when one entertains others in his home."

Noticeably absent from their position is a deep and profound reverence for the Sabbath and what it pictures. At no time does the UCG address the fact that this day looks forward to God's Kingdom—a Kingdom in which no one will engage in such a sin. Furthermore, they never mention that God's people are ambassadors of that Kingdom and should act out the great hope it holds. Instead, these Church leaders attempt to prove that His people can go back into spiritual Egypt and avail themselves of the very sin they were once enslaved by.

Additionally, the UCG never addresses what dining out on the Sabbath requires. At no point do they acknowledge that what takes place in restaurants every Sabbath is an act of sacrilege—although the scriptures say just that. They never mention that those who labor in restaurants on the Sabbath are desecrating that which God made holy—although the scriptures say just that. At no time do they admit that the God who created the Sabbath ABHORS what is being done by restaurant personnel on His day—although the scriptures say just that. Instead, they argue that God's word only condemns spending the entire Sabbath day in a marketplace, not just an hour or two at a restaurant where His Sabbath is being trampled on by others.

This wing of our site examines the position offered by the United Church of God with respect to this critical issue. It is presented in a collection of articles addressing each UCG argument. As you read each response, we appeal to you to honestly ask yourself which position sounds more like the wisdom of the Holy One of Israel. After all, this debate is not about what man thinks but rather what the Great God of Heaven desires of His people. With that understanding, we think the answer will be obvious.

Finally, although we are very aggressive in our criticism of the UCG position, we do not for one minute believe this issue stands as a referendum on their legitimacy as a true Church of God. It is the official position of **Blow the Trumpet** that this body of believers is genuinely dedicated to God's way and His work. However, they are HUGELY mistaken on this issue. Because of the gravity of this error, we feel compelled to cry out to them and to all who hold their view.

Respectfully,

Blow the Trumpet

Counter Argument

United Church of God
Advisory Committee for Doctrine
April 16, 2007

Dear Mr. Fischer,

This is a response to your paper titled "The United Church of God vs. A Sabbath Test," which has been circulated within our Church membership. We appreciate your zeal to preserve the sanctity of the Sabbath and will respond to the points you presented in your paper that seeks to invalidate the conclusions of the United Church of God's study paper regarding eating out on the Sabbath. The reply to your paper was assigned to the Advisory Committee for Doctrine, whose work is overseen by the Doctrine Committee of the Council of Elders.

Your main points seem to be based primarily on your understanding of the Sabbath instructions in Exodus 16, Nehemiah's prohibition of buying and selling "victuals" and the Sabbath commandments recorded in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. The example of Nehemiah is often referenced in regard to restaurants on the Sabbath, e.g. "Would Nehemiah have permitted restaurants to operate during his day or would he have closed them down too?" (p. 23).

A recurring theme throughout this paper is that it's a sin to seek out services on the Sabbath from those who are desecrating the Sabbath. For example, page 3 of the Blow the Trumpet paper says:

"For nearly two years, Blow the Trumpet has exhorted God's Church to seriously address the issue of His people seeking out those who desecrate the Sabbath and actually paying them for this sacrilege. Tragically, this is exactly what takes place every time one dines out on a day that was set apart as HOLY from the very beginning."

Yet the Blow the Trumpet paper contradicts the non-compromising tenor of the paper with the following statement, "Paying for public transportation on the Sabbath may be unavoidable under certain circumstances" (page 53, emphasis added). The paper does not appeal to the example of Nehemiah in this regard, e.g. would Nehemiah have allowed Israelites to seek out and spend time among unbelievers, while financing those who desecrate the Sabbath via their public transportation work? No, he wouldn't. However, this demonstrates how such examples alone do not always define a transgression of the Sabbath.

Given the acceptance of public transportation, it's not farfetched to apply the same rationale to the time spent fellowshiping with brethren (e.g. discussing God's Word, encouraging one another, etc.) in a restaurant. The entire context and other related factors must be weighed. This is one of the major weaknesses in the Blow the Trumpet paper.

Sincerely,

Advisory Committee for Doctrine

Response from Dennis Fischer

Dear Friends,

Throughout the UCG letter, their advocacy of dining out on the Sabbath is defended with terms like: "possible," "plausible," "not farfetched," and other vagaries. This seems like a fairly weak foundation on which to build such an important Biblical argument. However, this is what they offer. It sure would be more compelling if they could cite one example of Jesus dining at a local inn on the Sabbath. There certainly were such places. But alas they don't, for obvious reasons. With that said, here is my response

The "Not Far Fetched" Argument

In all due respect to the UCG, there is a huge difference between having to take public transportation to Sabbath services because there is absolutely no alternative, and these Church leaders making Sabbath reservations at a fine restaurant when God has actually provided them with an alternative. To suggest that it is "not farfetched to apply the same rationale" to both behaviors is not only untrue, it's insulting, and mocks the very God who sanctified this day at the beginning (Gen. 2:2-3).

With respect to their comment regarding Nehemiah and public transportation, they are mistaken. Personally, I believe that if Nehemiah was in charge of Sabbath observance today he may very well see a legitimate need for public transportation in larger metropolitan areas. If such was the case, local governments could facilitate a solution. For example: they could arrange for shuttles to be operated by part time volunteers and offered without charge. These shuttles would be used exclusively to convey God's people to their places of assembly. The point here is that it can be reasonably concluded that transportation, in some parts of today's world, represents an essential service—even in a Sabbath keeping society. This would also be the case with respect to security, fire and rescue, emergency care and other functions operating for the public good. Certainly, the ancient Israelites must have applied this principle. It is virtually inconceivable that they didn't have security forces guarding the camp—including on the Sabbath. Even Nehemiah dispatched sentries to protect Jerusalem from Sabbath breaking merchants (Neh. 13:19). Certainly these services would function differently on holy time but I am confident that they could operate without compromising God's Sabbath law.

However, the same argument cannot be made for restaurants. Nehemiah would have closed them down in a heartbeat. Not only does God's law prohibit what they do on the Sabbath (Ex 16), but their services are not designed to cater to need, but rather to pleasure. This is not to suggest that if there was a natural disaster impacting the people's access to food, Nehemiah would still keep restaurants closed, for indeed he wouldn't. This would constitute a genuine emergency and would require unique action to ensure the public good. However, this is NOT what this debate is about. The discussion at hand is whether God's people may engage the services of a commercial business on holy time simply because it's an enjoyable activity. If God's people are honest with the scriptures they would have to conclude that the practice of seeking out Sabbath breakers at restaurants is absolutely excoriated in God's word.

Respectfully,

Dennis Fischer

P.S. I find it interesting that the UCG's portrayal of Sabbath dining always involves Christian fellowship in which brethren are edified and God's word is at the center. Having participated in hundreds of such gatherings I am persuaded that for the most part there is nothing unique taking place there. Furthermore, what the UCG doesn't say is that it is the official position of their Church that if one of their members wants to hop off to a diner Saturday morning and enjoy a stack of pancakes before going to Church, God is perfectly fine with it. Or, equally acceptable would be for a couple to make Friday evening dinner reservations at a romantic restaurant, as long as they comported themselves appropriately. The point here is that their description of Sabbath dining is simply an attempt to rehabilitate this sin. The truth is that

these COG leaders advocate this practice because it is an experience that brings them pleasure. However, this is not the criteria for measuring its moral standing with God.

The United Church of God vs A Sabbath Test

Argument I “A Matter of Conscience”

The United Church of God introduces their defense of dining out on the Sabbath by suggesting that this issue is a matter of personal conviction, not Biblical mandate. When doing so, they invoke Paul's letter to the Church at Rome to make their point. At first glance, what they say may sound plausible. However, it lacks one very critical component. It anchors its point on an assumption that is found nowhere in the scriptures. As a matter of fact, the UCG intimates something that actually contradicts God's word.

Their argument centers around the belief that because the Bible doesn't specifically mention dining out on the Sabbath, it is therefore silent on this issue. However, nothing could be further from the truth. The scriptures speak with great force regarding how this day is to be honored as well as how it can be profaned. God's word even addresses the acquisition and preparation of food on the Sabbath (Ex. 16). In both cases, the Almighty forbids these behaviors. Despite this fact, the UCG asserts that going out to a restaurant on the Sabbath, where God's holy day is being desecrated by slaves to sin (Ro. 6:16), is somehow a matter of personal choice. Notice how they advance this part of their case.

United Church of God:

The issue of eating out on the Sabbath has been raised occasionally over the years. Clearly Christianity involves personal choice for conscience sake. The apostle Paul took the position that he would not eat meat if it would cause someone to stumble. To eat or not to eat meat was a conscious choice that he could make. The act itself was not a matter of sin. “Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble” (1 Corinthians 8:13). There was no reason to force or cause someone to feel badly if he for conscience sake felt he could not eat meat that had been offered to an idol. In the book of Romans Paul offers a statement about conscience. “But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin” (Romans 14:23).

Our Response:

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

Additionally, the UCG states, "The act itself was not a matter of sin" when commenting on Paul's teaching concerning eating meat vs. vegetarianism. By doing so they imply that the same is true about dining out on the Sabbath. They dismiss this issue as simply a matter of choice, thus asserting that going to restaurants on the Sabbath is a benign activity not worthy of judgment. But is this true?

Consider for a moment what is taking place when God's people engage in this behavior. First, they must go out into the world (spiritual Egypt) and consciously seek out those who are profaning what God

made holy. They must do this because it is absolutely essential for someone to desecrate the Sabbath in order for them to do what they contend is acceptable with their Savior. The UCG defends this behavior despite the fact that God's word emphatically forbids His people going out of their spiritual camp on the Sabbath (Ex. 16:29. See also Re. 18:4). But it doesn't end there.

Those who dine out on the Sabbath must also direct these Sabbath-breakers to prepare a meal for them according to their specifications. They do this despite the fact that God Himself prohibited food from being prepared on this day (Ex. 16:23). He actually proclaimed that this aspect of His Sabbath law was to test whether or not His people would obey Him (Ex. 16:4).

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

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

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

A Great Misunderstanding

There is a great misunderstanding in the Church concerning Paul's instruction regarding faith as recorded in Romans 14. Many have defended dining out on the Sabbath by arguing it is not a sin because they can do it in good conscience. They then cite Paul's words in defense of their point. But Paul said no such thing. He did not say faith makes everything right. He said the absence of faith makes everything wrong.

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

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

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

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

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

Counter Argument

United Church of God
Advisory Committee for Doctrine
April 16, 2007

Dear Mr. Fischer

Blow the Trumpet states:

"Imagine for a moment that this debate was not over dining out on the Sabbath, but rather whether one may eat pork or some other unclean meat... However, it is doubtful that any member of the UCG doctrinal committee would be persuaded by this use of scripture. This is because Paul is NOT addressing unclean meats in this chapter..."

Here the paper rejects the example of eating meat offered to idols, concluding that it was not a matter of sin (i.e. unclean food) and therefore is not applicable to this subject. However, this example would be germane to the subject if it were sinful, in one context but permissible in different context. Let's further consider the relevance of meat offered to idols here. *Different circumstances* may have emerged where they were *just eating a meal*, not endorsing the sinful behavior of those who prepared the meal.

The Bible introduces this matter within the context of *sin*, as it was a common *idolatrous practice*. Numbers 25:1-2 says, "The people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab, They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and *the people ate and bowed down to their gods*" (emphasis added throughout). Here eating such things was an expression of *idolatrous acceptance*.

Also Daniel "would not make himself *ceremonially unclean*" with the king's delicacies and *wine* (Daniel 1:8 New English Translation The wine could have been dedicated to idols. In the New Testament, Acts 15:20 says: "But that we write to them to abstain from things *polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood.*" Verse 29 instructs them to "abstain from things offered to idols." Potential idolatrous *syncretism* could have been the concern.

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

Sincerely,

Advisory Committee for Doctrine

Response from Dennis Fischer

Dear Friends,

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

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

The Jerusalem Conference

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

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

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

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

What did Paul Teach?

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

How Can You Know?

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

The reason for their concern may actually have been prompted by Paul himself when teaching about how the True God views sacrifices to Him. He even alluded to this teaching in his letter. There, he explained that, in God's sacrificial system, the offerings were accepted and symbolically eaten by the Eternal as well as the one who brought the offering (1 Cor. 10:18). In doing so, the person who brought it

became a partaker of the altar. For this reason, some may have wondered how this teaching would apply to them if they had inadvertently eaten a pagan sacrifice.

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

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

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

A Grave Misunderstanding

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

What say I then? that the idol is any thing, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing? But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils. (1 Corinthians 10:19-21)

Not Causing Offence

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A Lesson to God's Ministers Today

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

Are You Required to Investigate?

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

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

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

What About Dining Out on the Sabbath?

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

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

Returning to the Argument

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

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

Does anyone honestly believe this is what Paul was teaching? We ask this question because it describes exactly what scores of God's people do when they dine out on the Sabbath. These Christians believe that they can actively seek out, on holy time, sinners who profane the day the God consecrated, and pay them for the fruit of their labor simply because any god the employee might worship isn't real anyway. These Sabbath-diners then argue that they play no part in the unbeliever's trespass even though they are the ones who solicited the very sin being committed.

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

Respectfully,

Dennis Fischer

The United Church of God vs A Sabbath Test

Argument II “Strict Obedience is Pharisaical”

When defending the practice of dining out on the Sabbath, the UCG implies that those who condemn this behavior are similar to the Pharisees of Jesus' day. They then point out that the Pharisees tediously legislated the Sabbath by crafting endless regulations concerning how it should be observed, including not buying and selling. After setting up this premise, they suggest that just as the Messiah took issue with the Pharisees of His day, He would also reject the belief that going to restaurants on the Sabbath is a sin in our time.

The UCG begins this phase of their case by explaining how the Pharisees dominated religious life during the first century. Actually, they provide a very informative picture of these religious leaders. However, as you read their argument, remember what they are advocating. These COG leaders contend that the Bible is silent on the issue of God's people seeking out unbelievers who profane the Sabbath and paying them for the fruit of their sacrilege, which is exactly what takes place when one dines out on the Sabbath. Everything the UCG presents is done with that objective in mind. After all, their doctrinal paper is called "Dining Out on the Sabbath." Their intent is clearly to persuade God's people that the Lord of the Sabbath accepts this practice. The question for you to ask is: "Have they proven anything?" Notice that even the UCG acknowledges that during the time of Christ all forms of buying and selling were forbidden. Here are their words, followed by our response.

United Church of God:

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

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

This was legislated in the oral law which developed over many years, but much of the development occurred in the period of time between the two testaments (400 B.C. to A.D. 100). When the Old Testament ends there is no Sanhedrin, but when the New Testament begins it is a thriving institution. The Sanhedrin wielded much power during this time when it came to Sabbath observance. The prohibition against carrying (one of the 39 categories of work) was used by the Sanhedrin to deny any sort of commerce.

This category absolutely forbids all carrying in the street. Even such trivial things as a key or a handkerchief must be left at home. Certainly pocketbooks, purses, wallets and key

chains may not be carried. The only things one may carry outdoors are things that are actually worn.

The power of the Sanhedrin was uncontested. They were the authors and final arbiters of Jewish law. During the time of the Roman persecutions, it became very difficult to maintain the academies where the Oral Torah was taught, and it was feared that it would be forgotten and lost. Because of this, it was finally put into writing some 1700 years ago to form what we call the Talmud.

The Talmud itself says that the laws of the Sabbath are only alluded to by a hairsbreadth in the Written Torah, but rise like mountains in the Oral Law. This body [the Sanhedrin] had a twofold authority. First of all, it was the keeper of the Oral Torah, and was charged with its interpretation. As such, it functioned as the supreme court of Jewish law. Secondly, it had the authority to legislate religious law. Since this authority was derived from the Torah itself, it was as binding as Biblical law. Once legislation was passed, it could only be repealed by the Sanhedrin itself. Such legislation was most often aimed at maintaining the spirit, as well as the letter, of the law.

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

Our Response:

Here, the UCG attempts to link genuine obedience to God with the self-righteous hypocrisy of Jesus' greatest antagonists. In essence, they imply guilt by association. It is interesting that this is exactly the same approach employed by the Protestant world when attempting to rebut many of the beliefs the UCG holds to be true. After all, the Pharisees kept those Old Testament feasts, they didn't eat unclean meats, they tithed, and they wouldn't work on the Sabbath. Protestants then conclude that because Jesus issued a scathing indictment against them, He must have disapproved of everything they did. It is doubtful that the UCG would "buy" this argument. However, they have no problem "selling" it when it suits their purpose.

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

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

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

Despite this fact, the UCG implies that those who think such a practice is wrong are just like the Pharisees. Notice their warning at the conclusion of this point. They assert that the prohibition against buying and selling on the Sabbath is a "Jewish regulation." Never mind that it was God's servant Nehemiah who commanded His people to cease from buying ANYTHING (including food) that was sold on the Sabbath or holy day (Neh. 10:31).

A Final Thought

The argument that God will somehow give His people a "free pass" to dine out on the day He made holy reflects the height of arrogance. In a very real sense, it is pharisaical. It makes the law of God of none effect and reflects a total disregard for His word.

God's instructions are firm. His law is absolute. His word does not require man's "spin," it requires man's obedience. Going outside your spiritual camp to acquire your meals and have them prepared for you on the Sabbath is a practice that God specifically condemns. He even identified it as a test to prove His people's loyalty to Him. The self-righteous will ignore that test. Those who tremble at His word will heed it.

Which best describes you?

Counter Argument

United Church of God
Advisory Committee for Doctrine
April 16, 2007

Dear Mr. Fischer,

Blow the Trumpet states, "The point here is that this issue is not about 'Jewish rules and regulations;' it is about obeying God and honoring His word." Mark 2:25 speaks of David "...when he had need, and was hungry..." There is a difference in "having need, being hungry" and "mere convenience."

Sincerely,

Advisory Committee for Doctrine

Response from Dennis Fischer

Dear Friends,

What happened to David when he ate the shewbread occurred once in his life and here the UCG employs it to justify an on-going practice they advocate. I'm curious, but what if David took the same approach? What if he concluded that because God permitted him to eat the shewbread once, he may now avail himself of it on a regular basis? Does anyone honestly believe God would consent to such a thing?

Additionally, although Jesus specifically stated that David was guiltless when he ate the shewbread, He also stated that the act itself was "unlawful" (Mt. 12: 4), and that it was only David's unique circumstance that exonerated him. This being the case, is the UCG prepared to concede that going to a restaurant on the Sabbath is also unlawful? Our guess is NO.

Furthermore, while these Church leaders defend their SIN as a "need" driven by "being hungry" and not something driven by convenience, this is not true. It is the official position of the United Church of God that if one wishes to make Friday night dinner reservations for himself and his family, two weeks in advance, it would be perfectly acceptable. If you doubt this, ask them. My question is: where is the need? Where is the hunger? Furthermore, what if David advised Ahimelech the priest that he and his men would be in the neighborhood in a few days and was wondering if they could drop by and have some more shewbread? What do you think God's answer would be?

The UCG may attempt to hide behind exceptions to defend their on-going sin, but they do not have God's word in their corner. They must rely on twisting the truth to advance their own lawlessness.

Respectfully,

Dennis Fischer

Counter Argument continued

United Church of God
Advisory Committee for Doctrine
April 16, 2007

Dear Mr. Fischer,

We would consider [your] approach as legalism, similar to the mind-set of the religious leaders in Christ's time, whose constant refrain was what was "lawful." This stands out in stark contrast to how Jesus kept the Sabbath with love and mercy as the foundation of His motivation. This is why he told them, "But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless" (Matthew 12:7).

The context of this statement is significant to the subject of eating out on the Sabbath, because that is EXACTLY what He and His disciples were doing. Their alleged sin was not buying food but picking grain to eat, which the legalistic religious leaders considered to be harvesting. They could not see the difference between harvesting and the simple act of procuring food to eat for one meal on the Sabbath. Similarly, neither can you see the difference between treating the Sabbath as a shopping day and simply purchasing a meal in a restaurant on the Sabbath, That also strikes us as a legalistic mind-set, not unlike that of the religious leaders that condemned Christ.

It is significant that most of the examples of Jesus' conduct on the Sabbath recorded in the New Testament are exceptions to the ideal norm of Sabbath-keeping. We believe that this should be instructive to us as we seek to meet the challenges of keeping the Sabbath in our contemporary culture.

Sincerely,

Advisory Committee for Doctrine

Response from Dennis Fischer

Dear Friends,

Once again the United Church of God attempts to blur the lines between two hugely different acts, only this time they do so by perverting the words of Jesus Himself. Here, they argue that what the disciples did when they picked grain on the Sabbath is "EXACTLY" the same thing they do when eating out in a restaurant on that day. But is this true? Consider the obvious differences: First, noticeably absent from this act was any attempt by Jesus or His disciples to buy the grain. Furthermore, at no time did they try to hire others to pick it for them and prepare it. Additionally, no one was commissioned to serve the grain to them or to clean up after the meal. Despite these glaring differences the UCG declares what the disciples did and what they (the UCG) does, a perfect match.

However, if they want to cling to this idea, I have a suggestion for them. I propose that the UCG doctrinal group invite their wives to "dine out" with them. However, instead of taking them to a restaurant, they take them to a grain field or an orchard to pick a piece of fruit. Do you believe their wives would have the same difficulty telling the difference between this activity and going to a restaurant as they do? I seriously doubt it. When it comes to the UCG and "eating out" on the Sabbath, what they advocate is light years from what the disciples did. Furthermore, Jesus' teaching concerning what was done by His disciples actually contradicts the UCG position on this issue. Consider what really took place and what Jesus taught.

Picking Grain on the Sabbath

When citing the story of Jesus disciples picking grain on the Sabbath, the UCG suggests that what the disciples did may have offended the Pharisees but it did not go contrary to God's law. In other words, what the disciples did was lawful. However, this understanding couldn't be more incorrect. To illustrate this point consider the following.

- Contrary to what the UCG claims, Jesus NEVER picked, nor ate, anything Himself—only His disciples did (Mt. 12:1-2, Lk. 6:1). The question we need to ask ourselves is, Why?—why wouldn't Jesus pick the grain like His disciples? Read on.
- Jesus likened what the disciples did to David eating the shewbread. There, He specifically said that it was unlawful for him (David) to do so (Mt 12:3-4). The point here is that Jesus was not suggesting that what the disciples did was now lawful. He was acknowledging just the opposite. Furthermore, the reason Jesus didn't pick any grain was because to do so would have gone contrary to God's law and the Messiah never offended in one point of the law.
- Jesus' indictment of the Pharisees was that they condemned the "guiltless." The question for us to understand today is why were the disciples considered "guiltless" by the Messiah, if their act was unlawful? It was NOT because of what they did. It was because of why they did it. The disciples were genuinely hungry, just like David and his men. This hunger was clearly unique and what was done to remedy it was unquestionably a once in a lifetime act, not a regular practice like that of the UCG. The point Jesus was making was that just as God showed mercy in the Old Testament, He shows mercy in the New Testament.

How hungry were the disciples?

The actual story of David and the shewbread provides some very keen insight into what may have been taking place when Jesus defended His disciples against the accusation leveled by the Pharisees. It most assuredly makes a powerful statement regarding dining out on the Sabbath. Consider the following.

When David ate the showbread he didn't simply take it and start eating. He first approached the priest and asked for permission to do so—and he had a very good reason for asking. The scriptures tell us that at that time David was being pursued by King Saul who wanted to kill him. His flight required him and his men to hide out in order to avoid capture and certain execution. In all likelihood, their escape was so swift they didn't have time to take provisions with them. Some commentaries suggest that they may have gone 3 days without food when David finally sought out the priest for help. Jamison, Fausset and Brown's commentary describes David's plight as "an emergency." They would go on to write:

"David and his attendants seem to have been lurking in some of the adjoining caves, to elude pursuit, and to have been, consequently, reduced to great extremities of hunger."

In short, they were famished. This was not a simple case of the "munchies." Nor were they looking for a nice place to fellowship. Their need was REAL. And their situation was desperate.

However, even then David sought the permission of the priest before taking the showbread. And although his need was truly GREAT, Ahimelech the priest still inquired of God as to whether he could give David the food. The scriptures tell us that God showed mercy to David and consented. JFB put it this way.

"A dispensation to use the hallowed bread was specially granted by God Himself."

This now brings us to an important question. Why would Jesus invoke the story of David at this time if it didn't parallel, to some degree, what was taking place with the disciples? After all, if the need of the disciples wasn't comparable to that of David and his men the analogy wouldn't work. In other words if what the disciples did was simply a part of a normal Sabbath day then their reason for plucking the grain would have been driven by convenience while David's reason was driven by desperation. It is interesting that the word used to describe the disciples' hunger (Mt. 12:1) was the same used to describe the hunger experienced by David (v. 3). It was also the same word used to describe the Messiah's condition when he fasted for forty days and forty nights in the wilderness (Mt. 4:2).

Based on Jesus' invocation of the story of David and the shewbread, it is reasonable to conclude that what the disciples were experiencing was truly unique. This was not a typical Sabbath in which these men were simply acquiring a normal meal. These men were genuinely hungry, perhaps even famished. You don't know why, but like David they must have had a very good reason for having not eaten. As a result they inquired of the Messiah to see if they could gather a small amount of grain to eat. Jesus consented.

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

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

Jesus was that God.

This is why He said, "For the Son of man is **Lord** even of the Sabbath day"

The bottom line is this. God's judgment of David as well as His judgment of the apostles was based on a unique circumstance at a unique time. For the United Church of God to hold this example as proof that God's people may now make plans to pay Sabbath-breakers to prepare their meals on holy time and also be held guiltless is disgraceful. In a very real sense such a belief turns the grace of God into license. In other words, it rejects the true meaning of the words "I desire mercy and not sacrifice," and represents them to mean "If you can acquire your Sabbath food once, because of a genuine need, then I can do it on occasion because of the pleasure I derive from it."

It is interesting that in a recent sermon defending Dining out, a long standing UCG pastor actually referred to this practice as a "treat." Here is my question.

Do you think that is why David ate the shewbread?

Or, why the disciples picked grain?

Respectfully,

Dennis Fischer

Counter Argument continued

United Church of God
Advisory Committee for Doctrine
April 16, 2007

Dear Mr. Fischer,

On Page 11 of the Blow the Trumpet paper it states:

"What the UCG fails to understand when advancing its particular point is that those who reject the practice of dining out on the Sabbath are not taking their lead from the Pharisees, but rather from God Almighty. It was He who specifically forbade His people from acquiring their daily meals on the Sabbath, preparing their meals on the Sabbath, and from going outside their community of faith to obtain their meals on the Sabbath (See Ex. 16). Furthermore, God was so emphatic when giving these instructions that He actually said that failure to comply was proof that His people rejected Him and His law (verse 4)"

While one might conclude general principles of Sabbath-keeping from Exodus 16, we do not consider every specific instruction to the Israelites as binding upon us today. This was clearly a unique incident that has never been duplicated before or since. As you stated, God miraculously provided manna with explicit instructions as a test of obedience. The instruction to gather twice as much on the sixth day and none on the seventh can certainly teach the principle of doing preparatory work on the sixth day in order to avoid unnecessary work on the Sabbath. However, to conclude that God's instructions to the Israelites on this unique occasion represent an explicit command to all generations of God's people not to procure or prepare food on the Sabbath is an unprovable extrapolation.

You ask, "Why would God allow His people to procure ANY food on His Sabbath when He actually prohibited the children of Israel from doing such a thing when they wandered in the Sinai desert (Ex, 16:16-25)?" **The simple answer is that God does not deposit manna on our property six days a week.**

Sincerely,

Advisory Committee for Doctrine

Response from Dennis Fischer

Dear Friends,

What the UCG asserts in this section of their letter shows utter contempt for God as a provider. The fact that He no longer rains down manna does not mean He no longer provides the very food we eat. In essence what these men are saying is "God, if you want us to not acquire or prepare our food on your Sabbath, then you need to keep providing us with manna. Otherwise, we have no obligation to obey you in this matter." Can you imagine the audacity of such a statement?

Here are some questions for the UCG doctrinal team to consider.

- When God stopped providing manna, were the Israelites then permitted to acquire their meals on the Sabbath just like you?
- When God stopped providing manna, were the Israelites then free to cook their Sabbath meals just like you?
- When God stopped providing manna, were the Israelites then free to seek out unbelievers outside their gate on the Sabbath and pay them to labor on their behalf just like you?

God's command regarding the acquisition and preparation of food on the Sabbath is so clear that only the defiant would conclude otherwise. Furthermore, when the United Church of God refers to **Blow the Trumpet's** conclusion concerning Exodus 16 as "an unprovable extrapolation," they are relying on a patent rejection of the obvious. I encourage everyone to read this chapter to their children and ask them how it can be applied today.

The idea that any minister of Jesus Christ can promote the argument of "No manna, no deal" as proof that they no longer have to obey God Almighty is inconceivable to me, but that is precisely what the UCG is saying.

Respectfully,

Dennis Fischer

P.S. Where in scripture does it say that when the manna ceased, the Israelites were free to gather food on the Sabbath, as you claim?

Counter Argument continued

United Church of God
Advisory Committee for Doctrine
April 16, 2007

Dear Mr. Fischer,

Every single detail in a given account does not always set a permanent precedent for festival observance. We must consider everything for the situation under consideration. Consider the long-term ramifications of Exodus 12:16:

"On the first day there shall be a holy convocation, and on the seventh day there shall be a holy convocation for you. No manner of work shall

be done on them; but that which everyone must eat that only may be prepared by you."

God did not instruct them to prepare their food the day before these annual Sabbaths, e.g. "for that Sabbath was a high day" (John 19:31). What happened when Passover (or another festival) occurred on the Sabbath? Did they prepare the Passover lamb on the day before, the 13th of Nisan, or skip preparing it altogether? Even the Jewish Talmud, despite its extremes, allowed for food preparation on annual Sabbaths. The Church believes that an over-Sabbath likely occurred in Joshua 5:10, "Now the children of Israel...kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight." This meal would have been prepared on the Sabbath, two days before the manna ceased (verse 12).

The food preparation in Exodus 12 was limited to "that which everyone must eat," i.e., for that day. Likewise, those who eat in restaurants are just eating for the benefit of that day.

They are not (grocery) shopping on the Sabbath, which is the context of Nehemiah's prohibitions. Sabbath-keeping is obviously permanent, yet the same cannot be said about every detail of Exodus 16.

Sincerely,

Advisory Committee for Doctrine

Response from Dennis Fischer

Dear Friends,

Once again the United Church of God's doctrinal group attempts to blur the lines between a practice the scriptures permit and the SIN they commit. This time it centers around meal preparation on high days. According to the UCG, because God permits meals to be prepared on the annual holy days, He must also approve of His people seeking out unbelievers to prepare them. Furthermore, they contend that if the Almighty allows food to be prepared on His annual Sabbaths, He must also approve of it being done on His weekly Sabbath.

They present this phase of their argument using some of the best slight-of-hand in this debate. However, in the interest of fairness let's examine what God is really saying about labor on His Sabbath and holy days. First, notice His exact words with respect to His high days. Here is what he says regarding the Days of Unleavened Bread.

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

Here, God is **NOT** telling His people that others may be hired to prepare their food on His high days, He is telling them that they may prepare their own food. Notice that He says these meals may "only be prepared by YOU." However, when it came to the weekly Sabbath food preparation was strictly forbidden (Ex. 16:23). This truth is also born out when God explains the timing as well as certain rules pertaining to His Holy convocations—including the Sabbath.

Regarding Servile Work

In Leviticus 23 the Almighty identifies His Sabbath and all seven of His annual assemblies. When doing so His prohibition against work on the weekly Sabbath and the Day of Atonement are unique. In each

case God prohibits ALL WORK. On the remaining holy days He says no "servile work" may be done. But why make this distinction? God did so because on the remaining holy days He did permit His people to prepare their own meals—"that only may be done of you." The scriptures don't say why God made this provision, but it is reasonable to conclude that the Almighty anticipated that his annual festivals would require great family pilgrimages involving significant travel. However, even though this was the case, He made no such provision for the weekly Sabbath. The steadfast on that day was NO WORK (Ex. 20:10, 31:15-16, Lev. 23:3).

What is most disappointing about this particular UCG argument is that these Church leaders know full well that the Almighty makes a very clear distinction between labor on the weekly Sabbath and labor on the annual holy days. Sadly, they turn a blind eye to this fact because they would rather indulge their own appetite than to honestly represent God's word and correct His children. In essence, these ministers are trying to persuade you to believe that God not only permits His people to prepare their own meals on the Sabbath, which is totally false, but that they can even seek out Sabbath-breakers and pay them to prepare those meals for them. Do you really believe this is what God intended the 4th commandment to say?

Brethren, the idea that the Creator of heaven and earth somehow permits food to be prepared by anybody on the weekly Sabbath is flat out wrong on so many levels.

- First, it is a claim that goes totally contrary to God's Sabbath law as expressed in the Ten Commandments—a law that says you shall not do ANY work.
- Secondly, it is a claim that goes totally contrary to God's Sabbath covenant as expressed in Exodus 31—a covenant that forbids ANY work.
- Furthermore, it is a claim that goes totally contrary to God's instructions concerning His Sabbath as a holy convocation as expressed in Leviticus 23—instructions that declare, "you shall do NO work."

Here is something to consider. If God wanted to limit His prohibition against work on the weekly Sabbath to "servile work," as He did with His holy days, you can bet that He would have said so. It's not as if He didn't know how to say "servile." But He said no such thing. And the scriptures bear this out.

The bottom line is this. The UCG and its leadership may claim that God's winks at what takes place in restaurants every Sabbath all they want, but they do not have the force of scripture on their side. In truth, you may read the Bible from page 1 to the back cover and not find a single example of any work, servile or otherwise, on the weekly Sabbath referred to as anything but UNLAWFUL.

Respectfully,

Dennis Fischer

Counter Argument continued

United Church of God
Advisory Committee for Doctrine
April 16, 2007

Dear Mr. Fischer,

The command "let no man go out of his place" (Exodus 16:29) must also be understood in the proper context. The Blow the Trumpet paper above interprets this qualifier as not

"going outside of their community of faith." Your interpretation of the command not to "go out of his place" on the Sabbath as going outside your spiritual camp to acquire your meals and have them prepared for you on the Sabbath is a practice that God specifically forbade-represents a gigantic leap of logic that is unproven and unprovable.

But in Exodus 16 the entire camp of over 2 million Israelites was their "community of faith." Yet those who went out for food in Exodus 16 were still within the camp of Israel. Therefore they probably were to remain in their individual tents or dwelling places on the Sabbath. Either way, we do not consider that this instruction applies to us today. If we followed this literally, we could not even go to Church. The original instructions certainly did not mean their "spiritual camp." Nor can we prove that it means that today.

The paper's "community of faith" interpretation is evidently due to the command for the holy convocation, as explained on page 40. This sounds like human reasoning in order to somehow keep everyone in "his place" on the Sabbath. But the command for the "holy convocation" was not given until Leviticus 23, about a year after Exodus 16. Therefore, it's plausible to conclude that they could not go out of their dwelling places in Exodus 16 but were permitted to do so later.

Similarly, on Passover it says, "And none of you shall go out of the door of his house until morning" (Exodus 12:22). Yet Jesus Christ and the disciples went out during the night of Passover to the garden of Gethsemane where Jesus was arrested.

Note from Blow the Trumpet

Exodus 12:22 pertained to the night the death angel would kill all the firstborn of those who were not under the blood of the lamb. There is nothing to suggest that this was an ongoing command as the UCG implies.

UCG Continued

The Blow the Trumpet paper also notes that Jesus dined "at the homes of others on the Sabbath." However, not only was Jesus here outside of His place, He ate with those who were not part of the community of believers, ie. "lawyers and Pharisees" (Luke 14:3). Likewise, we do not believe that it's a sin to eat with fellow believers in a restaurant while surrounded by unbelievers. We also do not believe that eating an occasional meal in a restaurant on the Sabbath constitutes going back "into the world" or "spiritual Egypt" as you suggest.

Sincerely,

Advisory Committee for Doctrine

Response from Dennis Fischer

Dear Friends,

Once again, in an effort to justify their defiance of God's Sabbath law, the UCG attempts to blur the lines between two behaviors that are vastly different. This time they liken the scribes and Pharisees Jesus ate with on the Sabbath to restaurant personnel or other patrons. After all, according to these COG leaders, both are outside the community of faith. Never mind that Jesus Himself said the Pharisees sit in

Moses' seat (Mt. 23:2). I'm just curious, do you think he would say that about a waiter at a restaurant?

Now for Some Honesty

The religious leaders the Messiah ate with on the Sabbath were a part of synagogue life. To suggest that He saw them as something other than that is a stretch, even for the United Church of God. What Jesus did was tantamount to me dining at the home of the UCG doctrinal group on the Sabbath.

It is interesting that in this phase of their argument, these ministers also attempt to prove that Jesus behaved in a way that went contrary to God's law as recorded in Exodus 16—by going outside his place on the Sabbath. They then reason that if Jesus can go contrary to the law so can they.

However, we at ***Blow the Trumpet*** believe that if Jesus went contrary to the law, as the UCG suggests, then we would have no Savior. Fortunately, that didn't happen. In truth, Jesus' behavior illustrates what God's word really means by "your place." "Your place" means "where you belong." The point here is that God did not want the Israelites to go out to gather their food on the Sabbath. That was not their place. Assembling on the Sabbath and Holy days was their place. Sharing a meal with their neighbor was their place. This was true in the time of Moses, it was true in Jesus' day, and it is still true today. As much as the UCG wants to show Jesus' behavior as at odds with God's law, we see it as TOTALLY compatible. Even the Pharisees never challenged Him on this.

The bottom line is this. Jesus was well within "His place" when he dined at the homes of the religious leaders of His day. However, when the UCG seeks out Sabbath-breakers and pays them to prepare their meals on holy time, **they are not!** These two behaviors are not remotely similar with respect to God's Sabbath law.

Additionally, it is predictable that the UCG would not believe that the restaurant they patronize on the Sabbath is a part of the "world" or "spiritual Egypt." This is because to do so would expose their behavior for what it really is—the solicitation of SIN. With that said, I have a question for them:

Where do you believe God thinks they are?

Respectfully,

Dennis Fischer

The United Church of God vs A Sabbath Test

Argument III “They’re Not Our Servants”

In an attempt to justify purchasing the services of restaurant personnel on God's Sabbath, the United Church of God employs what is unquestionably the most popular argument in this debate. They claim that those who labor in restaurants are not THEIR servants but rather the servants of someone else. Therefore, because the commandment only mentions "your servant," God must approve of His people seeking out unbelievers who profane His Sabbath as well as paying them for the fruit of this sacrilege. In other words, the actual meaning of the fourth commandment in the eyes of the UCG doctrinal committee would be something like this:

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shall you labor and do all your work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God: in it you shall not do any work. You nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your manservant, nor your maidservant. *However, you may compel someone else's manservant or maidservant to labor on your behalf, provided they are not under your direct authority or responsibility and would be working anyway* (Ex. 20:8-10 revised)

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

United Church of God:

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

Are they working for you?

The answer to both questions is "no." The waitresses, waiters, cooks, etc., in a restaurant are not your servants. They do not live in your household. This was the principle given in Exodus. Those who live under your roof or are under your control were not to work on the Sabbath. This cannot be applied to a waitress unless you have control over her and can force her not to work.

Our Response:

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

Furthermore, what the United Church of God asserts as the "principle given in Exodus" is totally UNTRUE! Contrary to their claim, God's purpose when giving the fourth commandment was not to define who could work on the Sabbath and who couldn't. When the Almighty was presenting this part of the Decalogue He was not crafting some elaborate labor code. He was declaring in no uncertain terms that the Sabbath is HOLY and that work profanes this day no matter who performs it. The authors of A

Sabbath Test understand this truth. Here is their assessment of God's purpose when giving this command.

A Sabbath Test

God first addressed the issue of work on the Sabbath when He made the seventh day. At that time, the Great Creator of heaven and earth rested from His labor (Gen. 2:2-3). Later, when giving the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, God made reference to this rest. Through the Sabbath commandment, God is declaring that our lives should be like His. Labor should not be a part of this day – directly or indirectly.

Additionally, God knew that there were only two broad sources of labor – the work you perform, and the work that is performed for you. The fourth commandment addresses both types. First, "you shall not do any work" (Ex. 20:10). That addresses your part. Secondly, no one who comes into your sphere of influence shall be compelled to labor on your behalf. This includes family, servants, strangers, and even livestock (same verse). That part addresses everybody else His people would come in contact with on the Sabbath. Everyone else on earth was outside the camp and God had already forbidden His people from going outside the camp on this day (Ex. 16:29).

Surprisingly, there are many in God's Church today who believe the fourth commandment is limited in scope. In other words, although it prohibits His people from engaging in labor, it does not prohibit them from orchestrating the labor of others for their benefit. As a result of this thinking, many contend that when God gave His law regarding the Sabbath, He intentionally made provisions for His people to be the beneficiary of the labor of others.

Today, all too many in God's Church advance an endless stream of technical arguments in an attempt to circumvent God's law. But in the final analysis, God's word is clear. When He told his people they were not to work on the Sabbath, He was declaring that labor profanes the day He made HOLY! Even God Himself ceased from His labor on this day. Does anyone sincerely believe He would avail Himself of the labor of someone else?

The point God was making when He uttered the fourth commandment was that Israel was not to be a party to profane work in any way, shape, or form on this day unless it specifically related to a Levitical duty (Mt. 12:1-5). Going to a restaurant on the Sabbath is not such a duty. It is a pleasure that God's law prohibits (Isa. 58:13). (*A Sabbath Test*, Appendix I)

Despite this wonderful truth, the UCG doctrinal committee offered more excuses in defense of dining out on the Sabbath. According to this body of Biblical thinkers there are times when God's people today should even allow those living in their home to labor on the Sabbath. What they fail to do is take their hypothetical question to its logical end. Notice what they write.

United Church of God Continued:

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

Our Response:

These are interesting questions. What they are saying in effect is: Can a true believer today require those living in his home to worship the true God? The answer is: Of course not. Why?—because the worship of the true God must be voluntary. It cannot be forced on anyone.

But here are some questions the UCG doesn't ask: Can a true believer prevent those under his roof from offending his God? For example: What if your adult son brought his girlfriend home to sleep with him? What if he brought drugs into your home, or cigarettes? Could you as the homeowner prohibit such things? What if he wanted to put up Christmas lights or bring a tree into the house? Could you say "no"? The answer to these questions should be obvious. The believer would not only have the right but the obligation to prevent such behaviors. This is not cramming your faith down someone else's throat. It is preserving the spiritual integrity of your home. It is our belief that every Christian has a moral obligation to do just that.

However, there is another hypothetical that is even more applicable to the issue at hand. What if your adult son wanted to wash your car or mow your lawn on the Sabbath? What if he wanted to labor FOR YOUR BENEFIT during this holy time? Should you consent, knowing he doesn't worship your God anyway? Or, once again, should you defend the spiritual integrity of your home and forbid it?

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

Whose Servants are They?

Perhaps the greatest error in UCG's thinking is in claiming whom the waiters and waitresses, as well as other restaurant workers, serve. Most think they serve restaurant managers and owners. But is this true? At this point, it is important to understand that those who labor in restaurants on the Sabbath are SINNING! That's RIGHT, it is a SIN. It may look innocent enough, but looks can be deceiving. God calls labor on His Sabbath a MORTAL SIN (Ex. 31:15). This being the case, those who work on the Sabbath are actually SLAVES to SIN! The apostle Paul understood this profound truth. Notice what he said in a letter written to the Church at Rome.

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

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

But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shall not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor your ox, nor your ass, nor any of your cattle, nor the stranger that is within your gates; that your manservant and your maidservant may rest as well as you.

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

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

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 served the same SLAVE MASTER the world serves today.

However, our calling reveals that a Great Deliverer has again rescued His people from a world that does not know Him or His way (Eph. 2:1-5). For this reason, God’s people today should never compel the unbeliever (a slave in Egypt) to work on their behalf on the Sabbath. We must refrain from this practice because we were miraculously delivered from this very practice ourselves. Remember, YOU were once a SLAVE in Egypt.

With this in mind, God’s people must understand that their Great Deliverer would no more permit His people today to return to this world and avail themselves of its sin than He would permit the Israelites of yesterday to return to Egypt and avail themselves of their sin. As much as the UCG 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—a world that tramples on this great day. 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.

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 because they are now FREE!

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.”

A Final Thought

God’s plan is that all mankind will ultimately be free from the tyranny of ignorance and sin. The Sabbath pictures that freedom. It is not by accident that when giving the fourth commandment, God reminded His people that they were once slaves in Egypt (Dt. 5:15). It is for this very reason that every Sabbath God’s people are to be liberators. In other words, they are to declare everyone they come in contact with "FREE!" Nowhere in the commandment does it remotely hint that God condones of His people going back into “Egypt” to avail themselves of the very sin they were once a part of (Dt. 5:14-15). The Sabbath is about liberty, not slavery.

Those who work in restaurants and are ignorant of God's law may not understand why the faithful would be so considerate of them by not compelling them to labor for their benefit on the Sabbath. But God's people do understand. By releasing the unbeliever from labor on the Sabbath and holy day, they are acting out what their King will ultimately do when He returns to earth.

They declare all the slaves FREE!

Counter Argument

United Church of God
Advisory Committee for Doctrine
April 16, 2007

Dear Mr. Fischer,

Blow the Trumpet says:

"The point God was making when He uttered the fourth commandment was that Israel was not to be a party to profane work in any way, shape, or form on this day unless it specifically related to a Levitical duty (Mt. 12:1-5). Going to a restaurant on the Sabbath is not such a duty. It is a pleasure that God's law prohibits."

Leading the ox from its stall to water on Sabbath is work (Luke 13:15) and pulling an ox from a ditch on Sabbath is work (Luke 14:5). Circumcision, which involves someone working, was allowed on Sabbath (John 7:22). God allows for unavoidable emergencies. Our points should not be twisted to include sins, such as adultery, when we are specifically talking about the Sabbath.

Sincerely,

Advisory Committee for Doctrine

Response from Dennis Fischer

Dear Friends,

We are fully aware that God has made provisions for Sabbath labor under certain conditions such as those the UCG enumerates. However, working in a restaurant is not one of them. Additionally, we are very confident that the UCG leadership making reservations for their families to dine out at a nice bistro on a Friday evening is not what Jesus had in mind when giving the lesson of an ox in a ditch. However, despite this fact, they don't hesitate to make those reservations.

With respect to the UCG's accusation that **Blow the Trumpet** is guilty of "twisting their points," it is actually they who are guilty of this very thing. Furthermore, they are making a very subtle misdirection with this argument. In it, they conveniently neglected to say what they would do if an unbelieving adult child living at home, wanted to work for their benefit (e.g. mow their lawn or wash their car) on the Sabbath. My guess is that they thought long and hard on this and concluded that whatever answer they offered would contradict their point—so they simply stood down on this one. In other words, if they admitted they would reject their child's offer, even though they can't force Sabbath observance on him,

then why would they claim that they may seek out the services of a restaurant on the grounds that they can't force Sabbath observance on them?

On the other hand, if they said they would accept their unbelieving child's offer, how can they reconcile that with the fourth commandment which prohibits family members as well as unbelieving "strangers" from working on God's Sabbath?

Respectfully,

Dennis Fischer

Counter Argument continued

United Church of God
Advisory Committee for Doctrine
April 16, 2007

Dear Mr. Fischer,

Matthew 12:15 [sic] is not restricted to a "Levitical duty." These heads of grain were plucked by "His disciples," not the Levitical priesthood. Their reason, SIMPLE HUNGER, had nothing to do with Levitical duties. Yet the disciples did this as if it were a norm under these circumstances. Deuteronomy 23:25 says, "When you walk along a path in someone else's grainfield, you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not use a sickle."

Should the disciples have prepared twice as much food on Friday to avoid this scenario? Should Jesus have warned them? In Exodus 16, would Israelites have been permitted to go out and pluck heads of grain on the Sabbath? Matthew 12 shows the potential shortsightedness of such questions. Were this not permissible on the Sabbath, Jesus would have brought it to their attention.

The Pharisees made the mistake of thinking that they had higher standards of Sabbath keeping simply because they were more strict. There's a difference between eating enough for a meal and reaping food to cover multiple days. Similarly, there's a difference between eating a meal in a restaurant and grocery shopping.

Sincerely,

Advisory Committee for Doctrine

Response from Dennis Fischer

Dear Friends,

In all due respect to the United Church of God, their analysis of what took place when the disciples picked grain on the Sabbath is not supported by the facts. In truth, the Messiah's own words contradict their understanding. First, consider what the UCG is contending in this point. They claim that it did not go contrary to God's law to pick a small amount of grain on the Sabbath. Therefore, the disciples did it without a second thought. Here are their exact words.

"Yet the disciples did this as if it were a norm under these circumstances."

However, that is NOT what Jesus said. The Messiah specifically stated that the disciples were "guiltless," not because of what they did, but because they were given special dispensation this one time for doing it. In truth, the Messiah actually acknowledged that God's law HAD BEEN VIOLATED. Notice that He specifically likened what they did to David eating the shewbread and to the Sabbath labor of the Levites. In both cases He readily acknowledged those acts were "unlawful." It makes no sense for Him to cite these examples if what the disciples did was not unlawful as well.

At this point it is important to understand that the thing that made the disciples "guiltless" is the same thing that made David and the Levites guiltless. In the case of these Old Testament examples each had been given specific permission from God to do what the law prohibited. With respect to David, he actually sought permission from the priest to take the bread, and the priest sought permission from God. It is my personal opinion that the disciples also asked Jesus for permission to pick the grain because they too knew it was UNLAWFUL.

Even the UCG's invocation of Deuteronomy 23 is a distortion of the Biblical record. There is nothing that even remotely hints that verse 25 applies to the Sabbath. On the contrary, Jesus' response to the Pharisees proves just the opposite. If what the disciples did was lawful why wouldn't Jesus simply defend them on legal grounds? Furthermore, who honestly believes that the Pharisees were unaware of the provision in the Torah for gleaning on another man's field?

At this point it is interesting to note that during this confrontation Jesus NEVER challenged the Pharisee's understanding of the Law, but rather their understanding of mercy. In truth, MERCY was the foundation on which He defended His men. Clearly, this entire pericope addresses a unique event. What it is NOT is an invitation to the UCG to seek out Sabbath breakers and purchase their labor on holy time.

More Desperation

The UCG also posed some questions they feel are germane to their argument. I would like to address them at this time.

- **Question 1:** In Exodus 16, would Israelites have been permitted to go out and pluck heads of grain on the Sabbath?

Answer: The simple answer is NO! This is because their Sabbath food had been provided on the sixth day. Furthermore, God had given them specific instructions concerning its acquisition and preparation.

However, if something totally beyond their control prevented some of them from having access to their food supply through no fault of their own, I am confident that God would accommodate their special circumstance. This is what unquestionably took place with David and the shewbread as well as the disciples in the grain field. In both these cases Jesus' accommodation was a once in a lifetime act.

Turning Grace into License

What the UCG is attempting to do with this argument is exploit God's mercy into an invitation for them to seek out Sabbath breakers to pick the grain, prepare it with special seasonings and some vegetables on the side, and serve it with a nice bottle of wine. Furthermore, they want to repeat this practice every month or so. This would be tantamount to the disciples asking the Messiah, "Why don't we go out to some nearby fields today? We understand there are some unbelievers there who have a great recipe for making special cakes that are just out of this world." Or, "Why don't we go out to lunch after services. There is a great little Italian restaurant in town."

What the disciples did and what the UCG wants to do aren't in the same universe. Despite this fact, these long time COG leaders pursue their sin as if it was perfectly analogous to what took place when the Messiah extended mercy to those who were greatly in need of it.

~ ~ ~

- **Question 2:** Should Jesus have warned [the disciples] not to pick the grain?

Answer: I have absolutely no doubt that the disciples were fully aware of God's prohibition against gleaning on the Sabbath, just as I have no doubt that David knew that it was unlawful to take the shewbread. The only way they could satisfy their unique problem was to go straight to God for help. I would bet everything that in both cases they did just that.

~ ~ ~

- **Question 3:** Should the disciples have prepared twice as much food on Friday to avoid this scenario?

Answer: If the UCG is suggesting that this event proves that God no longer requires His people to prepare their Sabbath meals on Friday, they are greatly mistaken. Everything about this act reveals that it was an exception to the rule, not a new application of Sabbath observance. Clearly Jesus did not hold the disciples negligent in this matter. However, this only proves that something TOTALLY beyond their control either prevented them from preparing their Sabbath meals the day before, or, have access to the food they had prepared. Whatever the case, it is clear that Jesus' mercy was appropriate, and He graciously extended it.

However, if the disciples persisted in picking their Sabbath meals on a regular basis, I am confident Jesus' approach would have been much different. God is merciful. But His mercy is not to be exploited, nor is He one to be mocked. What the UCG teaches in their advocacy of dining out on the Sabbath does both.

Creating an Artificial Distinction

At the conclusion of this part of their letter, the UCG makes a statement that they believe supports their teaching regarding this sin. They contend that the volume of the meal acquired and the degree of labor involved in its preparation is what determines its acceptability with God. Here is how they express this.

"There's a difference between eating enough for a meal and reaping food to cover multiple days. Similarly, there's a difference between eating a meal in a restaurant and grocery shopping."

My Response:

There is also a difference between playing golf all day on the Sabbath and simply going to the driving range for an hour and hitting a bucket of balls. However, despite their differences, both are sins, as is dining out on the Sabbath. This issue is NOT about degrees as the UCG suggests. It is about an act that contradicts God Sabbath law, regardless of the degree. Furthermore, when it comes to acquiring your Sabbath meals, God has also spoken forcefully. Exodus 16 addresses that very thing—and once again the ALMIGHTY proclaims an emphatic "NO!"

The UCG may try to blur the lines in this issue, but there is a HUGE difference between Jesus' giving His disciples permission to pick a small handful of grain **once in their life** on the Sabbath and the UCG's on-going practice of paying Sabbath-breakers to acquire their meals, prepare their meals, and clean up

after the meal is finished. What this prominent COG group advocates was NEVER done by Jesus, the disciples, or any other servants of God throughout the Bible.

Respectfully,

Dennis Fischer

Counter Argument continued

United Church of God
Advisory Committee for Doctrine
April 16, 2007

Dear Mr. Fischer,

The main point that you glean from the Fourth Commandment, as stated in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, is that working on the Sabbath is prohibited for God's people and that "no one who comes into your sphere of influence shall be compelled to labor on your behalf," including family, servants, strangers and even livestock. You believe that this commandment requires the head of the household to compel all of these people (and even livestock) who are "within our sphere of influence" to keep the Sabbath. So you conclude that when we eat out on the Sabbath, we are causing restaurant workers (whom you deem to be working for us and thus "within our sphere of influence") to break the Sabbath.

Sincerely,

Advisory Committee for Doctrine

Response from Dennis Fischer

Dear Friends,

Although the UCG insists that **Blow the Trumpet** believes in compelling all who are in our sphere of influence to keep the Sabbath, this is NOT TRUE. It is the official position of **Blow the Trumpet** as well as the authors of *A Sabbath Test* that God's people are not to compel others to do that which goes contrary to the Sabbath. In other words, although we cannot force Sabbath observance on anyone, we will not contribute to others profaning this day. The UCG on the other hand argue that if you lack the capacity to impose Sabbath observance it doesn't matter if you solicit that which violates the command.

With respect to the UCG's intimation that restaurant personnel don't labor for the benefit of those who seek out their services, I can only say that it is a sad thing to see the leaders of God's Church so committed to sin that they reject what is patently obvious. To suggest that restaurant personnel are not laboring on behalf of their customers reflects a level of denial that is totally dishonest. One of the great pleasures of dining out on the Sabbath, or any other time, is that instead of you working to prepare your own meal someone else works to prepare and serve it to you. Despite this obvious fact, the UCG claims that no one is working on their behalf. To me this argument reaches the height of silliness, but the UCG proclaims it with great pride. Why?—because if they don't make this assertion they know that what they advocate would contradict God's law. Their remedy is simply to redefine the role restaurants perform as beyond the scope of the fourth commandment. Therefore, in their mind, they (the UCG) may now seek out such labor and still "obey" God.

Throughout their doctrinal paper as well as their letter to me, the UCG insists that they would shut down restaurants on the Sabbath if they could—they simply don't have the authority. Well, here is a question for them. If they had the authority to reduce a restaurant's customer base by 90 per cent every Sabbath, would they? What about 80 percent or 70 percent? What about 60, 50 or 40 percent? What about 30, 20, 10, or 5 percent? Finally, what if they could only reduce a restaurant's customer base by one person, would they? Our guess is no—not because they believe that the sin taking place can't be diminished by fewer customers, but because they are that "one person." Therefore, they argue semantics in order to protect their right to partake of the sin they seek out and pay for. Consider just some of the arguments they promote when justifying this behavior.

The UCG claims:

- Those who work in restaurants on the Sabbath are not in the world
- A restaurant laboring on the Sabbath is not in spiritual Egypt
- Those who labor on the Sabbath are not in bondage
- People who work in a restaurant are not working for you
- Restaurant personnel are not within your sphere of influence
- You are powerless to prevent them from laboring for your benefit
- Nehemiah never told His people to not buy their daily meals on the Sabbath
- Exodus 16: is irrelevant because God doesn't provide mamma anymore

These are just a few of the arguments advanced by the UCG in defiance of God and His great Sabbath law. Despite the clear meaning in the scriptures regarding proper Sabbath observance, the UCG redefines God's word to accommodate their sin. To me it is clear that their judgment in this issue cannot be trusted. They have been so blinded by their own appetite that they deny the obvious and embrace the ridiculous.

Respectfully,

Dennis Fischer

Counter Argument continued

United Church of God
Advisory Committee for Doctrine
April 16, 2007

Dear Mr. Fischer,

Careful reading of the Sabbath commandment reveals that the fundamental point is to "remember the Sabbath to keep it holy." Not working on the Sabbath is one way of acknowledging one's reverence for the Sabbath and what it means.

People outside the Church who work on the Sabbath lack that understanding and conviction and therefore do not keep the Sabbath holy, whether they are working or not.

So we do not cause them to sin by preparing or serving a meal on the Sabbath. Their sin is based on their lack of understanding and conviction of the need to recognize the Sabbath as a holy day. Instead they consider it as simply another day, common and profane rather than holy. So we do not cause them to break the Sabbath by preparing or serving a meal.

You state,

"...They trespass against this wonderful law every time they comply with orders given to them by their patrons, including God's people."

Preparing and/or serving one more or one less meal does not increase or decrease their sin. In that sense there are no degrees of keeping or breaking the Sabbath. Nor does our eating or not eating there on the Sabbath have any effect on their lack of understanding and commitment regarding the Sabbath.

Sincerely,

Advisory Committee for Doctrine

Response from Dennis Fischer

Dear Friends,

Notice what the UCG is advocating. They claim that because those who profane the Sabbath by working in restaurants don't know any better, God's people are now free to exploit this ignorance for their own Sabbath pleasure. Personally, I believe this particular wisdom reveals that the restaurant worker is not the only one in ignorance.

Additionally, the UCG's argument of "degrees" is classic denial. In truth, these Church leaders are as complicit in the sin of restaurant workers as they would be in purchasing merchandise they knew was stolen. Even though the thief would sell his "take" to someone else does not absolve these Church leaders of anything. The bottom line is this. Those who dine out on the Sabbath are, of their own free will, seeking out the sin of those who profane God's law. If they think they bear no responsibility in the very act they are soliciting they are just fooling themselves.

Finally, although the UCG asserts that the primary focus of the fourth commandment is to "keep the Sabbath holy," their behavior says just the opposite. The word "keep" means to preserve something in the state it was given. When God created the Sabbath, as well as when He gave the fourth commandment, He never intended profane labor to be performed on it. Today, the UCG actually considers such sin as necessary in our modern world. Furthermore, they teach that God approves of His people seeking out Sabbath-breakers and paying them for the fruit of their sin. I am just curious, but how does that "keep (preserve) the Sabbath holy"?

Respectfully,

Dennis Fischer

Counter Argument continued

United Church of God
Advisory Committee for Doctrine
April 16, 2007

Dear Mr. Fischer,

We also believe that you are missing the point of the reference to Israel's past slavery in Egypt [in the fourth commandment]. We understand this to mean that Israelites need to allow family members, servants and even animals the opportunity to rest on the Sabbath, realizing what it was like in Egypt when they as slaves were not allowed that opportunity. So we do not agree with your conclusion that Sabbath breaking as a form of spiritual slavery is the point of this passage.

Note from Blow the Trumpet

It is interesting that the fourth commandment mentions their entire slavery, not just their inability to rest on the Sabbath as the UCG claims. God did not simply deliver them out of one day of oppression. He completely liberated them from all the bondage they were subjected to.

In the first commandment, the Almighty referred to Egypt as the "house of bondage." The Sabbath was, and is a symbol of deliverance from that bondage and Israel's entrance into FREEDOM. This wonderful command is far greater in scope than the UCG is willing to acknowledge. And until they do, they will persist in their sin.

UCG continued:

We do not understand this passage as a command to heads of household to compel family members, visitors or others who may be "within our sphere of influence" to keep the Sabbath. While it may be possible to prevent someone from working on the Sabbath, it is certainly not possible to force someone to consider the Sabbath holy. Sabbath-keepers can make household rules, especially for children living at home, to prevent an atmosphere not conducive to the Sabbath; but we do not believe that God expects us to force anyone else to keep the Sabbath.

Note from Blow the Trumpet

Although the UCG repeatedly suggests that ***Blow the Trumpet*** believes God's people are to force Sabbath observance on others, this is NOT TRUE. At no time do we remotely intimate such a thing.

UCG continued:

We do not think that "refusing to allow" someone to labor on the Sabbath is "proclaiming a great hope" to "all who are enslaved" to be "FREE." In fact the very terminology of "refusing to allow" is contradictory to the concept of freedom. True freedom allows for individuals to make their own choices, even if they are wrong, God grants all of us that kind of freedom. We believe in allowing that freedom to fellow human beings as well.

Furthermore, not eating out on the Sabbath does not release the unbeliever from labor on the Sabbath." They will continue to work, whether we eat a meal there or not.

Sincerely,

Advisory Committee for Doctrine

Response from Dennis Fischer

Dear Friends,

Although the UCG refers to it as "contradictory to the concept of freedom," the position of **Blow the Trumpet** is one of the most powerful declarations of hope ever published in this era of the Church. For the UCG to reject it reflects a calloused indifference toward those who are currently enslaved by the god of this world. My question for you is this: What part of our position do you think offends God's desire to free mankind from slavery? Although our statement appears earlier, I have placed it here as well. Please read it carefully. This is what the UCG finds objectionable.

From Blow the Trumpet

Today, those who work on the Sabbath are truly slaves to sin—a sin that has been sold by mankind's greatest enemy (Rev. 12:9). Furthermore, those in God's Church who avail themselves of this sin are condoning both the slavery and the SLAVE MASTER (2 Cor. 4:4). This is what God was conveying when He gave the fourth commandment. This Great Lawgiver actually explained why His people were to release their servants from labor on the Sabbath. Notice the 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, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor your ox, nor your ass, nor any of your cattle, nor the stranger that is within your gates; that your manservant and your maidservant may rest as well as you.

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

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

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 served the same SLAVE MASTER the world serves today.

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 (a slave in Egypt) to work on their behalf on the Sabbath.

We must refrain from this practice because we were miraculously delivered from this very practice ourselves. Remember, YOU were once a SLAVE in Egypt.

With this in mind, God's people must understand that their Great Deliverer would no more permit His people today to return to this world and avail themselves of its sin than He would permit the Israelites of yesterday to return to Egypt and avail themselves of their sin. As much as the UCG 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—a world that tramples on this great day. 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.

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 because they are now FREE!

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.”

Dennis Fischer continued:

The entire point we are making is that while you are powerless to compel a non-believer to keep the Sabbath holy, you do have the power, and the obligation, to refuse to allow them to impose their lawlessness on you. The UCG is arguing just the opposite. They contend that because you cannot compel the un-believer to keep the Sabbath, you may now proactively seek them out and purchase the benefits of their Sabbath-breaking. That is what they do every time they dine out on the Sabbath. How can any true follower of Christ preach such nonsense?

The most telling aspect of their position is that they do not believe that profaning Sabbath is a form of spiritual slavery. Personally, I believe that until they can accept the FACT that all sin is a form of SLAVERY (Rom. 6:16), they will continue to promote this bondage.

Respectfully,

Dennis Fischer

Counter Argument continued

United Church of God
Advisory Committee for Doctrine
April 16, 2007

Dear Mr. Fischer,

Throughout your paper, you seem to advocate a boycott of all forms of Sabbath breaking. This is not biblically required, nor is it even possible to boycott all forms of sin. As Paul writes in Corinthians 5:9-10,

"I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world."

Sincerely,

Advisory Committee for Doctrine

Response from Dennis Fischer

Dear Friends,

Let me see if I understand the UCG correctly. Are they suggesting that Paul believed it was acceptable with God if a UCG member paid to watch someone in the world engage in sexually immoral behavior? I ask this because they are employing this argument to defend their belief that God approves of His people seeking out and paying those who engage in profaning the Sabbath. Does anyone honestly believe this makes sense?

In truth, the point Paul was making was that it is impossible to not be a part of a world dominated by sinners. However, I don't believe for one minute that he was implying that because of this fact, God's people are now free to patronize its sin.

Respectfully,

Dennis Fischer

P.S. Wasn't it Paul who said, "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness..." (Eph. 5:11)

The United Church of God
vs
A Sabbath Test

Argument IV
"It's Not Business"

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

What the UCG advances as Biblical truth is a remarkably silly observation—and one that must truly disappoint God Almighty. Such arguments are not borne out of a genuine desire to understand what the Lord of the Sabbath expects of His people, but rather are an attempt to justify a behavior the scriptures soundly CONDEMN. These Biblical minds have twisted the clear intent of God's word in an effort to engage in an activity so offensive to the purpose of the Sabbath that it actually requires people to desecrate this holy time.

Watch how this major COG group makes their point by ignoring the obvious. However, before you do, consider the following sign posted on a prominent outdoor mall in the Great Northwest. Within that mall are four restaurants—two of which would be considered "high end." Notice that the world has no difficulty understanding that consumers are conducting BUSINESS. However, the United Church of God argues otherwise for obvious reasons.

~ ~ ~

Notice!

This Is Private Property

Persons not conducting authorized business within this complex and/or specific business with its tenant are considered trespassing.

Violators will be subject to arrest and/or citation for criminal trespass pursuant to B.C.C. 10A.53.080 or RCW 9A.52.070 or 9A.52.080

~ ~ ~

United Church of God:

Question:

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

Answer:

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

Perhaps the UCG forgot this one.

Nehemiah 10:31

"And if the people of the land bring ware or ANY victuals [food] on the Sabbath day to sell, that we would not buy it of them on the Sabbath, or on the holy day..."

Our Response:

Consider what the UCG is actually saying about the True God and His great Sabbath Law. According to their wisdom, the Almighty forbids what is being done at restaurants every Sabbath, but permits His people to proactively solicit the very act He forbids. Can you say "HYPOCRACY"?

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

Here is a question for all of God's people. If the Almighty told you He absolutely detested what was being done in restaurants every Sabbath, do you think He would be pleased if you told Him you buy the products they labor to make on that day? The United Church of God actually thinks He would.

At one point in their doctrinal paper, the UCG correctly states that even though the sole owner of a business can't prevent his employees from working somewhere else on the Sabbath, he should still close his business down on this day. This is because these employees are working on his behalf.

However, the UCG then contends that God's people may purchase the services of restaurant personnel who also labor for their benefit because they are already working for someone else and can't be prevented from doing so. Here is how they express this reasoning.

United Church of God Continued:

If you are the sole owner of a business, you should close it down on the Sabbath day. But the people who work for you still don't keep the Sabbath. They may choose to work a second job for another employer or they may choose to do other activities that would not be in keeping with the Sabbath. If you don't go to the restaurant, the waitresses will still be working. You are not causing them to work by eating out in the restaurant, nor are you causing them to break the Sabbath.

Our Response:

It is true that the decision to work on the Sabbath rests solely in the hands of restaurant personnel. But it is equally true that the decision to seek out that labor rests solely in the hands of those who purchase their goods and services. To assert that the consumer of services plays no part in the business being conducted is TOTAL NONSENSE! It also misses a greater point. The Sabbath is a profoundly sacred

day. It was created by a Holy God as a memorial of both His physical and His spiritual creation. It demands to be hallowed.

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

The bottom line regarding this argument is really quite simple: You may not be able to prevent restaurant personnel from working on the Sabbath. But you most certainly can prevent them from working FOR YOU on this day!

Counter Argument

United Church of God
Advisory Committee for Doctrine
April 16, 2007

Dear Mr. Fischer,

Blow the Trumpet states the following:

" Consider what the UCG is actually saying about the True God and His great Sabbath Law. According to their wisdom, the Almighty forbids what is being done at restaurants every Sabbath, but permits His people to proactively solicit the very act He forbids. Can you say "HYPOCRACY?"

Public transportation is sometimes sought out by those in God's Church as well, though the Blow the Trumpet paper understands this to be permissible on the Sabbath. Is that hypocritical?

Sincerely,

Advisory Committee for Doctrine

Response from Dennis Fischer

Dear Friends,

What the UCG doctrinal group is arguing is that **Blow the Trumpet** is being hypocritical for suggesting that it may be appropriate to for God's people to take public transportation to services when there is no alternative, while not extending the same accommodation to God's people for dining out on the Sabbath when the Almighty has actually provided the alternative. For the UCG to see these two behaviors as morally equivalent is disappointing, to say the least.

With that said I would like to make the following observation. I sincerely believe a strong case can be made that public transportation represents an essential service--especially in larger metropolitan areas. As such it should exist even in places where God's Sabbath is the law of the land. Certainly, this service should function differently on holy time but it could operate, and even do so in the spirit of proper Sabbath observance. For example: shuttles could be operated by part time volunteers and offered without charge

to customers. Furthermore, their hours of operation would be greatly reduced and their routes would be limited to conveying God's people to His places of assembly. Although this is not how they are run today, it is how they are used by those in the Church that require them.

However, the same argument cannot be made for restaurants. The only time they could be considered an essential service is during a national disaster when access to food supplies were impacted. Under that scenario I would not only support opening restaurants on the Sabbath, I would personally volunteer to assist in their work. But this is not what we are addressing in this debate. The issue at hand is whether God embraces the on-going practice of his people soliciting the labor of Sabbath breakers at restaurants. The UCG claims He does while every syllable in scripture addressing the subject cries out against it.

The point here is that except in the most extraordinary of circumstances restaurants are designed to cater to pleasure NOT to need. Therefore, there is no Biblical imperative for them to be open on holy time. Furthermore, God has already COMMANDED His people to acquire and prepare their Sabbath meals on the sixth day.

Respectfully,

Dennis Fischer

Counter Argument continued

United Church of God
Advisory Committee for Doctrine
April 16, 2007

Dear Mr. Fischer,

Consider Deuteronomy 14:21: "You shall not eat anything that dies of itself; you may give it to the alien who is within your gates, that he may eat it, or you may sell it to a foreigner; for you are a holy people to the LORD your God..." The Israelites remained a holy people, despite their involvement in the exchange of forbidden food. The same is possible for spiritual Israelites in the exchange of food in restaurants on the Sabbath. While we all should be careful of hypocrisy, every situation is individual.

Sincerely,

Advisory Committee for Doctrine

Response from Dennis Fischer

Dear Friends,

Consider what this team of doctrinal experts is suggesting. According to them, because an Israelite was permitted to sell a gentile food that was unfit for them (Israelites) to eat, God would somehow permit these same Israelites to go out on the Sabbath and purchase a meal from these same gentiles, just like the UCG does. Furthermore, they can engage in this practice without any complicity in the sin of the Sabbath breaker.

The UCG goal in presenting this point is really quite simple—to prove that because God wouldn't hold Israel responsible for unbelievers eating something that was unfit, even though they were the ones who

sold it, it stands to reason He wouldn't hold His people today responsible for the labor taking place in restaurants even though they are the ones who buy it. In other words, if God permitted one behavior it is **"POSSIBLE"** He would permit the other.

However, what these ministers conveniently omit in this particular point is that although God permitted His people to sell meat that had been compromised to Gentiles, He absolutely prohibited them from acquiring or preparing their Sabbath meals on the seventh day (Ex. 16). Additionally, although God permitted "strangers" to eat food that was compromised, He absolutely prohibited these same strangers from working on His Sabbath (Ex. 20:10, Deut. 5:14).

With that said, let's take a closer look at what God was conveying when giving His people these instructions and how they specifically relate to the issue of dining out on the Sabbath.

The REAL TRUTH about Deuteronomy 14:21

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

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

Notice that although an animal that died of itself was not to be consumed by God's people, it could be consumed by unbelievers—even unbelievers within the camp where God's law was in force (the "stranger that is within your gates"). Although these Church leaders imply that for a gentile to eat food that had been compromised was a sin, this is not true. Actually, it was not a sin at all for them. That's right! Those "strangers" will never be judged for this, in this life or the next.

Here Is the Point

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

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

The True God is Different; You be Different, Too

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

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

A Lesson for God's People Today

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

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

If God's people, including His leaders, sincerely desire to be like Him, they would never seek out "strangers" and pay them to labor on holy time. Instead, they would seek to be holy—different from those in the world—not go back into the world and partake of its sin (Eph. 5:11).

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

Respectfully,

Dennis Fischer

P.S. With respect to the UCG's assertion that God's people can remain "holy" even while they solicit the services of Sabbath breakers is an interesting theory. What it is suggesting is that they bear no responsibility for the unlawful labor they specifically solicit. But is this true? The following scenarios provide some insight concerning how God views this point. These scenarios may seem contrived at first, but in the end they will all make sense.

"Am I Responsible?"

Scenario I "The Assassin"

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

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

The Confession

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

Does God Almighty consider the member
complicit in this murder?

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

- Both acts require God's law to be violated. Murder violates the sixth commandment. Labor on the Sabbath violates the 4th.
- Both acts (murder and Sabbath labor) are identified as capital crimes in the scriptures. The penalty for both is DEATH.
- Both acts involve people who don't have a clue regarding the True God. At least we hope that's the case.
- Both acts require skilled labor to be contracted.
- Both acts require specific conditions to be met. In the case of the restaurant: the type of food, how it is to be prepared, when it is to be served, etc. In the case of the assassination: the intended target, as well as the time, location and method of the "hit"
- Both acts require payments to be made.
- Both acts involve the pro-active involvement of God's people. In this particular case, without their involvement the specific target won't be killed and the specific meal won't be prepared.
- Both murder and Sabbath labor are CONDEMNED by God Almighty
- Both murder and Sabbath labor are acts that require those involved to REPENT.

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

Scenario II "The Thief"

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

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

What Should He Do?

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

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

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

Now for the question.

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

Once again, we are certain that a genuine Christian would not succumb to the temptation portrayed in our scenario. God's people could easily detect the moral defect in this behavior. Furthermore, we are confident that most people would be furious that we would offer it at all. Well, in the interest of fairness, let's try one last scenario.

Scenario III "The Restaurant"

Imaging the United Church of God's Advisory Committee for Doctrine is dining at an exclusive Five Star Restaurant on a Friday evening. They made reservations three weeks ago and were truly looking forward to sharing this time with their colleagues. They knew the menu was going to be a little "pricey" but it was more than worth it. After all, the food is superb and the service is legendary. Additionally, the atmosphere is wonderful—soft music, candlelit tables and a very sophisticated clientele. Add to that, this was God's Sabbath and NOTHING is too good for God. That is why they selected this particular bistro. They honestly believed it would be the perfect setting to ring in holy time.

The Conversation

After ordering wine and selecting dinner the fellowship begins. At some point, the conversation turns to dining out on the Sabbath. These long standing ministers already know this issue well and are in total agreement with the Church's position. At this point one of the men offers his analysis. First, he explains why he and his companions are totally innocent of any trespass of God's law because even though their server is working on the Sabbath, at least they are not. He even suggested that sharing a Sabbath meal with brethren in the comfort of a nice restaurant was more in keeping with the Sabbath than dining in one of their homes because it freed them from the burden involved in preparing their own meals. He then

observed that even if their server wasn't working for them he would be assisting someone else. Therefore, they really hadn't added to his burden.

At this point everyone voices their agreement prompting a different guest to offer his thoughts on the topic. He observes that although the entire staff is laboring on the Sabbath, they don't know any better. After all, they are unconverted and totally ignorant of God's law. Because of this, the Almighty holds them to a different standard. This being the case, He must hold God's people, who solicit their labor, to a different standard as well. Anyway, it isn't as if God's people can prevent restaurant personnel from profaning the Sabbath. There is not one thing anyone can do about it.

The group again nods in agreement.

Finally, a third member of the committee presents his wisdom on the matter. He explained that the command regarding not compelling servants to work only applied to "your" servants, not someone else's servants. Therefore, God permits the soliciting of labor from others as long as they are not under your control. Furthermore, the same applies to "strangers" because the command only mentions to those "within your gates"—clearly these strangers are outside our gates.

This long standing minister then suggested that our contemporary culture is so different from the one existing during the time when God's law was given that His people must adapt it to the context of our modern age. He also noted that God's prohibition against acquiring food on the Sabbath ended when the manna stopped. Therefore, it is fine to acquire and prepare your meals on holy time. He concluded his comments by reminding everyone that strict Sabbath observance is Pharisaical and that dining out is really a matter of personal preference.

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

- Are restaurant workers breaking God's law when they labor for these ministers and their wives by preparing and serving their meals on the Sabbath? If no, was the assassin or the thief breaking God's law when they performed their service?
- Is it possible for the Advisory Committee for Doctrine to prevent restaurant workers from laboring for their benefit on holy time? In other words, if someone offered the UCG ten million dollars if these ministers could ensure that restaurant personnel would not serve them this Sabbath, is there something they could do to prevent this service? We can think of one thing.
- If The UCG's Advisory Committee for Doctrine insisted on proactively soliciting the services of restaurants on the Sabbath, would God Almighty consider them complicit in the labor performed exclusively for their benefit?

This UCG may argue all they want that they bear no responsibility for the Sabbath labor performed for them by restaurant personnel, but this is simply not true. They personally direct that labor and benefit from it. That is why they seek it out and pay for it! Although the employee would be working for someone else if the UCG wasn't there, so would the assassin and the thief.

The United Church of God
vs
A Sabbath Test

Pardon the Interruption
"The Devil's Din

The Devil's
Diner

Open 24 Hours

"NOTICE"

This restaurant rejects God's law and profanes His Sabbath.
We serve another god. He is our master.
So come on in and enjoy the best food and service in town.

Dear Brethren,

Imagine that you and some friends decide to go to your favorite restaurant after Sabbath services and enjoy a delicious early dinner and some wonderful Christian fellowship. This has been a long standing tradition of yours and you never once questioned it. As you pull into the parking lot, you immediately notice something different. The name of the restaurant has changed. You then proceed toward the entrance and see a small announcement board with a notice that informs all customers that this is a God-rejecting, Satan-worshipping restaurant. Aside from that, nothing has changed. The personnel are all the same. The menu is identical to the one that was there before. Now here is our question:

Would you feel as comfortable eating there
as you did prior to this "renovation"?

If your answer is "no," then you are simply the victim of good advertising. You may never find this sign or the accompanying announcement, but every Sabbath, you will find the restaurant they describe. It is the one many of God's people visit every week.

"And no marvel; for Satan himself
is transformed into an angel of light."
2 Cor. 11:14

Respectfully,

Blow the Trumpet

Counter Argument

United Church of God
Advisory Committee for Doctrine
April 16, 2007

Dear Mr. Fischer,

The outlandish hypothetical situation given above has no relationship with reality. It is inconceivable that such an announcement would be posted. It seems that the point being made is that a restaurant open for business on the Sabbath is by definition a "God-rejecting, Satan-worshipping restaurant." Hence, we should not patronize such an establishment. If this indeed is the point being made, we would also have to logically conclude that we should not patronize such an establishment any day of the week, Why would we patronize at any time a business that openly declares itself to be a "God-rejecting, Satan-worshipping restaurant"

Furthermore, if this logic is followed, we should only patronize restaurants that are closed on the Sabbath (from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday) and Holy Days. In the unlikely event that such a restaurant could be found, there probably would be other objections to patronizing such a restaurant-for example, what if unclean meats are served, what if smoking is permitted, etc.? Indeed, if the logic of this hypothetical situation is followed, it would be impossible to eat in any restaurant at any time unless it is owned by a Church of God member and its employees and patrons are only Church of God members!

Sincerely,

Advisory Committee for Doctrine

Response from Dennis Fischer

Dear Friends,

The indignation expressed by these UCG leaders speaks volumes about their approach to deception. According to them it is inconceivable that they could ever be fooled by the devil. After all, they know just what to look for. As soon as they see a man in a red suit with a pitchfork and a tail they will be the first to warn God's people to stand clear. However, if he appears as an "angel of light" it must be okay to avail themselves of his services. Regrettably, this is their approach to dining out on the Sabbath as well. In other words, they would never patronize a restaurant bearing an offensive name or vulgar announcement, but wouldn't give a second thought to patronizing one whose atmosphere ("ambiance") masks a behavior that is an affront to God Almighty.

In one sense their response has proven our point. Instead of seeing God's Sabbath being profaned as a clear "**SIGN**" telling them to avoid such places on holy time, they see a festive atmosphere, scores of delicious meal options, and friendly attentive servers all whispering to them, "Don't worry, you can keep your Sabbath here." Unfortunately, the UCG listens attentively. At this point it is significant that a similar enticement was uttered and believed long ago "You will not surely die" (Gen. 3:4).

With that said, here is a little advice for these leaders regarding appearances. Although it is "inconceivable" that a restaurant would ever acknowledge that their Sabbath is fully invested in a behavior inspired by the devil himself, it is also "inconceivable" that Osama Bin-laden would ever call himself a terrorist or, that the Babylonian Mystery religion would ever refer to itself as a false Church.

The point in this "hypothetical" is that what takes place in a restaurant on God's Sabbath goes entirely against His great moral law. On that day, restaurant personnel serve the god of this world, and do his bidding, whether they are aware of it or not. In a very real sense, restaurants that profane God's Sabbath are, FOR THAT DAY, "The Devil's Diner." Simply because they don't post this fact on a sign may provide consolation for the United Church of God, but such an omission carries no weight with the Almighty. Both Israel and Judah went into captivity because they forgot about His Sabbath. I believe the same fate awaits His people today, if they continue to engage in this sin. Certainly that is what Nehemiah suggested (Neh. 13: 17-18).

What the UCG fails to grasp is that a real God-rejecting devil has blinded the minds of those who profane the Sabbath by laboring in restaurants on this day (2 Cor. 4:4). Furthermore, that devil has also blinded the minds of the UCG doctrinal group in this matter. While they claim they would never patronize a restaurant called "The Devil's Diner," they actually consent to doing just that.

The bottom line is this: Satan desperately wants restaurant personnel to reject God's Sabbath, and he desperately wants the UCG doctrinal group to seek out and purchase this sin. So far he is having his way with both.

Respectfully,

Dennis Fischer

P.S.

Dear UCG,

Your comment suggesting that our approach toward this issue "logically" demands that God's people would have to boycott all businesses except those operated by Church members, is manipulative, not to mention TOTALLY FALSE. Furthermore, I believe it is symptomatic of a greater problem. Throughout your doctrinal paper as well as your letter to me you refuse to acknowledge that Satan is the FORCE behind Sabbath breaking. The problem with this belief is that everything in God's word says otherwise. Consider what the scriptures say about the role Satan plays in the conduct of unbelievers.

Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation (conduct) in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. (Eph. 2:2)

The simple truth is that when it comes to God's called-out-ones, what takes place in restaurants every Sabbath belongs to "times past"—and God commands His people to not be a part of such things (Rev 18:4). This is why you would never order Lobster when dining out even though the restaurant will provide it to someone else. It is also why you should never solicit Sabbath labor even though they will provide that labor to someone else as well. Gentlemen, this isn't that hard to understand. However, it appears that you have become so intoxicated by this activity you just can't seem to be honest with yourself or God's people when explaining what is really occurring in the place you seek out. So SAD.

The United Church of God vs A Sabbath Test

Argument V “Nehemiah Never Bought It”

When advancing their case in defense of dining out on the Sabbath, the UCG offers an interesting slant on what Nehemiah meant when he prohibited the Jews of his time from buying and selling on God's day. According to their thinking, Nehemiah's indictment was only against God's people setting up businesses on the Sabbath as well as spending the entire day purchasing goods and services. This prominent COG group then argues that spending an hour or two enjoying a meal at a restaurant does not come close to that practice and therefore must be acceptable with God. Here is how they put it.

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

What the UCG fails to say is what God Almighty thinks of that restaurant and what it is doing on holy time. At no time do they admit that operating such a business on the Sabbath is an egregious evil that God abhors. Additionally, they omit some very important questions relating to this issue. For example: Would Nehemiah have permitted restaurants to operate during his day or would he have closed them down too? Furthermore, would Nehemiah have commanded the Jews of his day to cease and desist from buying their goods? Finally, if restaurants today are desecrating what God made holy, why would any minister of that God teach His people to patronize such sin? In other words, why purchase the fruit of this sacrilege?

Although the UCG makes every attempt to persuade God's people to believe that Nehemiah was only concerned about the complete and total abandoning of the Sabbath by the Jews in Jerusalem, they fail to concede the obvious. There is not one chance in a trillion that Nehemiah would not have shut down every restaurant or diner in the city. Furthermore, there is not one chance in a trillion that he wouldn't have commanded the Jews to cease and desist from buying their goods.

It is interesting that when describing what was taking place on the Sabbath during Nehemiah's day, the UCG paints a picture that looks remarkably similar to our world today. Regrettably, they believe that God's people can go out into that world on the Sabbath, if they only do so for an hour or two. We at **Blow the Trumpet** think this is madness.

As you proceed through the UCG argument, ask yourself if the true God makes a distinction between a restaurant operating a business on His Sabbath from a supermarket doing the same thing. If you conclude that God wants them both closed down on this day, then why would any of His people want to go near them?

United Church of God:

Nehemiah 13:15-21

To understand this section of Scripture, we need to understand what was going on at the time. Ezra had arrived in Jerusalem from Babylon in 457 B.C. (the seventh year of the king). The temple had been built earlier, but things were in disarray by the time Ezra arrives. He oversees a correction of the people in the area of marriages to strange women. The Jews had begun to marry the people in the surrounding areas. Ezra put an end to this during his time in Jerusalem, but it did not last.

Nehemiah was the king's cupbearer (or special assistant) when he heard of the difficulties in Jerusalem. The king gives him his leave to travel to Jerusalem to resolve the problems that exist. He is named governor for Judea. This was now the 20th year of the king or 13 years after Ezra had gone to Jerusalem. He finds things again in disarray. The temple was not being maintained, the wall had not been rebuilt and Jerusalem was a broken-down city. Nehemiah brings about another reform, similar in some ways to the one brought about by Ezra. He also set about to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem. They finished building the wall in 52 days, in spite of the many obstacles that were put before them (Nehemiah 6:15). After the wall was rebuilt, another reform was instituted by Ezra and Nehemiah. Ezra read from the law to the people (Nehemiah 7) and the people responded positively. After this, Nehemiah proposed a covenant for the people. This covenant agreement is outlined in Nehemiah 9:38 through 10:29. "And because of all this, we make a sure covenant and write it; our leaders, our Levites, and our priests seal it. Now those who placed their seal on the document were: Nehemiah the governor, the son of Hacaliah and Zedekiah..." (Nehemiah 9:38 to 10:1). There were seven distinct expectations for the Jews in this covenant (Nehemiah 10:29- 39):

- Obedience to "God's Law, which was given by Moses the servant of God" (Nehemiah 10:29).
- No marriages with the inhabitants of the land.
- Any wares brought into Jerusalem would not be purchased by the Jews on the Sabbath day or any Holy Day.

Note From Blow the Trumpet

Although the UCG only mention "wares" when identifying what was not to be purchased on the Sabbath, Nehemiah also mentioned "victuals" (food). (See Ne. 10:31)

UCG Continues:

- Land was to rest in the seventh year and all debts forgiven according to the year of release.
- There was to be a temple tax to take care of the upkeep of the temple.
- The Levites were to receive the tithes and the firstfruits.
- The Levites were to contribute a tithe of the tithe to the temple.

Some of these can be found within the "law of Moses," but some go beyond the law itself. In the case of the Sabbath, this is the first mention of a prohibition concerning commerce on the Sabbath. Jewish scholars contend that it was the first time the issue of buying and selling on the Sabbath was even addressed."

Our Response:

Apparently the UCG derives great consolation from the belief that because Nehemiah is the first to mention the words "buying" and "selling" on the Sabbath, this prohibition doesn't carry much weight in Sabbath observance. This is similar to the Protestant community claiming that there is no mention of the Sabbath as a commandment prior to the time Israel was delivered out of bondage in Egypt. Therefore, there was no obligation to keep it prior to the fifteenth century BC.

The fact that a sin is not mentioned before a certain point is not proof that it did not occur, let alone that it wasn't a sin. With that said, here is what was declared by God Almighty nearly a thousand years before Nehemiah leveled his rebuke to the Jews in Jerusalem. It is interesting to note that God used the acquisition and preparation of food on the Sabbath to make His point.

The Manna Principle

When God delivered the children of Israel out of bondage in Egypt, He introduced them to His Sabbath. This was done prior to giving them the Ten Commandments. In the sixteenth chapter of Exodus He explains how He planned to nourish them physically. He would do so by providing them with food every day--with the notable exception of the Sabbath. He would not rain down manna on the seventh day because that day was holy. Just as He rested from His labor on the first Sabbath during creation week, He never ceased the practice.

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

- 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.

In reality, the UCG position on this issue contradicts every aspect of God's command with respect to eating on His day. Consider what they advocate. First, they assert that they may acquire their Sabbath meals on the seventh day by purchasing them at a restaurant. They also assert that Sabbath meals may be prepared for them by chefs who profane this day. Finally, they teach that God's people may go outside their community of faith to procure their food as well as to consume it. It is interesting that the phrase "going out to eat" is used when describing this activity.

However, the greatest tragedy is that this prominent COG group believes Nehemiah would have concurred with their judgment. Notice how they continue to describe what was taking place during his time.

United Church of God Continued:

Nehemiah leaves Jerusalem and returns to the king for "certain days" (Nehemiah 13:6). Later when he returns to Jerusalem he finds that virtually all the agreements reached previously had been abandoned. This grieved him immensely. He cried out to God to remember him for the good he had done and not the end result that he saw in Judah (Nehemiah 13:14).

Nehemiah saw the evil that was being done by the high priest in giving a room in the temple to Tobiah. He became so angry that he threw all his belongings out of the temple area. He then reopened the treasuries for the tithes. He saw people treading grapes on the Sabbath—working in clear violation of the Sabbath command (Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15). They were loading up their produce and bringing it into Jerusalem to sell. They had again made the Sabbath a market day. All of these activities mentioned here (Nehemiah 13:15-17) dealt with a market day. This is not a restaurant nor does it have anything to do with eating a meal. It was a market day! Notice the items mentioned here: wine, sheaves, grapes, figs, provisions (corn and other items of sustenance), fish and "all kinds of goods." The Sabbath had become the one day in the week for going to market.

The prohibition was against setting up a market on the Sabbath or a Holy Day. There is no mention of eating or not eating on the Sabbath. The Jews had made the Sabbath a secular day in which it was acceptable to go to market. Going to market was an all-day activity. In most ancient societies (as well as in several areas of the world today) a whole day was set aside as the day for market because it took so much time.

Our Response:

What the UCG advances here is a great deception. First, they conveniently omit Nehemiah's command that the Jews were not to buy ANYTHING on the Sabbath (Ne. 10:31). This is because doing business on the Sabbath is an act of desecrating the holy. God's point was that He didn't want His people to touch this sin.

Second, the UCG boldly declares that Nehemiah makes no mention of dining out on the Sabbath. But is this true?

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. The UCG may assert that it would have been great amounts of food, but that is pure speculation, not to mention irrelevant.

At this point, it is also important to note that those who were selling food on the Sabbath were "non-believers" just like those who work in restaurants today. They were from the city of Tyre.

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

These vendors did not know God. They were totally ignorant of His law and His plan for man. However, this "shortcoming" was irrelevant to Nehemiah. To him, ignorance was no excuse. This truth is born out in the action he would take.

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 products 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 was 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 either balk at becoming involved or apply convoluted reasoning 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.

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.

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

Counter Argument

United Church of God
Advisory Committee for Doctrine
April 16, 2007

Dear Mr. Fischer,

These merchants [referred to in Nehemiah 13] were *knowingly* defying the Sabbath in a culture where Sabbath-keeping was a legally protected national custom. This is not the case in our culture today. We do not consider eating out on the Sabbath as paying for "the fruit of their sacrilege." Much of the food sold in grocery stores may have been harvested or packaged on the Sabbath. By your definition, these products would also be "the fruit of their sacrilege."

The account of Nehemiah's encounter with the merchants selling merchandise on the Sabbath illustrates the importance of keeping the Sabbath holy by not treating it as an ordinary day for marketing or shopping. However, we do not believe it is possible to equate this problem with eating out on the Sabbath. The conditions that existed then were in some ways more similar to those of the millennial rule of Christ than to conditions in our culture today. The Sabbath was part of the law of the land, which Nehemiah had

authority to enforce. The nation was being restored to the worship of the true God after having been in captivity. These factors do not exist today.

God's people today are a minority group seeking to live God's way in a world that rejects many of the laws of God, especially the true Sabbath. We are widely scattered, which often requires traveling many miles on the Sabbath to attend services. Church pastors have to travel even more, which could result in the need to purchase fuel on the Sabbath (which by your reasoning is making unbelievers labor on the Sabbath to serve us).

These are not excuses for not keeping the Sabbath, but these and other factors pose challenges to Sabbath-keepers to determine how to keep the Sabbath in a way that will result in the blessings that God intended the Sabbath to give us. We believe that the key to achieving these positive results lies in understanding the basic principles of the Sabbath and determining how to apply those principles in the context of our culture, not by taking specific instructions from Old Testament passages that relate to very different and even unique historical contexts.

Sincerely,

Advisory Committee for Doctrine

Response from Dennis Fischer

Dear Friends,

What is it about our culture today that makes the UCG believe they have no choice in this issue? After all, they don't dine out on the Day of Atonement. Does our culture somehow change on that day? And what about the pressure many employers apply to God's people regarding working an hour or two after sunset on Friday?—this also is a reality in our current culture. Should God's people cave into this as well? After all, it is not as if they would be treating the entire day as a work day.

This portion of the UCG letter further illustrates the lengths people will go to when justifying their behavior—and contrary to what they assert, these are EXCUSES. They are a slick way to manipulate God's word in order to engage in a behavior simply because it gives them pleasure. Once again, these UCG leaders attempt to blur the lines between an innocent act and their SIN. This is done so that they can engage in sin and still claim to be innocent. They even go so far as to suggest that what **Blow the Trumpet** does at a super market during the week is no different than what they do at a restaurant on God's Sabbath. They then attempt to manufacture hypocrisy in **Blow the Trumpet's** position on the strength on the words "may have." Notice what they wrote.

Much of the food sold in grocery stores may have been harvested or packaged on the Sabbath. By your definition, these products would also be "the fruit of their sacrilege."

In these two sentences the UCG argues that there is no difference between us going to a market on Monday and purchasing food that "may have been" the product of Sabbath labor, and them going out to a restaurant on the Sabbath where it is absolutely essential that profane labor be done. In other words, in order for them to dine out on the Sabbath, they absolutely need someone to break God's law. We, on the other hand, don't require any such thing. Furthermore, there is no Biblical prohibition against purchasing products that may have come into contact with Sabbath labor, provided the labor wasn't done at your request. When it comes to dining out on the Sabbath the UCG is placing an order that they fully expect to be filled by profaning holy time.

More Self-Justification

The UCG then argues that if God's people had the authority to shut down businesses on the Sabbath like Nehemiah did, they (the UCG) would do so. However, because they have no such authority, God now approves of them paying these Sabbath-breakers to labor on their behalf on holy time. They do this despite the fact that God's Sabbath law shouts out that what takes place in a restaurant every Sabbath is an egregious sin.

Tragically, what the UCG fails to understand is that they do have the power to emulate what Nehemiah did. If these leaders honestly read what took place in Jerusalem when this great servant took action, they would discover that he expelled the merchants from the city. That's right! He kicked them out—including the men of Trye who did not know the true God. He then warned the Jews that if these Sabbath-breakers returned to do business on Holy time, God's people were not to purchase any of their wares or food products—NOT ONE THING (Neh. 10:31).

Emulating Nehemiah

Today God's people can do just what Nehemiah did. They have the power to lock the merchants out of their lives on the Sabbath. They also have the power to not buy their goods and services. However, because the UCG is so intoxicated with this practice, they ignore the enduring moral principle revealed in this powerful lesson taught by Nehemiah's bold action. Therefore, instead of locking merchants out of their lives on the Sabbath as Nehemiah did, the UCG actually seeks them out and embraces their sin as a necessary enhancement of Sabbath observance. To me, that is pathetic.

More Concerning Nehemiah

The UCG also contends that what took place in Jerusalem during the days of Nehemiah involved turning the entire Sabbath into a market day and therefore, doesn't apply to them. They then imply that Nehemiah would not have had a problem with the Jews just spending an hour or two paying Sabbath-breakers to make them a meal on holy time.

This is an argument that would make any criminal defense attorney proud. The strategy is really quite simple. Find a way to prove that it is impossible to obey God in this matter because the scriptures are not specific enough to address their particular situation. This tactic can almost always work if one is creative enough. For example, if the Jews during Nehemiah's day were only eating lunch at a restaurant on the Sabbath, the UCG could argue that the scriptures are silent about going out to breakfast or dinner. After all the Bible only mentions lunch. Or, if people were buying meat on the Sabbath when Nehemiah rebuked them, the UCG could argue that it doesn't say you can't buy vegetables.

What these leaders are doing in this phase of their argument is attempting to convince the Church that when Nehemiah said that God's people were not to buy ANYTHING on the Sabbath or Holy day (Neh. 10:31), what he really meant was don't spend all day shopping. Personally, I believe Nehemiah's actions proclaim that he didn't want God's people to come into any contact with merchants on God's Sabbath. That is why he expelled them from the city. They had come within the gates of Jerusalem and profaned what God had made holy. Nehemiah forced them outside the city gates. Consider his actions in light of the fourth commandment concerning the "stranger within your gates" (Ex. 20:10, Dt. 5:14).

Respectfully,

Dennis Fischer

Counter Argument continued

United Church of God
Advisory Committee for Doctrine
April 16, 2007

Dear Mr. Fischer,

Blow the Trumpet states:

"What the UCG fails to say is what God Almighty thinks of that restaurant and what it is doing on holy time. At no time do they admit that operating such a business on the Sabbath is an egregious evil that God abhors. Additionally, they omit some very important questions relating to this issue. For example: Would Nehemiah have permitted restaurants to operate during his day or would he have closed them down too? Furthermore, would Nehemiah have commanded the Jews of his day to cease and desist from buying their goods? Finally, if restaurants today are desecrating what God made holy, why would any minister of that God teach His people to patronize such sin? In other words, why purchase the fruit of this sacrilege?"

Neither would the United Church of God today, if the city were under its jurisdiction. The Bible, in I Corinthians 5:12, says: "For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside?" Here members were permitted to eat with such persons outside of the Church, but not in the Church. This recognizes the different expectations between those whom God is calling and those He has yet to call.

Sincerely,

Advisory Committee for Doctrine

Response from Dennis Fischer

Dear Friends,

In this brief installment of their letter, the United Church of God claims that if they had the authority to prevent restaurants from operating on the Sabbath, like Nehemiah did, they would shut them down. However, because they do not have that authority, they claim they may now seek out these Sabbath-breakers and pay them for their services on this day. In other words, when it comes to dining out on the Sabbath, the UCG has found a way to have their cake and eat it too. It is interesting that in other places of their letter the UCG characterize restaurants as providing a much needed service on God's Sabbath. Personally, I find it difficult to reconcile these two positions. I also find it inconceivable that Nehemiah would ever think such a thing.

A Different Standard

The UCG then employs Paul's letter to the Church at Corinth to "prove" that because the responsibility of God's Church is to judge its own behavior, not the behavior of those outside the community of faith, these COG leaders don't have to concern themselves with any alleged sin that might take place in a restaurant on the Sabbath. What they are implying with this deception is that because those who work in restaurants are outside the community of faith, what they do on the Sabbath is irrelevant. Once again this

is done in an attempt to sell God's people on the idea that it is acceptable with the Almighty for His children to seek out unbelievers who profane His Sabbath and actually pay them for this sacrilege.

At this point it is important to understand that the passage (I Cor. 5:12) cited by the UCG in defense of this view has absolutely nothing to do with paying unbelievers to prepare their Sabbath meals. Paul never engaged in, nor did he ever advocate such a practice, and the UCG knows it. The point Paul was making is that God's people should not fellowship with brethren that are engaging in acts of moral depravity (i.e. fornication, extortion, idolatry, drunkenness), which had infested the Church. When it came to God's people interacting with such people outside the Church, Paul said, "It's not my job to judge them. God is their Judge" (v.13).

What Paul was saying in effect was: "If a member of God's Church is knowingly engaging in sin, don't associate with him. As for those outside the Church, it is impossible to not do so because they are everywhere." If you applied Paul's teaching to the Sabbath it would sound like this: "If a member of God's Church is knowingly profaning the Sabbath, don't associate with him—on any day. However, even though your unconverted boss profanes the Sabbath, you may still work for him." What Paul was NEVER suggesting is that because your boss breaks the Sabbath by laboring, you may feel free to solicit his Sabbath-breaking services. For the UCG to suggest otherwise is TOTALLY FALSE.

Respectfully,

Dennis Fischer

P.S. It is interesting that the UCG still refuses to say what God thinks of the Sabbath activities engaged in by restaurant personnel, let alone acknowledge His contempt for such things.

Counter Argument continued

United Church of God
Advisory Committee for Doctrine
April 16, 2007

Dear Mr. Fischer,

The Blow the Trumpet paper mentions "seven distinct expectations for the Jews in this covenant (Nehemiah 10:29-39)." The second one listed is "no marriages with the inhabitants of the land." Yes, Nehemiah had them put away their pagan (unconverted) wives. But Paul judged differently concerning unbelieving spouses: "If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her" (I Corinthians 7:12). Corinth was heavily pagan. However, Paul's judgment was different because circumstances were different, i.e., these couples were already married before they were part of spiritual Israel. Again, one should not assume that every prohibition in Nehemiah must be administered in the same way today.

Sincerely,

Advisory Committee for Doctrine

Response from Dennis Fischer

Dear Friends,

Here, the UCG argues that because Paul's judgment regarding marriages to unbelievers was different than Nehemiah's, God's Church may now seek out Sabbath breakers and hire them to prepare their meals on holy time. What they fail to mention is that although Paul mentions marriage, he is absolutely SILENT with respect to paying unbelievers to prepare your Sabbath meals. Why?—because Paul NEVER endorsed such a practice. For the UCG to try to equate two entirely different acts is typical. They diligently seek out any New Testament teaching that is different than that found in the Old Testament so that they may claim that ALL the rules are different. The cold hard TRUTH is that Paul never intimated such a thing.

Respectfully,

Dennis Fischer

Counter Argument continued

United Church of God
Advisory Committee for Doctrine
April 16, 2007

Dear Mr. Fischer,

Blow the Trumpet says:

"Ask yourself if the true God makes a distinction between a restaurant operating a business on His Sabbath from a supermarket doing the same thing. If you conclude that He wants them both closed down on this day, then why would any of His people want to go near them`?"

Does God want transportation businesses closed down on the Sabbath? Clearly, many types of businesses that are open on the Sabbath in our world today will not be open during the Millennium. There is also a clear difference between doing one's grocery shopping on the Sabbath and eating out in a restaurant instead of in one's home, though apparently you are unable to see that difference.

Sincerely,

Advisory Committee for Doctrine

Response from Dennis Fischer

Dear Friends,

What the UCG is arguing with respect to this point is that there is a huge difference between a supermarket and a restaurant but absolutely no difference between a city bus and a restaurant. Armed with this theory, they then contend that if God's people can spend money to take a bus to Church because they have no other choice, then they should also be able to make Friday evening dinner reservations three weeks in advance at a five star restaurant. After all, money is money.

At this point it is important to understand that the sole purpose of UCG's doctrinal paper is to "prove" that God's people may seek out Sabbath breakers at restaurants and solicit their labor on holy time, as long as it only requires an hour or two. Furthermore, they anchor their position on the supposition that that because the Jews in Nehemiah's time were "allegedly" spending the entire day in the marketplace, God would not be concerned if they were just purchasing their daily meals from a local food merchant. Therefore, dining out at restaurants on the Sabbath must be acceptable with Him. Believe it or not, this is what they want you to accept.

I'm just curious, but what if the Jews were playing golf all day on the Sabbath? Would the UCG argue that it would be acceptable with God if they just went to a nearby driving range for an hour or two? According to their logic, there would be a huge difference in these two behaviors as well.

The truth of the matter is that when it comes to the Sabbath, what takes place in a restaurant and what takes place in a supermarket is a distinction without a difference. Both of them contradict God's law. Nehemiah understood this and his actions confirm that he saw their services as a clear breach of the fourth commandment.

Respectfully,

Dennis Fischer

P. S. With respect to their comment regarding public transportation, I honestly believe that although God would modify their Sabbath operation, He would not shut them down as the UCG rhetorically asserts. This is because they represent an essential service, especially in larger metropolitan areas. As was stated in an earlier response, I believe that if their operation was deemed necessary, local governments, under the direction of God's servants, could arrange for shuttles to be operated by part time volunteers and offered without charge. Their hours of operation would be greatly reduced and their routes would be limited to conveying God's people to and from services or other Sabbath functions. I am absolutely convinced that such an approach is in total keeping with the spirit of God's Sabbath law. Restaurants however, are another issue entirely.

The United Church of God vs A Sabbath Test

Argument VI “Things are Different Now”

When rationalizing the sin of dining out on the Sabbath, the United Church of God argues that the world we live in today is so radically different from the time of Nehemiah that it would be impossible for God's people to administer His law the way Nehemiah did. Therefore, because we can't close down merchants on the Sabbath, we may now buy their products, provided we don't spend the entire day doing so.

What this prominent COG group fails to acknowledge is that those who labor in restaurants on the Sabbath are engaging in a practice that God ABHORS. That's right. He HATES this sin. However, the UCG sees it much differently. They don't think God hates it at all. Why?—because they don't hate it. In truth, they see it as a vital service in this age.

Sadly, these Church leaders are so committed to this practice that they work tirelessly to diminish the impact of what takes place in restaurants on holy time by blurring the lines between that and what restaurants do the other six days of the week. They reason that if the work they do Sunday thru Friday is acceptable with God, how severe could doing the exact same thing be on the Sabbath? In essence, the UCG is arguing that the Lord of the Sabbath shouldn't care if His people seek out those who brazenly desecrate His day because they don't see such labor as "brazenly desecrating" anything, but rather just an innocent mistake. Furthermore, they imply that if Nehemiah lived today, he would somehow condone patronizing businesses that trample all over God's Sabbath.

After advancing this portion of their argument, the UCG presents an avalanche of points that have absolutely nothing to do with the subject at hand. As you read each point, ask yourself if their case sounds more like one motivated by a genuine desire to honor God or more like one motivated by a desire to justify a practice they enjoy. We think the answer will be pretty obvious.

United Church of God:

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

Our Response:

With these words the UCG is suggesting that because God's people do not have the power to shut down merchants who profane the Sabbath, they may now proactively seek them out and financially support them by purchasing the very fruit of their sacrilege. Can you imagine presenting this argument to God Almighty?

Abandoning God

Today the physical descendents of Israel have forgotten the true God and have forsaken His law. They have trampled all over His Sabbath and holy days. Tragically, the UCG has adopted the attitude of "When in Rome, do as the Romans." They may deny this assessment, but look at what they are advocating with

their point. They contend that God's people today may seek out those who profane the Sabbath and purchase the fruit of their sin. The UCG repeatedly attempts to "sugar coat" their position on this issue, but this is exactly what must take place when one dines out on the Sabbath.

Down through the ages God's people have paid, with their own blood, the price of honoring the fourth commandment. We doubt that these champions of faith ever once thought that because they couldn't compel unbelievers to obey the Almighty, they were now free to go back into spiritual Egypt and mingle with them for an hour or two on holy time. But once again, this is exactly what the UCG is advocating.

United Church of God Continued:

"In addition to Nehemiah's reforms related to the Sabbath, there were other reforms expected of the Jews. Nehemiah was highly agitated that many of the Jewish children did not speak Hebrew, but spoke the language of Ashdod (Nehemiah 13:24). He was so upset that he "struck some of them and pulled out their hair" (Nehemiah 13:25) and made them swear that they would not allow their children to intermarry with the neighboring people. What should we learn from this example? How can we apply this to our lives today? Should we attack people and pull their hair out if we don't agree with their conduct?"

Our Response:

We at ***Blow the Trumpet*** readily acknowledge that our world is very different from the one during the days of Nehemiah. However, what we will not admit is that God's law has changed to conform to our generation. What the UCG has employed here is nothing but a smokescreen. It may be true, but it is totally irrelevant. Simply because you cannot enforce the Sabbath on a world dominated by a God-rejecting devil, does not mean you are powerless to obey for yourself. Here is something the UCG should consider before advancing such a point. Those who labor in restaurants on the Sabbath are SLAVES TO SIN (Ro. 6:16). However, God's people have been delivered out of that bondage. To suggest that they can now return to spiritual Egypt and purchase the fruit of their affliction is utter nonsense. Perhaps the authors of *A Sabbath Test* put it best.

"You may not be able to prevent restaurant personnel from working on the Sabbath. But you most certainly can prevent them from working for you on that day!"

United Church of God Continued:

The principles we should learn from Nehemiah 13 are respect for the Sabbath and that one should seek to marry someone of like faith. Everything that was done in Nehemiah 13 cannot be applied directly to our lives today. Notice the following activities from the time of Ezra and Nehemiah.

- Setting guards with weapons (swords and spears) on the walls of the city. Should we carry weapons? Can a Christian carry a weapon and be a security guard? Can a Christian work on the Sabbath as a security guard?
- Threatening to do bodily harm to those who lodged outside Jerusalem waiting to do business with the Jews on the Sabbath. Should a Christian threaten bodily harm toward someone who attempts to break the Sabbath?
- Attacking people because of the manner in which they were raising their children and pulling out their hair. Is it permissible for a Christian to attack another Christian over his approach toward child rearing?

- Forcing people to divorce who were married to a foreigner (this was in the case of Ezra). Should the Church demand that everyone who is married to a foreigner be expected to divorce upon entering the Church? Or should the Church insist that everyone who is married to a non-believer be forced to divorce prior to becoming a member of the Church?

Our Response:

The principle we should learn from Nehemiah 13 is more than "respect for the Sabbath," it is REVERENCE of it. The Sabbath is HOLY! It was made so by a HOLY GOD. The Lord of the Sabbath consecrated it at the very beginning (Gen. 2:2-3). Simply because it cannot be enforced on others does not mean that God's Sabbath law is no longer in effect. The Sabbath is an exquisite moment each week that allows God's people to come out of this world and celebrate a marvelous Kingdom that will soon replace man's corruptible governments. When that Kingdom does arrive, all people will honor the Sabbath and keep it HOLY.

However, instead of remembering this day as God has instructed, the UCG thinks they may decide for themselves how they will keep it holy. Their commitment to the practice of dining out on the Sabbath is so strong that they will even spin and contort the scriptures to justify this sin. Consider the four points mentioned above which they offer in defense of seeking out Sabbath-breakers and paying them for their services.

UCG Point I

Setting guards with weapons (swords and spears) on the walls of the city. Should we carry weapons? Can a Christian carry a weapon and be a security guard? Can a Christian work on the Sabbath as a security guard?

Our Response:

Here the UCG is implying that Nehemiah took action that actually violates Sabbath observance, while their action actually enhances it. They do so by suggesting that it was wrong for this servant of God to use sentries to prevent Sabbath breaking merchants from gaining access to God's people on holy time. On the other hand the UCG argues that it is now permissible for God's people to seek out these merchants and purchase their good and services because those who provide them are already there.

Although the UCG thinks Nehemiah's approach would be unacceptable in the Church today, this is not entirely true. Many COG groups have members who serve as ushers and even security personnel to ensure that services are not disrupted. For example, imagine if someone attempted to enter a UCG hall on the Sabbath to set up a concession stand in the back of the building. Their intent was to sell Bibles, religious music as well as sandwiches and beverages. They had all the appropriate permits and only needed the Church's permission to engage in their business on the Sabbath. We doubt that the UCG would grant their request to do so. Now imagine that this vendor persisted by returning for several Sabbaths and attempting to set up his vendor kiosk. Would the UCG ever consider physically escorting this merchant off the premises, or, at the very least, seek the assistance of law enforcement personnel to remove him? We think the answer is yes. Certainly, they would be justified in doing so.

We at ***Blow the Trumpet*** believe the UCG has missed the point in their characterization of Nehemiah's actions. Furthermore, their slant on this story appears to be an attempt to obfuscate God's clear instructions concerning His Sabbath. With this said, here are our questions for them. Notice that these questions bear directly on the issue of dining out on the Sabbath.

- When God instructed the children of Israel to not gather their daily food on the Sabbath (Ex. 16:4-5), what did he mean and why did He do it? Here is a hint: look at verse 4.

- When God instructed the children of Israel to not prepare their Sabbath meals on the seventh day (Ex. 16:5, 23) what did He mean and why did He do it? Here is a hint: look at verse 4.
- When God rebuked the children of Israel because they went outside their place to acquire their Sabbath meals (Ex. 16:27-29) what did He mean and why did He do it? Here is a hint: look at verse 4.

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

UCG Point 2

"Threatening to do bodily harm to those who lodged outside Jerusalem waiting to do business with the Jews on the Sabbath. Should a Christian threaten bodily harm toward someone who attempts to break the Sabbath?"

Our Response:

The answer to this UCG question is, "absolutely not!" God's people do not have the power or the authority to "lay their hands" (Neh. 13:21) on Sabbath-breaking merchants in the world today, although they do possess the authority to remove those who disrupt their services as mentioned in our response to point 1.

With this said, there is something the UCG omits in this particular phase of their argument. God's people not only have the right but the moral duty to deny merchants access to their lives on holy time. Furthermore, they have a moral duty to HATE what these worldly merchants do. This is the point Nehemiah's example of righteous indignation is illustrating. This wonderful servant of God saw what was taking place in Jerusalem as a genuine threat to God's people. Our questions to the United Church of God are these: Do you HATE what is done in a restaurant every Sabbath? Do you see it as an egregious sin against God's law and a threat to His people? If not, why not? If you do see this as a horrible sin, then why would you seek out those who commit it and actually pay them to do so?

What takes place in a restaurant every Sabbath may appear innocent but it most assuredly is not. Satan himself is the force behind Sabbath breaking (2 Cor. 4:4). This is a fact the UCG appears to forget

UCG Points 3 & 4

"Attacking people because of the manner in which they were raising their children and pulling out their hair. Is it permissible for a Christian to attack another Christian over his approach toward child rearing?"

"Forcing people to divorce who were married to a foreigner (this was in the case of Ezra). Should the Church demand that everyone who is married to a foreigner be expected to divorce upon entering the Church? Or should the Church insist that everyone who is married to a non-believer be forced to divorce prior to becoming a member of the Church?"

Our Response:

These UCG points illustrate how far people will go to justify a practice that flies in the face of God's law. The issue of dining out on the Sabbath has absolutely nothing to do with forcing anybody to do anything. It is about what God's people will do and what His teachers will teach. What the UCG is attempting with

this argument is to suggest that because we can't prevent certain behaviors by Sabbath-breakers, we may now embrace those behaviors and even pay for them. Do you honestly believe this is how God thinks?

United Church of God Continued:

"We must be careful when extracting principles that we do not jump to conclusions in our comparisons to modern-day life when civil law is not in the hands of Sabbath keepers. One cannot transfer the events of that day to our day. Nehemiah 13 is not about eating out in a restaurant. This was not the problem. The Jews had turned the Sabbath into market day and were selling all kinds of wares. This wasn't just a food market. The Sabbath had become the primary business and shopping day of the week in Jerusalem. This was contrary to the spirit of the Sabbath commandment."

Our Response:

According to the United Church of God, Nehemiah's indictment against buying and selling on the Sabbath was limited to the scope of purchases being made. According to their reasoning, the Jews in Jerusalem were going into the open market for the entire day and purchasing provisions for their homes. These provisions would last for several days and even longer in many cases. This would be tantamount to buying several hundred dollars worth of groceries today as well as performing other errands. As a result, the entire day was spent in activities totally unrelated to the Sabbath. The assumption the UCG wants God's people to draw with this point is that it is acceptable with God if only an hour or two are spent in activities totally unrelated to the Sabbath.

However, this reasoning represents a massive leap in logic. Nowhere does Nehemiah mention the length of this activity (buying and selling) as an issue, but rather the activity itself. Notice that Nehemiah was not attempting to restrict this practice, he was attempting to eliminate it altogether. It is true that some of God's people may have spent the entire day purchasing goods and services, but that ignores a bigger question: why were they there at all? Nehemiah's remedy was designed to address the latter.

The big question God's people today should ask themselves is this: Why would God allow His people to procure ANY food on His Sabbath when He actually prohibited the children of Israel from doing such a thing when He gave them His law (Ex. 16:16-25)?

Dining out on the Sabbath so clearly violates the enduring moral principle contained in God's law, it is simply mind-boggling to think that any COG group would suggest that it is an acceptable practice. Sadly, that is exactly what the United Church of God claims.

The irony in this entire debate is that it is not the authors of *A Sabbath Test* who are jumping to conclusions but rather the UCG. They want God's people to think that the world of Nehemiah and the one we live in today are so different that no comparisons can be made. But this is not true. Go into any mall on the Sabbath and you will see what Nehemiah saw. The big question for God's people today is: Why don't we see what takes place there every Sabbath the way Nehemiah saw it? The UCG mindset on this issue is totally contrary to Nehemiah's. Theirs is more like, "What harm can there be in spending an hour or two purchasing these goods on the Sabbath? After all, I will still go to services and worship God. How can He possibly be unhappy with that?"

United Church of God Continued:

"There was no direct statement made in the law regarding business or going to market on the Sabbath. Nehemiah took the law and applied it in principle to the activities of the Jews. When there is no "thus saith the Lord," then we must study the law and extract principles that apply to our day."

Our Response:

Just out of curiosity, what principle is the UCG extracting that would lead them to believe God somehow condones His people seeking out those who desecrate His Sabbath and paying them for doing so?

In an attempt to preserve their own blindness, the UCG refuses to see the clear injunction in God's word. Here is what the Almighty does say with respect to His Sabbath and how His people are to honor this day. If these UCG leaders can't see a clear condemnation of doing business or going to market on the Sabbath addressed in the fourth commandment, we think they should consider a calling other than the ministry. Here are God's words.

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.

And remember that you were once a slave in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD your God brought you out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day. (Deut 5:13-15)

God was so committed to preserving the sanctity of His Sabbath that He specifically identified the consequences for profaning it. This is what He thinks of the services The UCG patronizes on holy time.

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

Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD: whosoever doeth any work in the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. (Ex. 31:14-15)

The real tragedy here is that the United Church of God does not appear to truly appreciate the gravity of their trespass or the fact that they were once slaves in spiritual Egypt. If they did, they would NEVER teach that God's people may avail themselves of the same bondage they were once in.

United Church of God Continued:

"Additionally it should be noted that these restrictions were only in Jerusalem. What about the other cities in Judea? What about inns where people lodged and ate while traveling? If someone was on the road, traveling in Judea on the Sabbath day, could he get a meal at one of the inns along the way? How were these principles applied in the other cities of Judea? We must admit that we simply do not know the answers to these questions. There is no mention in Scripture of the other cities in Judea during the time of Nehemiah."

Our Response:

We now come to a point where even the UCG doesn't believe their own argument. If you doubt this assertion consider the following. Is the UCG suggesting that because Nehemiah's prohibition against making the Sabbath a market day (their contention, not ours) was only given to the Jews in Jerusalem, God's people in other cities may have been permitted to engage in this practice? We don't think so. Furthermore, the UCG's reliance on ignorance ("We must admit that we simply do not know the answers

to these questions.") is reckless to its core. It is one thing to say, "We don't know," and another thing altogether to say, "Because we don't know we will engage in a behavior that may offend God Almighty." In other words, if someone told you the water you were about to drink was laced with poison and the best counter argument you could come up with was, "We can't know for sure," would you still take a drink? According to the UCG argument, they would.

Counter Argument

United Church of God
Advisory Committee for Doctrine
April 16, 2007

Dear Mr. Fischer,

Blow the Trumpet says:

"Do you HATE what is done in a restaurant every Sabbath? Do you see it s an egregious sin against God's law and a threat to His people? If not, why not?"

Elsewhere in your paper you refer to those people who work in restaurants as "those who brazenly desecrate His day." Webster's Dictionary defines brazen as "marked by contemptuous boldness" and "to face with defiance or impudence." We do not think that this word is an appropriate description of people who do not understand the Sabbath. Based on the scriptural principle expressed in 1 Corinthians 10:25-33, we would not patronize the business of anyone who is knowingly and defiantly breaking the Sabbath. But in most cases, this does not apply to unbelievers. Jesus referred to David when he had need and was hungry, applying David's incident to the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1-4).

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

Sincerely,

Advisory Committee for Doctrine

Response from Dennis Fischer

Dear Friends,

The UCG may not like ***Blow the Trumpet's*** characterization of what takes place in restaurants as "brazen," but I believe the word is a perfect fit. The world today is defiant against God and His way and the hostility against Him continues to grow.

Furthermore, the UCG comment regarding not hating what takes place in a restaurant on the Sabbath may be the most disingenuous remark I have ever heard in this debate. Consider what they are saying. Although it is appropriate to hate the sin but love the sinner, the UCG doesn't hate the sin either. This comment reflects a HUGELY liberal view of a trespass God specifically identified as a CAPITAL CRIME (Ex. 31:14). However, the UCG sees it differently. These Church leaders are not the slightest bit offended by it.

Why Adopt Such a View

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

With that said, I'm just curious, are there any other sins they don't hate that are committed out of ignorance. For example, how would these COG leaders answer the following questions, all of which relate to sins that are done because people have been deceived by a real devil?

- Does the UCG hate what is done in abortion clinics?
- Does the UCG hate what takes place in sex shops across the country?
- Does the UCG hate the lies taught by false ministers?
- Does the UCG hate witchcraft?
- Does the UCG hate greed and idolatry?
- Does the UCG hate Christmas?
- Does the UCG hate pedophilia?
- Does the UCG hate prostitution?
- Does the UCG hate drug trafficking?
- Does the UCG hate man's attempt to redefine marriage?
- Does the UCG hate gang violence?
- Does the UCG hate divorce?
- Does the UCG hate obscene speech and profanity?
- Does the UCG hate terrorism?

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

Furthermore, does the UCG actually believe that Nehemiah didn't hate what the men of Tyre were doing on the Sabbath? They were unbelievers who also were deceived just like those who work in restaurants today. And what about the gentile city of Nineveh who God acknowledged "didn't know their right hand from their left (Jonah 4:11)? Does the UCG believe He didn't hate the sin taking place there (Jonah 1:2), when He actually threatened to destroy them if they didn't repent (Jonah 3:4)?

Human history is filled with acts that insult our Creator and Sabbath-breaking is high on that list. This sin deprives man the opportunity to know who God is, and to know about the wonderful Kingdom He is going to restore to this earth. Tragically, Satan has blinded the minds of unbelievers. He has persuaded

them that God is irrelevant and that His Sabbath doesn't matter. Does the UCG actually refuse to abhor what Satan has sold to Sabbath-breakers?

With respect to their invocation of David eating the shewbread and the disciples picking grain on the Sabbath, the UCG willfully distorts the clear meaning of these acts in an attempt to justify their on-going lawlessness. There is nothing about what David or the disciples did that even hints that God condones going to restaurants on the Sabbath or holy days. What took place with these men was a once in a lifetime exception--one that Jesus readily acknowledged was "UNLAWFUL." However, Jesus also explained that David, as well as His disciples were "guiltless" because of their unique circumstance. What the UCG advocates is not a once in a lifetime situation, it is an on-going practice. Once again, these teachers blur the line between exceptions and rules, and in doing so turn the grace of God into license.

Respectfully,

Dennis Fischer

Counter Argument continued

United Church of God
Advisory Committee for Doctrine
April 16, 2007

Dear Mr. Fischer,

Just as Jesus came to serve and not be served, God gives us the Sabbath to serve us, not for us to serve it. It is a wonderful gift of God to enjoy, not a legalistic set of restrictions and requirements (which is what the scribes and Pharisees had devised and laid upon the people). It is a special day to rejoice (Isaiah 58) and to feast (Leviticus 23:1-3) as well as to rest and draw close to God.

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

Sincerely,

Advisory Committee for Doctrine

Response from Dennis Fischer

Dear Friends,

Well, the United Church of God has finally done it. They have officially declared that the labor taking place in restaurants every Sabbath is necessary because it satisfies a "NEED" in today's world. It is not a sin as originally believed. It is a real end-time necessity for God's people. This assessment explains why they are so committed to promoting the idea that God is pleased when His people seek out those who profane His Sabbath, even though the fourth commandment prohibits such a thing.

At this point it is important to understand that UCG's idea is not new. Others in God's Church have advanced similar beliefs when justifying the practice of going to restaurants on the Sabbath. One

advocate of this behavior actually suggested that dining out on holy time was "a gift from God in the current distress." Another prominent COG leader suggested that restaurant-like facilities will actually operate on the Sabbath in the millennium. Some have even suggested that restaurant personnel are actually performing a Levitical function when they serve God's people. Can you imagine such a thing?

Although the UCG is convinced that their understanding is based on God's word, I am still puzzled by it. What is it about making dinner reservations for a Friday evening that falls into the category of a "need?" I understand the need for food on the Sabbath. But that need has always existed--even when the children of Israel were delivered out of bondage in Egypt. However, God had a way of satisfying this need without compromising His law. He specifically commanded His people to acquire and prepare their Sabbath meals on the sixth day. My question is: why can't God's people today do the same thing? Why can't they simply follow God's instructions? What is it about today's world that makes it a necessity to seek out unbelievers to prepare our Sabbath meals on holy time?

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

The argument that what takes place in a restaurant on God's Sabbath is a necessity today, is absurd. Dining out on the Sabbath is a luxury---one that goes totally contrary to God's law. To try to cloak it as a necessity represents a desperate attempt to legitimize sin. God's law specifically forbids such work to be performed on the Sabbath. To suggest that soliciting this labor is endorsed by Him is brazenly arrogant, whether the UCG believes it or not.

The UCG also offered the following observation about the Sabbath

"It is a wonderful gift of God to enjoy, not a legalistic set of restrictions and requirements (which is what the scribes and Pharisees had devised and laid upon the people). It is a special day to rejoice (Isaiah 58) and to feast (Leviticus 23:1-3) as well as to rest and draw close to God."

Dos and Don'ts

Although I agree with these COG leaders that God's people are to rejoice and draw close to their Creator on the Sabbath, I also believe that God Himself has defined how that can be done. When one reads the scriptures regarding the Sabbath, there appears to be a great deal said concerning what the Almighty desires of His people. One might even call His instructions a list of "dos and don'ts." The following are just a few examples.

- Don't work (Ex. 20: 8, Dt. 5:13-4))
- Don't compel servants to labor on your behalf (Ex. 20:10, Dt. 5:14-5)
- Don't compel unbelievers to labor on your behalf. (Ex. 20:10, Dt. 5:14-5)
- Don't compel your livestock to labor (Dt. 5:14)
- Don't compel your family to labor (Ex. 20:10, Dt. 5:14-5)
- Don't prepare meals (Ex. 16:23-5)
- Don't go outside your place (Ex. 16:29)
- Don't gather your daily food (Ex. 16:22-3)

- Don't engage in business (Neh.10:31, 13:15-21)
- Don't do your own pleasure (Isa. 58:13)
- Don't speak your own words (Isa. 58:13)
- Don't think your own thoughts (Isa. 58:13)
- Do assemble with God's people (Lev. 23:1-3)
- Do call the Sabbath a delight (Isa. 58:13)
- Do call it honorable and holy (Isa. 58:13)

This appears to be a fairly comprehensive list. Furthermore, it was not created by those who refrain from dining out on the Sabbath. Every one of these "do's" and "don'ts" was given by God Almighty through His servants. It is this standard that drives those who refuse to seek out unbelievers to labor on the Sabbath for their benefit. Furthermore, it is abundantly clear to us that if these instructions were truly honored by all of God's people today, we wouldn't be having this debate.

Respectfully,

Dennis Fischer

The United Church of God vs A Sabbath Test

Argument VII “A Day of Preparation”

When defending the practice of dining out on the Sabbath, the UCG goes to great lengths in applying human reasoning to explain away the obvious. For example, they argue that those who work in restaurants are not "their" servants, therefore the command does not apply to them. What they conveniently fail to acknowledge is that when God gave Israel His law there was not one person in the entire nation that was not included in it. If you doubt this assertion, just ask any UCG minister if it was possible for anyone in the congregation in the wilderness to engage in labor on the Sabbath (with the exception of the Levites) without committing a capital crime. The answer is an emphatic NO!

Furthermore, because God had already prohibited His people from going outside "their place" on the Sabbath (Ex. 16:29), it would have been impossible for them to engage the services of neighboring tribes who worshipped false gods and kept other days. The point here is that God's Sabbath law was crafted in such a way so as to insure that His people would never engage in or solicit profane labor on the Sabbath unless they willfully rejected Him and His law.

Sadly, because the modern day descendants of Israel have rejected the true God and His commandments, and have invited the unbeliever to profane the Sabbath, and have even joined them in this sin, the UCG now argues that God's "called out ones" may also participate in this sacrilege by purchasing their goods and services on HOLY time. These Church leaders even go so far as to argue that the fourth commandment is actually silent on this issue when in truth it thunders out God's will. The very essence of that law declares with great force that God's people are not to be a part of profane labor in any way, shape, or form.

Whether the UCG wishes to believe it or not, God's wisdom is crystal clear on this. The Sabbath is HOLY and those who labor on this day or purchase the fruit of that labor are committing sacrilege against the holy. God never intended it to be this way and deep down inside the UCG must know this.

A Lesson from the Preparation Day

Although the UCG only makes passing reference to the "Preparation Day," the lessons it contains are profound. Instead of learning those lessons, these COG leaders argue that the preparation day was designed simply to free the Israelites from having to engage in strenuous work on the Sabbath, nothing more. Notice what they write.

United Church of God:

The principle of the day of preparation

God instructed Israel to prepare on the sixth day so that no unnecessary work would be performed on the Sabbath day. Specifically the command addresses baking and boiling. To bake food or boil food required much work. The ovens of ancient times required an extremely hot fire to produce enough heat to bake something. And the same was true of boiling. There is no problem with having a fire for heat or to warm something prior to eating. The whole concept of cooking for your family required a day of preparation in order to avoid breaking the Sabbath.

Our Response:

While the UCG contends that the preparation day was simply intended to spare the Israelites from performing "unnecessary work" on the Sabbath, God indicated that it was much more than that. The Almighty declared that this day would stand as a test of obedience. Notice what He said.

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 remains 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)

While the UCG appears almost dismissive of the preparation day, the authors of *A Sabbath Test* provide some extraordinary insight concerning its purpose and significance. Their comments reinforce the gravity of God's words to Moses. We at ***Blow the Trumpet*** believe that this chapter of their book presents the most compelling reason for God's people to cease the practice of seeking out unbelievers who profane the Sabbath. They begin by commenting on Exodus 16:22-27 quoted above. The balance of our response is from their book. As you read it, notice the great deference shown for God's wisdom and His law.

A Sabbath Test

These verses (Ex. 16:22-27) 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."

The Significance of the Preparation Day

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?

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 Him 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? Additionally, 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.

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. 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 the community where God's people were camped. Furthermore, they had no need to do so. God had already provided food on the sixth day. Now consider this. If God prohibited the Israelites to go outside their camp to acquire food on the Sabbath, why would He permit that practice today? The answer is HE WOULDN'T!

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?

Counter Argument

United Church of God
Advisory Committee for Doctrine

The United Church of God offered no
Counter argument to this page

The United Church of God vs A Sabbath Test

Argument VIII “Rehabilitating Evil”

When defending the practice of dining out on the Sabbath, the United Church of God employs what is arguably the greatest insult to God's law in their quiver of points. They contend that seeking out unbelievers who desecrate what God made holy can actually be a better way to honor the fourth commandment than keeping it as God intended from the very beginning, when even He rested from His labor on that day (Ge. 2:2). Our assessment may sound harsh but we exhort all who are genuinely interested in this issue to honestly consider what the UCG is asserting in this phase of their argument.

United Church of God:

Eating in a restaurant doesn't violate the principles as given in the Bible about the Sabbath. In fact, to eat in a restaurant after Sabbath services with our spiritual family can be one of the highlights of a person's week. In many small congregations the entire group goes out together after services, either for lunch or dinner. It is a wonderful way to spend a portion of the Sabbath. Of course, we also need private time together with our families in the home. And we need the fellowship of a Sabbath service to fully appreciate the meaning of the day. The key in these areas is one of balance. It is actually less work for many to eat in a restaurant and pay for the meal than it is to have a group of people in your home to eat on the Sabbath. Even if you work diligently to prepare everything the day before, there will still be work involved when one entertains others in his home.

Our Response:

The UCG position reflected in the paragraph above is laced with so much misinformation that we decided to break it down into several components. As you read each assertion, consider the Biblical truth you must reject in order to accept their argument.

UCG Assertion I

Eating in a restaurant doesn't violate the principles as given in the Bible about the Sabbath.

Our Response:

Oh yes it does! When God established the nation of Israel, He specifically prohibited labor on His Sabbath (Ex. 20:8-11). He did so in order to preserve the spiritual integrity of this day. The Sabbath is HOLY and work profanes it. What takes place in a restaurant on a Friday evening and Saturday afternoon is an act of sacrilege and shows utter contempt for what God consecrated at the very beginning (Ge. 2:2-3). God's law not only prohibits His people from working, but also from soliciting the labor of others on the Sabbath. Even the "stranger" (unbeliever) was not to labor on behalf of God's people on this day (Ex. 20:10).

Furthermore, God's word specifically forbids His people from 1) acquiring their meals on the Sabbath, 2) having them prepared on the Sabbath, and 3) from going outside their community of faith on the

Sabbath (See Ex. 16). When one dines out on God's day he or she must violate all three of these commands.

Finally, dining out on the Sabbath requires the purchase of food and services from unbelievers just like the Jews did when purchasing goods from men of Tyre in Nehemiah's day (Neh. 13:16). Furthermore, God PROHIBITED his people from buying ANY food on His Sabbath or holy day (Neh. 10:31).

For these COG leaders to assert that seeking out Sabbath breakers to prepare their meals "doesn't violate the principles of the Sabbath" is laughable. The sad truth is that they are so committed to satisfying their appetite to engage in this sin they completely deny the obvious.

UCG Assertion II

"In fact, to eat in a restaurant after Sabbath services with our spiritual family can be one of the highlights of a person's week. In many small congregations the entire group goes out together after services, either for lunch or dinner. It is a wonderful way to spend a portion of the Sabbath."

Our Response:

Since when is going out into spiritual Egypt where God's law is being desecrated by slaves to sin (Ro. 6:16) under the influence of the great slave master, Satan (2 Cor. 4:4), "a wonderful way to spend a portion of the Sabbath"? The UCG may find pleasure in what takes place at a restaurant when they dine out on this day, but God absolutely ABHORS it (Ezk. 20: 12-13). If one truly loves God they would never participate in an activity that requires contempt for him--no matter how much pleasure it gives.

UCG Assertion III

Of course, we also need private time together with our families in the home. And we need the fellowship of a Sabbath service to fully appreciate the meaning of the day. The key in these areas is one of balance.

Our Response:

The argument of "balance" advanced by the UCG may sound plausible, but in truth it is nothing less than an attempt to compromise God's law. The fact of the matter is that God forbids moderation and balance in many areas, not the least of which is soliciting profane labor on His Sabbath.

The UCG may feel comfortable dressing up sin in a tuxedo and calling it beautiful, but the Lord of the Sabbath had different words for Israel when they went out to acquire their food on the Sabbath.

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 ye to keep my commandments and my laws? See, for that the LORD hath given you the Sabbath, therefore he giveth you on 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. 16:27-29)

The fact that unbelievers trample on God's holy day by preparing and selling their victuals is no reason for believers to purchase the fruit of their sacrilege. For the UCG to suggest otherwise is shameful.

UCG Assertion IV

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

prepare everything the day before, there will still be work involved when one entertains others in his home."

Our Response:

This brand of human reasoning is based on the belief that it is better for an unbeliever to work on the Sabbath than for a believer to do so. The problem with this assertion is that God makes no such distinction. His prohibition against work on the Sabbath pertained to both (Ex. 20:10).

However, inviting brethren to one's home on the Sabbath does not violate God's law. Even Jesus accepted such invitations (Lk. 14). And contrary to the thinking of the UCG, hosting a Sabbath meal in your home can absolutely be done without profaning God's day—going to a restaurant can't. In order to engage in this activity the Sabbath has to be violated. Without that sin the restaurant would not operate on holy time.

Counter Argument

United Church of God
Advisory Committee for Doctrine
April 16, 2007

Dear Mr. Fischer,

Blow the Trumpet states:

"God's position concerning work on the Sabbath has never changed (Mal. 3:6, H b. 13:8)."

We would agree with this statement in principle. We would disagree that this means that the exact circumstances of what constitutes work and how to keep the Sabbath have never changed. For example, preparing a meal today is much easier than it was before there were modern appliances. So cooking a roast on the Sabbath requires no more work than warming up a roast that was cooked on Friday.

Blow the Trumpet states:

"This brand of human reasoning [that eating out on the Sabbath is less work than having members over for dinner] is based on the belief that it is better for an unbeliever to work on the Sabbath than for a believer to do so. However, God makes no such distinction. His prohibition against work on the Sabbath pertained to both (Ex. 20:10)."

This statement is also based on what we consider as your misunderstanding of the Sabbath commandment. Also, we do not think of an unbeliever working on the Sabbath in terms of "better." But **we do consider that eating out on the Sabbath can be a better alternative than preparing and serving a meal at home.**

We have seen examples of ladies engaged in intense labor to the point of profusely perspiring while warming up and setting out potluck dishes on the Sabbath.

We would consider that a served meal in the quiet atmosphere of a restaurant owned and staffed by people who do not understand the Sabbath could be a better alternative in the age in which we live.

Sincerely,

Advisory Committee for Doctrine

Response from Mr. Fischer

Dear Friends,

In the first paragraph of this counter argument, the UCG contends that preparing a meal on the Sabbath is a relatively easy task. I suppose this is done to "prove" that God's people may now prepare their Sabbath meals on the seventh day, despite the fact that God's word forbids it (Ex. 16:23). Then, in the last paragraph they relate examples of people sweating over pot lucks. I suppose this is done to "prove" it is acceptable with God to go out to a restaurant because of the intense work involved in preparing Sabbath meals. But it doesn't end there. In the middle paragraph, the UCG states that they "do not think of an unbeliever working on the Sabbath in terms of [being] "better" [than a believer working]. Then in the very next sentence they write, "But we do consider that eating out on the Sabbath can be a better alternative than preparing and serving a meal at home."

As one who has engaged in both practices, when it comes to Sabbath observance, hosting brethren at one's home is hands down a more positive experience than dining with them at a restaurant. First, the time you can spend at a private home is significantly greater than it could possibly be at a restaurant. Second, the conversation in a private home can be far more open and candid. Just out of curiosity, has anyone ever seen God's people break out their Bibles in a restaurant and discuss a spiritual topic? If you have, it is very rare. Our conversations in such places require us to be more "discrete."

Finally, the greatest benefit to sharing a Sabbath meal at a private residence is that it is in total keeping with God's word and the example of Jesus Christ. However, seeking out the services of Sabbath-breakers in a restaurant violates every tenant of proper Sabbath observance. There is no example of any man of God doing such a thing in the scriptures.

What is particularly disappointing in this UCG position is that they not only believe and teach that it is acceptable with God to pay non-believers (the stranger within their sphere of influence) for his or her Sabbath labor, but that it is actually preferable to do so.

Respectfully,

Dennis Fischer

The United Church of God vs A Sabbath Test

Argument IX “Yeah Buts and What Its?”

In an attempt to justify dining out on the Sabbath, the United Church of God advances the argument of "moral equivalence." They contend that going to such places as a hospital on the Sabbath is morally no different than going to a restaurant because both involve people working. Therefore, because God would never condemn the act of calling 911 if someone had just been hit by a car on the Sabbath, He would never condemn it if someone called a five star restaurant and made Sabbath reservations for his family and some UCG friends. After all, work is work.

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

But is this true?

Furthermore, can you imagine presenting this argument to God Almighty in defense of willfully going out into spiritual Egypt and seeking out those who desecrate His Sabbath, and paying them to do so simply because their particular sin gives you pleasure?

Blurring the Lines

What the UCG is clearly attempting to do in this particular argument is blur the lines between exceptions and rules. They even manipulate certain situations that may call for Sabbath labor and insist that if it is good in one case it is good in their case. What is most disappointing about this approach is that each of their examples is offered without presenting the whole truth concerning it. Instead, these COG leaders pick and choose the part of their example that benefits their position, but intentionally omit the part that would undermine it.

As you read each point, consider that the issue at hand is whether it is acceptable with God for His people to willfully seek out Sabbath breakers and pay for their labor on holy time. The UCG argues that God approves of this behavior despite the fact that it is soundly condemned throughout His law.

We will first present the UCG argument in its entirety. We will then respond to each point, omitting nothing. Once again, remember, the issue is whether or not God condones the practice of dining out on His Sabbath.

United Church of God:

If you conclude that a waitress is working for you, then the same logic could be applied to those who work at the power plants producing electricity for you (and others) and those who work at the water plants or those who work in the hospitals. According to this logic, Sabbath observance would require that you not turn on electricity or use any water in your home on the Sabbath in order to be consistent. What if you need to take public transportation to get to services on the Sabbath? You will need to pay the taxi driver or purchase a subway ticket. In the Church we rent halls on the Sabbath for services. In some cases we are required to have a janitor present. If one believes he is “doing

business” by eating in a restaurant on the Sabbath, then, in principle, this would also be a problem. What about people who rent a home or apartment? The rent does not cease on the Sabbath. These examples and questions support our position that eating in a restaurant does not violate the Sabbath.

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

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

Our Response:

It is amazing to see the lengths people will go to when justifying sin. In the case of the United Church of God, they argue that there is no difference between the behaviors they presented above and going to a restaurant on God's day. They do this because they desperately want to go out into spiritual Egypt on a day God consecrated and purchase the fruit of its sin. Remember, when one dines out on the Sabbath, he or she must seek out unbelievers who desecrate holy time and pay them for the fruit of their sacrilege. This is done despite the fact that God specifically prohibited His people from acquiring their meals on the Sabbath, preparing their meals on the Sabbath, and going outside their place (community of faith) on the Sabbath (see Ex. 16).

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

UCG Example I

If you conclude that a waitress is working for you, then the same logic could be applied to those who work at the power plants producing electricity for you (and others) and those who work at the water plants... According to this logic, Sabbath observance would require that you not turn on electricity or use any water in your home on the Sabbath in order to be consistent.

Our Response:

While the UCG insists that there is no difference between using energy for one's home on the Sabbath and going to a restaurant on God's day, this is simply NOT TRUE. Consider the obvious differences. First, God's people do not, or at least they should not, seek out utility companies on the Sabbath. In other words, they should not subscribe to utility services on that day. Furthermore, we don't believe the UCG would condone such a practice.

However, when it comes to dining out on the Sabbath that is exactly what takes place. Those who engage in such a behavior must seek out, on holy time, unbelievers who are desecrating the fourth commandment and place an order for the fruit of this sacrilege. We think this represents a huge difference in these two behaviors.

Secondly, God's people do not, or at least they should not, pay their utility bills on the Sabbath. Once again, we believe the UCG would agree. However, when it comes to dining out on this day that is exactly what they do. They are purchasing a specific service that was provided for them, at their request, on and for a specific day—God's DAY! In other words, they are buying something exclusively for Sabbath use that was produced exclusively on holy time. We think this also represents a huge difference in these two behaviors.

Thirdly, when God's people subscribe to a utility service, they are not requiring that labor be performed for them on the Sabbath. That is not how utilities work. It is not as if someone at a power plant must crank a generator so that your home receives its power on God's day. As a matter of fact, power generated by utility companies can be sustained for considerable periods of time without the aid of any manpower. When one subscribes to receive energy, his home, which is already connected to a power source, is simply allowed access to that source.

However, when it comes to dining out on the Sabbath, the opposite is true. Manpower is absolutely essential. Those who engage in this practice depend on that labor—without it they don't eat. Although the UCG argues that going to a restaurant on the Sabbath is the moral equivalent of turning on a light switch, it is NOT! These behaviors are vastly different and we believe the UCG is aware of this fact.

Finally, we at ***Blow the Trumpet*** believe that it can reasonably be argued that utilities are a necessary part of the operation of a modern home. However, no such argument can be made about restaurants. Furthermore, although the Bible is silent on the issue of using utilities on the Sabbath, it speaks with great force regarding Sabbath meals. The Bible specifically mentions that food is not to be acquired on the Sabbath, prepared on the Sabbath and that God's people are not to go outside their community of faith to procure it on the Sabbath (Ex.16). However, instead of heeding the scriptures, the UCG cites the "utility defense" to justify their SIN.

UCG Example II

What if you need to take public transportation to get to services on the Sabbath? You will need to pay the taxi driver or purchase a subway ticket.

Our Response:

Paying for public transportation on the Sabbath may be unavoidable under certain circumstances. Going out to a restaurant is a different thing altogether. Those who do it have a choice. They can honor God's command and prepare their food in advance as He directs them (Ex. 16:23). But the UCG argues that God's instructions don't apply to them in this modern age.

The UCG decision to dine out on the Sabbath is driven by convenience and pleasure. Obedience to God never enters into that equation. This prominent COG organization may call what it advocates "a wonderful way to spend a portion of the Sabbath," but it is not. What they do in a restaurant on the Sabbath no more honors their Savior than what millions of professing Christians do during Easter sunrise services. Their words cry out to Him but their actions reject everything He stands for.

UCG Example III

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

Note From Blow the Trumpet

The UCG states that they "rent halls ON the Sabbath." It is our understanding that this is not true. In truth, they do not sign leases or pay

rents on the Sabbath. Therefore, their words would be more accurately stated, "We rent halls FOR the Sabbath." With this said, here is our response.

Our Response:

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

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

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

Do you see the difference now?

UCG Example IV

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

Our Response:

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

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

At this point it is important to understand that when one rents or buys a home it is done so with the purpose of spending a protracted period of their life in it. Dining out on the Sabbath is totally different. It is an activity that only involves the buying of goods and services to be consumed on a day consecrated by God Himself. This entire transaction involves God's Sabbath. While the UCG sees no difference between living in an apartment and dining out on God's day, we think the differences are HUGE.

UCG Example V

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

Our Response:

Here the UCG is hiding behind God's command to keep the Feast of Tabernacles in order to justify a practice that goes totally contrary to the scriptures. Remember, God specifically prohibited His people from acquiring their food on the Sabbath, having it prepared on the Sabbath and from going outside their place on the Sabbath to gather or consume it (Ex. 16). Additionally, He prohibited them from purchasing goods and services on the Sabbath (Neh. 10:31).

Somehow, the UCG believes that going to a restaurant on holy time is the moral equivalent of staying in a hotel during the FOT. They then reason that if God's people may do one, they most certainly may do the other. But is this really true?

The Sabbath is sacred. As such, it is to be treated with great deference and respect. It is not a time that should be spent engaging in the normal activities of the week. It is a time to come out of the world, not go back into it. The reason God's people should not dine out on the Sabbath is the same reason they should not check in or out of their festival housing on a Sabbath. The appropriate time for arriving at and departing from the FOT is prior to its start (a Sabbath) and after its conclusion (another Sabbath). Sadly, just as so many of God's people take a more casual approach when it comes to dining out on holy time, many of them also take a more casual approach to honoring this special festival.

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

Do Not Disturb

There are many amenities at hotels that are available to guests every day. However, when it comes to the Sabbath, God's people are commanded to conduct their lives differently. The scriptures make it abundantly clear that labor profanes the Sabbath. Therefore, He prohibits His people from being a part of it. Of course there are exceptions, but dining out is NOT one of them.

At this point some may ask, "What about housekeeping services offered by most hotels and resorts? They will want to clean your room on the Sabbath. Isn't it a little hypocritical to accept their service on this day?" The answer is yes. The good news is that God's people do not have to accept this service, let alone solicit it. Those who correctly observe the Sabbath and holy days will generally place a "Do not disturb" sign on their door. They do this in order to not compel hotel personnel to labor on their behalf on holy time. Although these people will be working anyway, this is not an excuse to take advantage of their labor.

UCG Example VI

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

Our Response:

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

While the UCG fails to see the difference between these two examples and dining out on the Sabbath, we see them quite clearly. For example, who would ever consider being a patient in hospital "a wonderful way to spend a portion of the Sabbath"? But that is exactly how the UCG characterizes dining out on holy time. Furthermore, what member of the UCG doctrinal committee would describe being confined in a nursing home by saying it "can be one of the highlights of a person's week"? But, once again, that is how the UCG describes going to restaurants on God's day. Furthermore, if given a choice between being able to live a life filled with vibrant health or living in a nursing home, what would these ministers choose?

God's word makes it clear that there are circumstances that may necessitate labor on the Sabbath, but this is an exception, not a rule. The authors of *A Sabbath Test* rightly understand this principle because they are not trying to play semantical games with God's great moral law. Notice how they explain the principle of "an ox in the ditch."

A Sabbath Test

If God's people are going to invoke the principle of "an ox in a ditch" to justify dining out on the Sabbath, they would be well advised to understand the principle the Messiah was conveying when giving this lesson.

When Jesus gave this very important principle regarding the Sabbath, He was dining at the home of a prominent Pharisee. Also there was a man suffering from "dropsy," an abnormal and painful accumulation of fluid in the tissue of the body. Some believe this man was placed in front of Jesus in an attempt to see if He would heal on the Sabbath.

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

"Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the Sabbath day?" (Lk. 14:5)

Jesus' question silenced these men because it not only appealed to their understanding of the scriptures, but also to rabbinical law, which provided for such acts of mercy. By invoking the law, Jesus was cutting through all the potential arguments these men may have been crafting. However, His words and actions were saying much more. The point He was making was that sometimes life does not go according to plan. There can be unexpected twists and turns. In short: an ox can fall into a pit.

The action Jesus took illustrated that when there is danger to life or property, God understands and even expects His children to take measures to correct the problem, even if it occurs on His Sabbath. In other words, save the ox.

This principle can be applied to other situations in life. There may be a time when the car breaks down or an injury occurs. These are not planned events. They are unforeseen emergencies. The fact is that our lives can be interrupted by events that are simply beyond our control.

However, there is a principle here that must be respected. The ox in a ditch is the exception, not the rule. In other words, just because you had to change a flat tire last Sabbath does not mean it is okay to set up an auto repair business that is open seven days a week.

A Genuine Emergency

There are times when purchasing something on the Sabbath might be appropriate based on the principle of an ox in a ditch. For example: suppose you are taking a Sabbath walk and notice an elderly gentleman has collapsed on the sidewalk. When you approach to offer assistance, he informs you that he is diabetic and asks if you could buy him a specific kind of candy bar. Across the street is a convenience store and in your pocket is a five dollar bill. This is an ox in a ditch. This act is not about engaging in business on the Sabbath. It is about healing on the Sabbath. This being the case, there may be times when it might be necessary to buy food on this day. But this should only take place in a genuine emergency where the alternative may be catastrophic.

Additionally, it is important to understand what an ox in a ditch is not. Poor planning is not an ox in a ditch. A messy home that is not ready for company is not an ox in a ditch. Running into old friends that you haven't seen in years is not an ox in a ditch. An ox in a ditch is something to regret, not something to anticipate – or even celebrate.

Furthermore, when Jesus gave the lesson of an ox in a ditch, it was in the context of healing, not dining. The principle is there to be sure, but it is not to be manipulated. To do so would be a HUGE mistake. Those who use Jesus' teaching regarding mercy to justify going to restaurants on the Sabbath should ask themselves, "Is it really an emergency?" Or is it possible that you are just exploiting for your own benefit the compassion and mercy of the very Savior who made provisions for dealing with a real tragedy that may arise on God's holy Sabbath?

Counter Argument

United Church of God
Advisory Committee for Doctrine
April 16, 2007

Dear Mr. Fischer,

Blow the Trumpet states:

"While the UCG insists that there is no difference between using energy for one's home on the Sabbath and going to a restaurant on God's day, this is simply not true. Consider the obvious differences. First, God's people do not, or at least they should not, seek out utility companies on the Sabbath. In other words, they should not subscribe to utility services on that day. Furthermore, we don't believe the UCG would condone such a practice. However, when it comes to dining out on the Sabbath, that is exactly what takes place. Those who engage in such a behavior must

seek out, on holy time, unbelievers who are desecrating the fourth commandment and place an order for the fruit of this sacrilege. We think this represents a huge difference in these two behaviors."

Nehemiah would not have allowed Israel to reap the benefits of anyone desecrating the Sabbath, regardless of whether the businesses were sought out. He would not have allowed Israelites to work in the first place. That's a major difference between his situation and ours today.

Consider some of the businesses that Church members, including those who do not eat in restaurants, encounter on the Sabbath. While driving to Church, some listen to classical music stations, weather reports, traffic updates, news of world events, etc. The employees providing media services are breaking the Sabbath, as much as the restaurant employees. Some members have their trash set out for pickup if it's scheduled on Saturday. They don't "lock out" these businesses on the Sabbath by simply keeping their radios off or not sitting their trash out.

Some members have opted to take transportation services, choosing to pay to travel an hour, rather than driving perhaps three hours for free. This can enable them to avoid bumper-to-bumper traffic, especially in urban areas, and greatly reduce stress on the Sabbath.

Sincerely,

Advisory Committee for Doctrine

Response from Dennis Fischer

Dear Friends,

Once again the UCG offers the argument of moral equivalence to defend their sin. They claim that there is no difference between you listening to classical music on the radio on the Sabbath and them proactively seeking out unbelievers and paying them to labor on their behalf on this day. They make this argument not because they love classical music, but because they love dining out on holy time.

Personally, I believe if the UCG honestly sees no moral distinction between listening to the radio and dining out at a commercial restaurant on a day God consecrated, I would advise them to stop listening to the radio. Unfortunately, these learned men would rather seek out a behavior that is totally innocent and arbitrarily declare that it is no different than what they do. Even sadder is the fact that this approach is a constant refrain throughout their doctrinal paper as well as their letter to me. Consider some of the lengths they go to when advancing their arguments.

- They believe God's instructions to not acquire or prepare your Sabbath meals on the seventh day (Ex.16) are not applicable because He no longer provides manna for His people. Therefore, they may now acquire their meals from Sabbath breakers.
- They believe that because it is acceptable with God for His people to pull an ox out of a pit on the Sabbath, it is also acceptable with Him if His people make Friday night reservations at a fine restaurant.
- They believe that what takes place at a restaurant on the Sabbath satisfies is a "NEED" in this present age. Therefore, they may now seek out these Sabbath breakers and pay them to labor on their behalf.

- They believe that seeking out unbelievers who labor in restaurants on the Sabbath is appropriate because it frees God's people from having to labor themselves.
- They believe that if it is acceptable with God for His people to pay for public transportation to services because they have no other way to get there, then it is also acceptable with Him if they pay unbelievers to labor on their behalf in a restaurant.
- They believe that if David could eat the shewbread once in his life, which Christ acknowledged was unlawful, then they can pay unbelievers to periodically cook for them on the Sabbath, which God also said was unlawful.
- They believe that because God permitted the Israelites to sell meat that died naturally to unbelievers, on days other than the Sabbath, He now gives the UCG permission to buy food from unbelievers on the Sabbath.
- They believe that if you can go to a market on Tuesday and buy food that "may have been" harvested on the Sabbath, then they can go to a restaurant on Saturday and pay for food that must be prepared on the Sabbath.
- They don't believe restaurants that labor on God's Sabbath are in the "world." Therefore, God's warning to come out of the world is not applicable in this regard.
- They don't believe that those who work in restaurants are in "spiritual Egypt." Therefore, God permits His people to seek them out and solicit the fruit of their Sabbath labor.
- They don't hate what is done in restaurants on the Sabbath because it is done out of ignorance. Therefore, they see no reason to refrain from paying for the fruit of that ignorance.
- They believe that if God's people may go to a hospital on the Sabbath, where people labor for them on holy time, then they may go to a restaurant on the Sabbath and pay for people to labor for them as well.
- They believe that if God would permit one of His children to live in a nursing home which requires round the clock care, including the Sabbath, then all of God's people should be able to dine out and be served by restaurant personnel on the Sabbath as well.
- They believe that if you can listen to the radio on the Sabbath where unbelievers are working, then they can seek out unbelievers at a restaurant and purchase their labor.
- They believe that if God's people may live in an apartment where part of the rent covers 4 to 5 Sabbaths per month, then they may also pay for someone to prepare their food on the Sabbath.
- They believe that if God's people can have electricity in their home on the Sabbath, then they may seek out unbelievers at restaurants to labor for them on holy time as well.

Every one of these beliefs is proclaimed without shame by some of the most prominent minds in the United Church of God. At every turn these Church leaders parade out a never ending list of "what ifs?" and "yeah buts" with the express purpose of proving that they can seek out "strangers" and pay them to desecrate the Sabbath, because they would be working anyway.

Respectfully,

Dennis Fischer

Counter Argument continued

United Church of God
Advisory Committee for Doctrine
April 16, 2007

Dear Mr. Fischer,

Blow the Trumpet continues:

"Secondly, God's people do not, or at least they should not, pay their utility bills on the Sabbath. Once again, we believe the UCG would agree. However, when it comes to dining out on this day, that is exactly what they do. They are purchasing a specific service that was provided for them, at their request, on a specific day-GOD'S DAY! We think this also represents a huge difference in these two behaviors.

"Thirdly, when God's people subscribe to a utility service, they are not requiring that labor be performed for them on the Sabbath. That is not how utilities work. It is not as if someone at a power plant must crank a generator so that your home receives its power on God's day. As a matter of fact, power generated by utility companies can be sustained for considerable periods of time without the aid of any manpower. When one subscribes to receive energy, his home, which is already connected to a power source, is simply allowed access to that source."

We are not suggesting that eating out on the Sabbath is the same as using utilities, but the principle is still the same. In both cases we are paying for labor that is done on the Sabbath. If people are employed at power plants on the Sabbath, by your reasoning we are "paying for the fruits of their sacrilege" because we are paying for work done on the Sabbath.

We do not think that paying for something on the Sabbath is necessarily wrong. Nor do we consider buying a meal to be the same as treating the Sabbath as an ordinary day for shopping and marketing. Otherwise, how could a minister purchase gas while traveling to and from Sabbath services? You refer to paying for public transportation on the Sabbath as "unavoidable under certain circumstances." Are you reasoning that some sin is unavoidable and thus permissible?

Sincerely,

Advisory Committee for Doctrine

Response from Dennis Fischer

Dear Friends,

Let me begin with the last question. I believe there are times when certain acts that go contrary to God's law may be done without Him imputing guilt. Jesus said as much. This was the case with David and the shewbread as well as the disciples picking grain on the Sabbath (Mt. 12:1-8). However, when advocates of dining out on the Sabbath attempt to blur the lines between what is clearly a unique situation and what they simply want to do because of the pleasure they derive from it, God's purpose is never served. Sadly, this is exactly what the United Church of God does with respect to this issue—THEY BLUR

THE LINES. In essence these Church leaders are asking, "What is the difference between, having to sit alone on a bus with a bunch of non-believers as it takes you to assemble on God's Sabbath, because it is the best choice available to you, and them pro-actively seeking out the services of unbelievers working at a restaurant simply because you think it is an enjoyable place to fellowship?" To me the answer is simple.

What about utilities?

When I subscribe to a utility service my home is connected to a power source that continues to operate twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Contrary to the silliness the UCG claims, I do not require manpower to labor on my behalf on the Sabbath. Furthermore, although they claim that the principle of dining out on the Sabbath is the same as having utilities, this is TOTALLY FALSE. When the UCG dines out after services, they are paying people to specifically work on the Sabbath. In other words they are paying for Sabbath labor as opposed to Tuesday labor, or, Wednesday labor. I on the other hand do not require Sabbath labor for my utility service, any more than I need my bank to be open on Saturdays for my checking account to work, which is also assessed a service charge. In truth, my home and accounts will function perfectly whether they are there or not.

Furthermore, I am 100 per cent certain that technology will exist in the millennium. Included in that technology will be a variety of power sources that will be a part of everyday life, including the Sabbath. That's right! There will be utilities that power homes and ensure proper sanitation during the rule of Jesus Christ and His saints. These are essential services that facilitate order and ensure proper health. Furthermore, there is not one syllable in God's word that contradicts their service

However, that is not the case when it comes to restaurants. The very nature of any Sabbath service they provide requires God's law to be compromised. As much as the UCG loves the pleasure of dining out on holy time God Almighty condemns it and promises that there will be a day of reckoning for this sin.

Respectfully,

Dennis Fischer

Counter Argument continued

United Church of God
Advisory Committee for Doctrine
April 16, 2007

Dear Mr. Fischer,

Blow the Trumpet states:

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

This issue goes beyond personnel simply in the building. Would Nehemiah have allowed Israelites to rent halls from people desecrating the Sabbath, elsewhere in the same hotel building during Sabbath services? The Church has also met in VFW halls where veterans are smoking elsewhere in the building during services. We've met in movie theaters where carnal movies were shown the night before or after the Church service as well as advertised on the walls of the building during the service.

Nehemiah certainly would not allow this and neither would we if these businesses were under the Church's jurisdiction, as they were in Nehemiah's day.

Sincerely,

Advisory Committee for Doctrine

Response from Dennis Fischer

Dear Friends,

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

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

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

Respectfully,

Dennis Fischer

P.S. I'm just curious. But has the UCG ever made it a requirement for renting a hall that Sabbath breakers must be in adjoining rooms? I didn't think so. Now, what about restaurants? Has the UCG ever gone to a restaurant on holy time and not sought out Sabbath breakers? Can you see the difference now?

The United Church of God vs A Sabbath Test

Argument X “The Scriptures are Silent”

When defending the practice of dining out on the Sabbath, the United Church of God claims that the scriptures are silent on this issue. Therefore, this prominent COG group contends that God's people may now go out into spiritual Egypt where the Sabbath is being desecrated by slaves to sin and actually purchase the fruit of this sacrilege. Here is how they express this point, followed by our response.

United Church of God:

There is nothing in the Sabbath commandment about eating in a restaurant or not eating in a restaurant. This was not an issue that needed addressing in the time of Moses. One must be careful in developing rules for Sabbath observance that are outside the bounds of what God has given.

We would conclude that you are the ones guilty of making up rules for Sabbath observance that are "outside the bounds of what God has given" and that defining eating out on the Sabbath as not acceptable with God falls into that category. We do not feel that you have proven your points in your paper for the reasons that we have presented.

Our Response:

Here is what the UCG conveniently omits when advancing their point. When God gave the Ten Commandments to the children of Israel, He had already introduced them to His Sabbath. Furthermore, it was not by accident that when doing so, the Eternal presented very specific instructions regarding their Sabbath meals. In short, God prohibited them from: 1) acquiring their meals on the Sabbath, 2) preparing their meals on the Sabbath, and 3) going outside their place (the camp) on the Sabbath (see Ex. 16). A few weeks later when presenting these emancipated slaves with His great moral law, the Ten Commandments, God reinforced His position concerning Sabbath labor. Simply put, it was NOT to be done, under penalty of death (Ex. 31:14)—even livestock were to be released from labor.

God's Sabbath law was clear and resolute. The Israelites were not to come into contact with profane labor on holy time, let alone seek it out and purchase it. Furthermore, everyone INSIDE the camp was bound by that law. In other words, no one could labor on the Sabbath or sell the fruit of that labor on God's day—PERIOD.

At this point, it is interesting to note that when Nehemiah powerfully addressed the profaning of God's Sabbath by the Jews in Jerusalem, he locked non-believers (men of Tyre) out of the city. He also rebuked the nobles of Judah for allowing them access to Jerusalem on the Sabbath in the first place. Nehemiah also made it absolutely clear that God's people were not to engage in labor on His Sabbath, nor were they to patronize labor on this day. He commanded them, in no uncertain terms, to not buy ANYTHING (Neh. 10:31). There was no limitation to this directive.

For the UCG to claim that there is nothing in the fourth commandment regarding going to restaurants is a disgraceful attempt to manipulate language. God's law addresses Sabbath meals in a way that leaves no room for the scriptural trickery employed by UCG's doctrinal committee. Furthermore, these men would be well advised to take their own advice about making up "rules for Sabbath observance that are outside the bounds of what God has given." And make no mistake about it: teaching

that it is acceptable with their Creator to seek out the services of Sabbath breakers and pay for their sin breaks all records in making things up.

Counter Argument

United Church of God
Advisory Committee for Doctrine
April 16, 2007

Dear Mr. Fischer,

If Scripture were as clear as the Blow the Trumpet paper states, then the disciples would not have plucked heads of grain on the Sabbath.

Sincerely,

Advisory Committee for Doctrine

Response from Dennis Fischer

Dear Friends,

Although the UCG contends that the prohibition against harvesting crops on the Sabbath did not apply to gleaning small amounts of grain to relieve hunger, Jesus implied just the opposite. If what the disciples did was lawful, why would the Messiah cite the examples of David and the Levites in their defense? Jesus readily acknowledged that both David and the Levites did that which went contrary to God's law (Mt. 12:3-5). If this wasn't also true of the disciples, why did Christ invoke these particular examples? Why didn't He simply argue that no law had been violated?

Something to Think About

At this point, it is important to understand that although the Pharisees, who accused the disciples, were treacherous, they weren't stupid. These men were acutely aware of the provision in the Torah permitting gleaning by a stranger or the poor on another man's property (see: Lev.19:9, Deut. 23:25, 24:19). However, they also knew that this provision did not extend to gleaning on the Sabbath, regardless of how little was gathered—and Jesus understood this as well

If the UCG carefully studied this event they would discover that Jesus never challenged the Pharisees' understanding of the law, but rather their understanding of MERCY. The truth that seems to be so elusive to them is that the Messiah considered His disciples "guiltless," not because of what they did, but because of why they did it. These men were genuinely famished, just like David—and like David, what was done to remedy it was unquestionably a once-in-a-lifetime act, not something that could be planned out and done periodically, as so many do today.

Respectfully,

Dennis Fischer

The United Church of God vs A Sabbath Test

Argument XI "Causing Division"

At one point in their defense of dining out on the Sabbath, the United Church of God requests that those who refuse to engage in this practice keep their views to themselves. They contend that to speak out on this issue is divisive. Here is how they express their point, followed by our response.

United Church of God:

There are many other things that can be said about this issue, but the conclusion of the Church is that eating out on the Sabbath does not violate the Sabbath command. Whether one eats out on the Sabbath or does not eat out is a personal choice. But it must not become a point of division within the Church.

If, after looking at all the scriptures on this subject, an individual feels compelled not to eat out in a restaurant on the Sabbath, the Church respects his position. We simply ask that he keep it as a personal decision and not make any effort to persuade others of his view. To attempt to persuade others would be divisive (1 Corinthians 14:26). All things should be used for the purpose of edifying or building up and not tearing down.

Our Response:

The UCG is correct when they assert that, "whether one eats out on the Sabbath or does not eat out is a personal choice." However, the same can be said about whether one chooses to keep the Sabbath at all. In truth, everything we do involves choices. With that said, God's people must understand that when it comes to obeying the TRUE GOD, there is more. The issue is not only what one chooses, but what God commands. Although the UCG insists that He is silent on this subject, they couldn't be more wrong.

The scriptures declare that labor performed at a restaurant on HOLY TIME is an act of defiance against God Himself. It is a CAPITAL CRIME. Furthermore, the SIN involved in that labor required the brutal execution of Jesus Christ. Despite this fact, the UCG teaches that purchasing the fruit of this CRIME is "a wonderful way to spend a portion of the Sabbath" (See Argument VIII). Can you imagine making such a claim?

Slaves to Sin

Those who labor in restaurants every Sabbath are slaves to sin (Ro. 6:16) and the great slave master, Satan the devil (2 Cor. 4:4). Equally true is the fact that God's people were once slaves to sin as well (Eph. 2:2-3). But we were mercifully delivered from this bondage.

Now for the question of the day:

Why would anyone believe that God would condone His people going back into spiritual Egypt and purchasing the fruit of the same bondage that once enslaved them? To believe such a thing is utter madness. This is why the Almighty commanded His people to not compel servants to work on the Sabbath.

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.

And remember that you were once a slave in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD your God brought you out through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day. (Deut 5: 14-15)

These words are so clear it is remarkable that any of God's people would debate them. Sadly, the UCG argues that although one should not compel their personal servants to work, they may go back into spiritual Egypt and let its slaves labor on their behalf. What an insult to GOD and His Sabbath! The bottom line is this: what takes place in restaurants every seventh day is a perfect example of bondage. On the other hand, God's Sabbath is a perfect picture of FREEDOM and deliverance from bondage. There is nothing compatible between these two practices, regardless of what the UCG claims.

Causing Division

With respect to causing division, this is not the first time such an accusation has been leveled against those who bare the truth. Peter and John were given "cease and desist" orders from the religious leaders of their day too. Furthermore, when the Worldwide Church of God started preaching heresy, they tried to silence the truth with threats that to preach such things was also divisive.

Here is a news flash for the United Church of God. It is not TRUTH that divides God's people, it is LIES. For them to advance their position on this critical end-time issue and then demand that those who oppose them remain silent is typical of leaders today. If these men are genuinely committed to unity in the Church, they should be anxious to publicly debate this issue.

Additionally, the UCG only requests that those who refuse to dine out on the Sabbath keep their opinion to themselves, not the other way around. Today there are scores of UCG brethren who have been pressured to give up their belief on this issue. Even pastors have exerted pressure on them.

Here is a thought for all the leaders in God's Church to ponder: silence doesn't foster unity, open and honest dialogue does. This lesson is made graphically clear in the scriptures. In Acts 15, the Church openly addressed an issue that divided God's people in the first century. We strongly suggest that the UCG follow that example and do it again. However, in the interest of fairness it should be done with genuine advocates on both sides presenting their case. For obvious reasons, our suggestion is not likely to be acted on. One only has to honestly consider the two positions being advanced to see why the UCG wants to silence its critics. Quite frankly, the alternative would be too embarrassing for them.

A Note from Blow the Trumpet

Throughout this series of articles we have vigorously argued against the UCG's position regarding dining out on the Sabbath. And although we often mock some of their points, we firmly believe these men are steadfast in their desire to honor God and His law. The United Church of God is a wonderful community of believers with a very talented and gifted team of leaders. Any thought that we think this issue brings into question the legitimacy of the UCG is TOTALLY FALSE. We love the United Church of God and would encourage anyone to fellowship with them.

Counter Argument

United Church of God
Advisory Committee for Doctrine
April 16, 2007

Dear Mr. Fischer,

Blow the Trumpet says:

"With respect to causing division, this is not the first time such an accusation has been leveled against those who bare the truth. Peter and John were given 'cease and desist' orders from the religious leaders of their day too. Furthermore, when the Worldwide Church of God started preaching heresy, they tried to silence the truth with threats that to preach such things was also divisive."

There are a number of significant differences between the example above and the Blow the Trumpet paper. Peter and John were commissioned and sent forth by Christ to do a certain work (Matthew 28:19-20). Their audience was nonmembers, not other baptized members of God's Church (Acts 3). They were not teaching anything contrary to the established doctrine in the Church where they attended. Their message did not cause other leaders in God's Church to provide a written response in order to address related problems. They were not disrespecting the Church or its leadership. The truth that Peter and John taught was primarily objective among the Church members.

Sincerely,

Advisory Committee for Doctrine

Response from Dennis Fischer

Note: from Blow the Trumpet

Because of the nature of this particular page, Mr. Fischer has elected to address his response directly to the United Church of God,

Dear UCG Advisory Committee for Doctrine,

I realize that you would like to dismiss our work and those who are a part of it. This is understandable in light of the fact we are so critical of your position on this issue. With this said, I would like to address the points you raise concerning what you think are "significant differences" between the work of **Blow the Trumpet** and that done by Jesus' disciples.

UCG point # 1

"Peter and John were commissioned and sent forth by Christ to do a certain work (Matthew 28:19-20)."

My Response:

The implication here is that you believe we have no such calling. By the way, we are confident that you believe you do. With that said, here is how history will play this one out. The day will come when you will suffer greatly for the sin you practice and teach, unless you repent. I personally believe the consequences will be the Great Tribulation. This is what is implied by Nehemiah when he rebuked the nobles of Judah (Neh. 13:17-18). In truth, Nehemiah's indictment was directly linked to Jeremiah's rebuke prior to the Babylonian captivity. Here is how that rebuke was expressed.

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

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

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

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

But they must obey me and observe the Sabbath as a sacred day. They must not carry any load through the gates of Jerusalem on that day, for if they do, I will set the gates of Jerusalem on fire. Fire will burn down the palaces of Jerusalem, and no one will be able to put it out." (Jer. 17:20-22, 24, 27 Good News Translations)

Tragically, the leaders of Judah refused to heed God's word and they would pay dearly for their defiance. For you see, God was not bluffing. Unfortunately, His people would have to find this out the hard way. Both the scriptures as well as secular history reveal that a powerful Chaldean army would attack Jerusalem and leave it in ruins. Here is how Jeremiah described its utter destruction and the price it would have to pay for not heeding God's warning.

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

A Tragic Consequence

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

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

“A forced laborer”

God's people were thrust into captivity because they thought they could trifle with the Sabbath. They did so because they would rather embrace their traditions than listen to the truth. They thought they could decide for themselves how the Sabbath could be observed. They thought they could make up their own rules concerning this holy convocation. But in the end all they got was bondage.

This is what **Jeremiah** was warning Judah about during the Days of King Zedekiah.

It is what **Nehemiah** was warning the nobles of Judah about during the days of Artaxerxes.

And it is what “***A Sabbath Test***” warns God's leaders about today.

The point to this is simple. Because God is a merciful Father, He has commissioned us, that's right, US, to warn His people to turn from the terrible sin you promote. You may reject this now, but that won't always be the case. We are very comfortable with your lack of faith in us, it is your lack of faith in God's word on this issue that has us concerned.

UCG point # II

Their audience was nonmembers, not other baptized members of God's Church (Acts 3).

My Response:

This assertion is simply not true. Peter and John were speaking to God's people of their day. They went directly into the Temple and proclaimed the gospel of Christ. Peter even called his audience "brethren" (Acts 3:17) as well as "children of the covenant" (verse 25). For you to imply that these people were outsiders is false. It is true that Peter exhorted them to repent and be converted (verse 19), but that is exactly what we are exhorting you to do.

UCG point # III

They were not teaching anything contrary to the established doctrine in the Church where they attended.

My Response:

On the contrary, this is exactly what they were doing. These men spoke boldly about the greatest contrary teaching in the history of religion. Furthermore, it was their regular practice to enter the synagogue on the Sabbath and proclaim their message. Even Paul was a part of synagogue life, much to the frustration of the religious leaders of his day. Personally, I think these men would be shocked to hear your assessment of their message.

UCG point # IV

Their message did not cause other leaders in God's Church to provide a written response in order to address related problems.

My Response:

This sounds more like whining to me than a biblical argument. Furthermore, ***Blow the Trumpet*** didn't cause you to write your counter letter to me anymore than you caused us to write our rebuttal to your totally unbiblical study paper. Personally, I believe you responded to ***Blow the Trumpet*** as a courtesy to Mr. Dennis Luker, and he asked you to respond as a courtesy to me. Additionally, I think your case would

have been better served by not writing at all, as opposed to producing the nonsense you presented in your letter.

UCG point # V

They were not disrespecting the Church or its leadership.

My Response:

John the Baptist called the religious leaders of his time a "generation of vipers" (Mt. 3:7). Jesus excoriated Church leaders with a mountain of insults because of their contempt for God and his word (Mt. 23). And I am sure that the religious leaders during the early years of God's Church thought Peter and John weren't showing them the respect they deserved either.

Here is something for you to think about. The real leader of the Church is Jesus Christ. He also happens to be the Lord of the Sabbath. It is your position on this issue that shows complete disrespect to Him. At every turn you have clung to a practice that disgraces what He made holy. It gives me no pleasure to say this. On the contrary, it grieves me to do so. But you have no idea the peril you are bringing on both yourselves and God's people.

UCG point # VI

The truth that Peter and John taught was primarily objective among the Church members.

My Response:

If you are suggesting that our position regarding dining out in restaurants on the Sabbath is "subjective," you are simply in denial of the Biblical facts pertaining to this issue. Throughout your paper, as well as your letter, you reject both God's Sabbath law as well as its enduring moral principles. We, on the other hand, take God's word to mean what it says. It is my personal belief that if the Almighty announced that the salvation of His people rested on this issue, you wouldn't go close to a restaurant on the Sabbath or the holy days.

Respectfully,

Dennis Fischer

Counter Argument continued

United Church of God
Advisory Committee for Doctrine
April 16, 2007

Dear Mr. Fischer,

We appreciate your assessment,

"We firmly believe these men are steadfast in their desire to honor God and His law. The United Church of God is a wonderful community of believers with a very talented and gifted team of leaders. Any thought that we think this issue brings into question the legitimacy of the UCG is

TOTALLY FALSE. We love the United Church of God and would encourage anyone to fellowship with them."

However, we feel that some of your "mocking" is inappropriate and contradictory to this conclusion. We consider the following statements from your paper to be both inaccurate and contrary to scriptural principles:

"The only thing these examples and questions prove is that the objective of the United Church of God is not to seek out the Lord's will in this matter, but rather to justify their own sin. Furthermore, these points don't possess a hint of honesty."

"This is one of the most self-serving arguments the UCG offers when justifying dining out on the Sabbath, and they should be ashamed of themselves for presenting it. In essence, they are hiding behind the weak and in firm order to excuse indulging their own appetite for pleasure on God's Sabbath."

We would certainly acknowledge that we all have gaps in our understanding. Even Paul said, "We know in part..." (1 Corinthians 13:9). After Christ returns, we will find out for sure who was right on the subject of eating out on the Sabbath. In the meantime, God holds us accountable for living our lives according to our own faith and understanding (Romans 14:22-23) and to refrain from condemning each other over differences of belief and practice.

However, we should avoid ad hominem attacks or imputed evil motives. We would appreciate if you would refrain from these condemning statements in any future dialogue with us or others on this topic.

Sincerely,

Advisory Committee for Doctrine

Response from Dennis Fischer

Dear UCG Advisory Committee for Doctrine,

I realize that some of our words have a sharp edge to them. However, your approach to this issue is so insulting to God's law, we are compelled to speak out with force. If you could just step back for a moment and see what you are advancing in this debate, I am convinced you would be embarrassed beyond words.

At every turn you argue that customers bear no responsibility for the work performed by restaurant personnel even though they are the ones who proactively seek out those services and pay for them. You claim that restaurants today actually satisfy a critical need in the Church and that seeking out Sabbath breakers to prepare your meals frees up God's people from labor of their own. You also claim that seeking out Sabbath breakers to prepare your meals is the moral equivalent of turning on a light switch or attending the Feast of Tabernacles.

Every point you presented in your paper and your letter to me was laced with one deception after another—and for what? So you can go out into the world like other Sabbath breakers and profane what God made holy.

Here is something to consider. When Nehemiah contended with the nobles of Judah he made a direct link between them allowing merchants access to their lives and CAPTIVITY. You on the other hand encourage that access, and by doing so invite the CAPTIVITY.

Well, here is the bad news.

If you as the contemporary nobles of God's people persist in promoting the HORRIBLE LIE that claims you just can't know for sure whether God approves of His people seeking out Sabbath breakers and paying them to labor on holy time—and if you persist on parading out a steady stream of distortions of the Biblical record in an attempt to indulge your own Sabbath breaking appetite, then you will bring about—and PERSONALLY EXPERIENCE—the same “EVIL” Nehemiah spoke of so very long ago. You may dismiss this warning now but you won't be so dismissive of it when it comes to pass. With that said here are some questions you would be well advised to prayerfully consider.

- 1) Are you prepared to bet captivity on your belief that when God stopped raining down manna His people were then no longer required to acquire and prepare their Sabbath meals on the sixth day?

Because that is exactly what the stakes are

- 2) Are you prepared to bet captivity on your belief that because Jesus' disciples picked grain on the Sabbath once in their life, God's people may now seek out Sabbath breakers to pick it for them because of the pleasure they derive from it.

Because that is exactly what the stakes are

- 3) Are you prepared to bet captivity on your belief that those who labor in restaurants on holy time are not really slaves at all, therefore, you can seek them out and pay them to labor on your behalf?

Because that is exactly what the stakes are

- 4) Are you prepared to bet captivity on your belief that Nehemiah only condemned spending the entire Sabbath at a market, not just an hour or two buying a meal from local food merchants?

Because that is exactly what the stakes are

- 5) Are you prepared to bet captivity on your belief that going out into a world of unbelievers and partaking of their sin is acceptable with God because it is a matter of personal preference?

Because that is exactly what the stakes are

- 6) Are you prepared to bet captivity on your belief that God doesn't ABHOR what takes place in restaurants on the Sabbath and the holy day?

Because that is exactly what the stakes are

- 7) Are you prepared to bet captivity on your belief that because our contemporary world is so different from the one existing when God led the children of Israel out of Egypt, that He now condones the practice of going back into Egypt and partaking of the very bondage His people were delivered from?

Because that is exactly what the stakes are

- 8) Are you prepared to bet captivity on your belief that you bear no responsibility for the labor you personally solicit and pay for when dining out on the Sabbath?

Because that is exactly what the stakes are

- 9) Are you prepared to bet captivity on your belief that because you are powerless to force unbelievers to keep the Sabbath, God now allows you to seek out those unbelievers and purchase their labor on holy time?

Because that is exactly what the stakes are

- 10) Are you prepared to bet captivity on your belief that because God permits His people to seek out the services of an emergency room at a hospital on the Sabbath, He also permit them to seek out the services of a restaurant on that day?

Because that is exactly what the stakes are

- 11) Are you prepared to bet captivity on your belief that because Jesus “dined out” at a private home on the Sabbath, you may “dine out” at a commercial restaurant on the Sabbath?

Because that is exactly what the stakes are

- 12) Are you prepared to bet captivity on your belief that there is no moral difference between shopping on a Monday and dining out on the Sabbath because the food you purchased on Monday “may have also required” Sabbath labor?

Because that is exactly what the stakes are

You may resent that this debate has become personal, but it was personal to Nehemiah too. This is because Nehemiah KNEW what the stakes were. Sadly, you refuse to see and as a result have become like a man shouting at his neighbor for making too much noise—when in fact his neighbor is crying out “YOUR HOUSE IS ON FIRE!”

Respectfully,

Dennis Fischer

The United Church of God
vs
A Sabbath Test

Pardon the Interruption
"Proclaiming Hope"

The Pyramid Café

Open 7 days a week
Just like the TIME of our Ancient Fathers

Imagine that it is one year into the millennium and you are serving with thousands of the faithful under the reign of Jesus Christ. However, not all of mankind has yet submitted to God's government. Some continue to assert their own will and refuse to honor the Almighty's great moral law, including His Sabbath and holy days. One such pocket of resistance is the nation of Egypt. God has already begun to deal with this rebellion by withholding rain from them (Zech. 14:17). This was done in an attempt to encourage their repentance, but as yet they continue their defiance.

Now imagine that you have been dispatched to this land to speak to a small group who have begun to turn from their ways and to honor the true God. At one point during your message someone in your audience asks you the following question.

"Your Majesty, As you know our nation refuses to honor God's Sabbath and annual festivals. One way they profane them is by engaging in business during these holy times. Our question for you is this: May we purchase their goods? For example, may we dine out at restaurants on the Sabbath? We know that God does not approve of what they are doing at such places. One only has to see the affects of the drought He has brought upon us to understand that. But what about buying their goods? It isn't as if we are making them work on the Sabbath. They would be doing that anyway. What does your God desire of us in this matter?"

How would you answer this question? Remember, you now speak for Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Sabbath. Therefore, your words must reflect His perfect will.

If your answer is that you would permit these recent converts to buy their Sabbath meals at the very restaurants that are defying God's law, our question is: WHY? Why would your God permit His people to purchase the fruits of the very labor He abhors?

To suggest that God would actually embrace a practice that relies totally on someone else's sin is hypocritical to the core. Everything about it goes contrary to God's very nature. Throughout the scriptures God's people are admonished to come completely out of sin—not come out and later return to partake of someone else's sin. The example of Lot's wife strongly suggests that God doesn't even want His people to look back at sin, let alone go back to partake of its "benefits."

We at ***Blow the Trumpet*** think it is inconceivable that the Almighty would actually condone a practice that requires His people to seek out those who are desecrating His Sabbath and then pay them for the fruit of their sacrilege--in this world or in the world to come.

Respectfully,

Blow the Trumpet

Counter Argument

United Church of God
Advisory Committee for Doctrine

The United Church of God offered no
Counter argument to this page

The United Church of God vs A Sabbath Test

In Conclusion
“Will You Pass the Test?”

Spring, 2006

Dear Brethren,

For the past two years, ***Blow the Trumpet*** has attempted to honestly address one of the most significant issues facing God's end-time Church -- the way it keeps the Sabbath. Today, our approach to the fourth commandment has changed radically and scarcely resembles what it was just a few decades ago. It is now commonplace for God's people to engage in a variety of Sabbath activities that have nothing whatsoever to do with holy time. These activities include such things as going to movies, participating in sporting events, doing family errands and the most popular one, dining out at restaurants. The latter activity is arguably the catalyst for all the others, but even if it stood alone, God's word makes it abundantly clear that it has no place in respectful Sabbath observance.

Despite this truth, many of God's servants defend their endorsement of this practice by using the flimsiest of arguments. Throughout this wing of our website we have addressed every one of them offered by the United Church of God and exposed them as nothing more than human reasoning disguised as Biblical scholarship. These words may sound severe, but any objective examination of the UCG points, and our response, make this truth abundantly clear. We challenge all of God's people to honestly compare both sides of this issue and judge them on their own merits. If they would do just that and genuinely weigh each point and counter point in the context of scripture, we don't think their verdict would even be close.

Contradicting the Kingdom

Whether the UCG realizes it or not, their advocacy of dining out on the Sabbath is promoting a practice that contradicts every part of God's Kingdom -- a Kingdom where nothing close to such a sin will exist. When that great government is established on earth, this debate will finally come to an end, and a practice that insults God's law will be rightfully terminated forever. Furthermore, whether the UCG wants to accept it or not, God HATES what takes place in restaurants on His Sabbath and holy days. This time is sacred and there is NOTHING a restaurant can do that will aid His people in honoring it. Those who labor on holy time do so in defiance of God Almighty Himself. To think that He has no qualm with His people patronizing this sacrilege is simply not true. It is borne out of a desire to justify a behavior that trivializes God's law.

This is NOT to suggest that we think the United Church of God's doctrinal committee doesn't sincerely want to obey their Creator, for indeed they do. It is just that they, like all of us, have gaps in their understanding. Tragically, this particular gap comes with enormous consequences. This is why we engage in this fight. Simply put, we at ***Blow the Trumpet*** love these servants and desire with all our heart for them to turn from this sin.

Something to Think About

When God first introduced the children of Israel to His Sabbath, He gave them very specific instructions concerning food on this day. In short, God commanded them to not acquire or prepare their

Sabbath meals on the seventh day. He indicated that this was done to prove whether they would walk in His law or not (Ex. 16:4-5). Those words should cause all believers today to seriously consider what is being suggested by groups like the UCG, whose position promotes going back into spiritual Egypt where God's law is being trampled on by slaves to sin and actually paying them to do so. We realize they would not characterize their position this way, but this is exactly what dining out on the Sabbath requires. Furthermore, contrary to what these Church leaders assert, they have total control over this behavior. There is no ox in a ditch here.

Additionally, God's Sabbath and holy days represent the blueprint of a plan that was inspired by the greatest Being in existence. The All-Powerful, All-Knowing, All-Loving and HOLY God wants His people to trust His wisdom regarding this day and how it is to be honored. He is NOT the slightest bit interested in man's wisdom on this issue (Pro. 3:5). Furthermore, He has provided His moral guidance in this area. With that said, His people should reject anything that does not reflect that guidance.

Will You Pass the Test?

The Sabbath is a sign from God directing man toward Him and His Kingdom (Heb. 4:4-9). However, that sign 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 Architect of heaven and earth not only sees WHO keeps His Sabbath, He sees the WAY and deference in which it is kept. Our conduct on holy time 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.

Finally, The Sabbath is a test. It is God's indicator of whether we will walk under His authority or not (Ex. 16:4). For any COG group to think that a Holy God can be worshipped by willfully patronizing labor that defies Him, is making a mistake of immense proportions. It is one borne out of arrogance—and those who teach such things are guilty of promoting an act that is just as defiant as the one engaged in by the children of Israel when they attempted to gather manna on the Sabbath. God was absolutely FURIOUS with them.

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 ye to keep my commandments and my laws? (Ex. 16:27-28)

The bottom line is this. The way we honor the Sabbath is our declaration to God of how we will yield to His authority. God said as much when He prohibited His people from acquiring their food on the Sabbath, preparing their food on the Sabbath, and going outside their place (spiritual camp) on the Sabbath (Ex. 16). He likened these instructions to a GREAT TEST (Verse 4). The question is:

Will you pass it?

Respectfully,

Blow the Trumpet

Counter Argument

United Church of God
Advisory Committee for Doctrine
April 16, 2007

Dear Mr. Fischer,

Blow the Trumpet states:

"It is now commonplace for God's people to engage in a variety of Sabbath activities that have nothing whatsoever to do with holy time. These activities include such things as going to movies, participating in sporting events, doing family errands and the most popular one, dining out at restaurants on the Sabbath and holy days."

This is a broad assertion—going to movies, sporting events and doing family errands are outside the realm of eating a meal in a restaurant. The United Church of God has never equated such activities on the Sabbath with eating a meal in a restaurant.

Sincerely,

Advisory Committee for Doctrine

Response from Dennis Fischer

Dear Friends,

A few years ago I was invited to the home of a UCG member who was hosting a reception for a visiting elder. The reception was to take place Sabbath afternoon and I was very honored to receive an invitation. I truly looked forward to fellowshiping with people I genuinely loved. I also looked forward to discussing God's word in a more informal way. Those who know me would testify to my passion for talking about the Bible. It is such a wonderful book.

About an hour after I arrived, the UCG elder suggested that we all play a parlor game. I don't recall the name of the game, but it had absolutely nothing to do with the Sabbath. It was a nice family game to be sure, but clearly not appropriate for the day, in my view. After about twenty minutes I decided to excuse my family by informing our hosts that we had a long drive home and needed to go. I didn't want to offend them or their guests and thought this was a discrete way to withdraw from this activity.

As we were gathering our things and saying "good bye," the elder asked if I was offended by the game. I responded by saying something to the effect of, "It is not what I would do, but I am not judging you." I then repeated that we had a long ride home in an attempt to deflect any potential debate on this. The elder then said, "You know Dennis, the Sabbath is about family and there is nothing wrong with doing family things on this day. I suppose you're one of those people that think it is wrong to eat in restaurants on the Sabbath too." I concluded the dialogue by wishing him and the guests a pleasant day without commenting on his last statement. At no time did I think that this would be a good time to engage this UCG elder in this issue.

The point I am making here is that this UCG minister immediately linked my opposition to playing generic parlor games on the Sabbath to not going to restaurants. Furthermore, it was clear he felt disapproval by my answer—although there was nothing in it that showed any disrespect. By the way, every guest who later spoke to me about this incident, mentioned that they were thoroughly embarrassed by the elder's comments.

In closing, I realize that the intent of the UCG doctrinal group is not to encourage a more casual approach toward Sabbath observance, but that is exactly what their teaching on dining out fosters. Scores of their members apply the same self-serving logic to defend a host of practices that go totally contrary to God's law.

I do agree with the UCG that the Sabbath is HOLY. However, their belief that God's people may somehow seek out those who profane this day and pay them for their sin, with God's blessing, is nothing but wishful thinking.

Respectfully,

Dennis Fischer

