

Sabbath Issues

Analysis of the Important Issues Surrounding the Paper from Dennis Luker and Melvin Rhodes titled "How United Church of God Members Observe the Sabbath Day"

Background

Prior to the 2010 Feast of Tabernacles, the president and chairman released a document to the Church titled: "How do Members of the United Church of God Observe the Sabbath Day?" This document addressed a concern that was raised in the aftermath of the June 2010 Council decision to remove Leon Walker as Regional Director of Latin America, as well as the subsequent separation of the majority of the Latin American members from UCG.

The issue revolves around a family in Chile who owns a day care business that has historically remained open at various times on the Sabbath and Holy Days. The family maintains that the Chilean government has laws that require the day care facility and school to operate on Friday evenings after sunset in the winter time and on Holy Days that fall during the week; that they have no choice but to comply and to allow the business to operate at those times.

Because many have questioned the appropriateness of this Sabbath activity, and desire more information, Mr. Luker and Mr. Rhodes released the above mentioned document on September 17, 2010 (hereafter referred to as "the Sabbath paper"). Even though this document was intended to put the issue to rest and convince members that there is no issue, the "Sabbath paper" has had the reverse effect—creating a proverbial firestorm of questions and concerns among the ministry and membership of the United Church of God.

After the Feast of Tabernacles, Mr. Luker had the "Sabbath paper" removed from the website and wrote the following official reason: "It was brought to our attention that the document . . . involves matters that are still being reviewed by the church." Somehow the president of UCG was not aware of the review in process by the Doctrine Committee prior to releasing this paper.

In his October 15 letter to the ministry and membership, Mr. Luker wrote: "A highly vocal few, particularly in online forums, have raised *imaginary issues* about the current administration and Council of Elders. These false issues center on recent letters published from Melvin Rhodes and me about the Sabbath day and about fasting. One of our letters, published shortly before the Festival season, confirmed the inviolate sacredness of the Sabbath day, but also discussed how one family in Chile was seeking counsel and resolution for a specific and nonroutine issue regarding Sabbath observance."

Overview

As we see in the above quotation, Mr. Luker relegates the aforementioned paper on the Sabbath to the status of a "letter." This was written in response to many pointing out that the document *was* a doctrinal statement and that it seemingly altered a previous doctrinal position approved by the Council. It has subsequently been revealed that the "Sabbath paper" was not approved by either the Doctrine Committee of the Council or the full Council itself.

The truth of the matter is that the “Sabbath paper” contained doctrinal material and was not a simple letter from the president and chairman. In the email from Mr. Luker and Mr. Rhodes to the ministry dated September 8, 2010, it is clearly stated that these are *documents*. The first of these documents was titled: “Rescind White Paper.pdf.”

According to the *Real Life Dictionary of American Politics*, a “white paper” is defined as: “a thorough study and *official* government report on a specific subject.” (p. 292). A white paper is a statement normally from a political party establishing a formal position on an issue.

The September 14, 2010 email introducing the “fasting paper” stated: “As mentioned in our message of September 8, please find attached **another document** in our ongoing communication effort. This PDF file contains **biblical and factual guidance** on the lessons we learn from fasting.”

The September 17, 2010 email introducing the “Sabbath paper” stated: “One **paper** focuses on our **Sabbath beliefs** and how they relate to a church family owning a day care facility in Chile, and the other one answers questions leveled at some on the Council of Elders about their doctrinal stance.”

Some may ask, “Where does this paper state that a doctrinal change is being made?” Though the paper does not openly state that a doctrinal change is being made, if the paper is accepted for what it says, there will be a change in the doctrinal understanding of the United Church of God in reference to Sabbath observance. The basic definition of “doctrine” is *teaching*.

In addition to the concerns over the contents within the “Sabbath paper,” the paper *leaves out* the official position of the church on this question which was approved in 2002 (Refer to December, 2002 Council decision here: <http://coe.ucg.org/council-report/council-elders-meeting-cincinnati-ohio-2002-12-13>).

The following is the approved Personal Correspondence Letter, which, as noted, was never referred to in the document:

Dear Friend,

Thank you for your interest. You asked whether it was proper for a church member who owns a business to hire employees for his business to work on the Sabbath and/or the Holy Days.

God commands us to keep the Sabbath day holy. We are to labor and do all of our work in six days, “but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God” (Exodus 20:10). God instructs us not to work, breaking down His instruction into details: “In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you” (Deuteronomy 5:14). Running a business on the Sabbath, even if you as the owner do not work on that day, creates several problems for a Christian.

In light of God's law, as a business owner we should not employ people to work on the Sabbath and/or the Holy Days. In addition to the reference above in Deuteronomy, Exodus 20:10 gives instruction to the people of God that neither "you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates" should work on the Sabbath. If one is to be diligent regarding his servants and even strangers, then the same principle could be applied to employees. The issue is one of control. In the case of servants or family members living in the home and under the control of the owner or head of the family, it was expected that they would keep the Sabbath. In the case of a business owned by a Christian, where the Christian has the controlling interest in the business, the same principles would apply. It would be inconsistent to believe in the Sabbath and observe the Sabbath, but keep a business that you own open on the Sabbath. This is certainly not being a light to the world (Matthew 5:14). If you believe that the Sabbath is truly a holy day, then you should not open a business you own on the Sabbath.

Due to your ownership and your position as an employer, you would be the responsible party in a business that operates seven days a week and therefore on the Sabbath and Holy Days. Since it is the view of the church that this would be a violation of God's law, a Christian should not be involved in such business ventures unless he is willing to close on the Sabbath and Holy Days. We realize that ownership may not give absolute control in all situations. If you have any questions, we would advise you to seek further clarification before making a decision to buy or sell a business of this nature. If we can be of further help, please let us know.

Sincerely,
Personal Correspondence Department

The UCG policy is quite plain about the need to avoid employing people to work on the Sabbath in a business that is solely or primarily owned by a member. The PCD department has known about this policy for years and has used the above form letter whenever such issues are raised. By omitting the official UCG position, one is left to believe that the conduct of the Chilean family is acceptable to the church. This effectively changes the doctrinal understanding of the church.

This would also affect other UCG fundamental beliefs such as Military Service and War. If one is exempt from obeying God if the government passes a law requiring military participation—then no member will be able to claim exemption from compulsory service in the military based on church teaching. Nor can members have their children removed from school for the Feast of Tabernacles since attendance is compulsory by law. Currently most schools allow for an exemption based on religious beliefs, but what if that was to change? Would we still remove our children from school for the Feast if the law of the land prohibited such absences?

The conclusion is simple, if this document is accepted as an official communication of the church (or republished), *it will change the doctrinal understanding of the church* when it comes to a business being open on the Sabbath and/or the Holy Days. The paper concludes with these

statements: “Hopefully, as their spiritual brothers and sisters, we should be **supporting their efforts to properly keep the Sabbath holy**. In this case there is no intentional Sabbath-breaking, nor collusion involving friends, family or ministers, no condoning of Sabbath-breaking and certainly no trace of any doctrinal changes.”

The problem is that the contents of the “Sabbath paper” do contradict the 2002 ruling—which held that such behavior is inconsistent with proper Sabbath and Holy Day observance. These statements are contradictory to the church’s official position; hence they *do* amount to a doctrinal change if this document is accepted and republished in its current form. Even if not republished, it is troubling to many that this is the position of the unknown authors of this document.

Specific Quotes and Analysis

Sabbath Paper: “Questions have arisen from allegations of purported ‘Sabbath breaking’ in Latin America.”

Comment: The questions are about a business being *open* on the Sabbath *and* the Holy Days. There is no allegation of purported “Sabbath breaking.” The question has to do with keeping a business open on the Sabbath and/or Holy Days. The answer to the question, based on the ruling of UCG, is that it is a violation of the Sabbath to operate a personally owned business on the Sabbath and Holy Days. Here again is the position of UCG as stated in this 2002 document: “Due to your ownership and your position as an employer, you would be the responsible party in a business that operates seven days a week and therefore on the Sabbath and Holy Days. Since it is the view of the church that this would be a violation of God’s law, a Christian should not be involved in such business ventures unless he is willing to close on the Sabbath and Holy Days.”

Sabbath Paper: “While the command to abstain from regular work appears clear for the majority of Church members, there remain areas of observance that are not fully defined and sometimes require an administrative decision from Church leaders.”

Comment: The church has already made a ruling on this issue. The church has unequivocally stated that businesses personally owned by church members should not operate on the Sabbath or Holy Days.

Sabbath Paper: “Today in the 21st century, sometimes the nature of certain acts on the Sabbath may not be clear from the biblical record. For example, can a physician who is a member of the United Church of God render medical aid in an emergency situation (including the laborious act of re-setting a broken bone)? From the direct example of Jesus, we know that this is a permissible act. What about other instances, such as driving long distances to attend Sabbath services?”

Comment: The issues of physicians performing necessary medical aid and travel are irrelevant to this question. These have nothing to do with keeping a business open on the Sabbath. UCG has other papers that address these issues (See Appendix II). Why bring up nonrelated issues? It seems the intent is to *blur the issues* and take focus off the issue

of pertinence—operating a business during holy time. This school is not a health care facility such as a nursing home or an Alzheimer’s facility or a dairy farm where cattle must be relieved. Those situations are irrelevant to this issue.

Sabbath Paper: “Christ Himself warned against adopting a Pharisaical attitude, judging others whom we think may be acting in a fashion that breaks the Sabbath. Recently, such an unfortunate situation appeared when a Church family in Chile came under fire from newly invented charges that cast doubts on the integrity of the members, the United Church of God, *an International Association*, and some of its leadership.”

Comment: The issues raised by others and addressed in this paper are not “invented charges.” Most of the “charges” have been accompanied by statements from individuals who identify themselves as witnesses and the paper itself includes testimony from the individuals themselves as to the core issues involved. To call these “invented charges” is to prejudice any sort of investigation and is intended to remove legitimacy from anyone who raises concerns. The primary accusations have been confirmed by the family—they keep the school open in the winter time after the sun sets on Friday and they keep the school open on the Holy Days that fall during the week. These are not invented charges.

Sabbath Paper: “Regarding this specific situation...”

Comment: For the leadership to address specifics of this situation is wrong and indefensible. To take a private and confidential member situation that the Council of Elders is in the process of investigating and make it public *is contrary to the policies and teachings of the United Church of God*. Personal member information should be kept confidential. The president and chairman have violated that confidentiality and therefore severely prejudiced the case by posting this paper before an official ruling has been made. This information can be confirmed by checking official church documents about appeals and the doctrinal review process of the church. Members can contact any current or former Council member who is familiar with our policies to confirm this.

Sabbath Paper: “On Friday evenings during winter months the sun sets 19 minutes before the government-regulated closing time of 6:00 PM. Fully intending to keep the Sabbath in a responsible and accountable way, the family used some UCG documents to find a good-faith solution to their problem. Seeing precedent, these members left work in advance of the start of every Sabbath, and did not work on any Holy Day to comply with God’s holy Sabbath command for every Sabbath and Holy Day.”

Comment: According to the statement on the Members Website removing the Sabbath paper, this matter is currently under investigation (<http://members.ucg.org/letter/how-do-members-united-church-god-observe-sabbath-day-september-17-2010>). Part of that investigation will have to corroborate that Chilean law does, with *no* exceptions, require such day care centers to remain opened until 6:00 PM on Friday or on the Holy Days. All should understand that even the validity of such a strict application of such a law in Chile is in question.

Some members have already contacted the Jewish leaders in Santiago, Chile. When asked if the government requires their educational facilities to remain open after sunset on Friday or on the Holy Days, leader Chaim Waissbluth wrote to these members: “I refer you to the Jewish day school director, Rabbi Avraham Horowitz. He can give you more detailed information. **But as far as I know there are no such restrictions.**” Director Horowitz also responded to the members questions: “We are an accredited (recognized) school in the Chilean Ministry of Education and **we make our own calendar** to suit our religious beliefs just like any other completely private school in Chile. A minimum amount of school days however is required” (ahorowitz@maimonides.cl).

Based on these responses to concerned members, the government does provide exemptions by reason of religious beliefs. Their comment is that “all” private and religious schools make their own calendars. Without any investigation cited, the “Sabbath paper” concludes that *there is a requirement* for a day care to be open on the Sabbath and on Holy Days. How can the conclusion be stated in this document if there has been no independent investigation? Why are the Jews allowed to close early on Friday and on all Holy Days and still qualify as a “recognized” school in Chile?

The point is that the president and chairman should not have made any such statements before a formal investigation into the matter is completed (Proverbs 18:13).

If we assume that 6 p.m. is “the government-regulated closing time” (with absolutely no exceptions), then we still have to deal with the question of whether or not that *excuses* an individual from obeying what both the Bible and the church teach on the subject. We have to remember at the outset that the government doesn’t force anyone to run a school. The UCG PCD letter on the subject even states: “Since it is the view of the church that this would be a violation of God’s law, a Christian should not be involved in such business ventures unless he is willing to close on the Sabbath and Holy Days.” The official position wisely points out that a Christian should avoid business ventures that would make it impossible to observe the Sabbath and Holy Days properly.

Sabbath Paper: “While the family maintains a strict Sabbath and Holy Day policy, some recent questions have prompted them to now formally ask the Church to review it and make suggestions on how to improve.”

Comment: Who will be investigating this matter? Will this investigation follow the normal doctrinal review as specified in the doctrinal review process of the United Church of God? After checking with members of the Doctrine Committee, it has been confirmed that the committee is in possession of an official appeal from the family in Chile. Since the Doctrine Committee is in possession of a formal request, why was this paper posted to begin with? The paper states that the request is to “make suggestions on how to improve...” It would seem that the request is whether it is acceptable to keep a business open on the Sabbath and the Holy Days? Since the church already has a statement on this matter, what is the actual purpose of the paper?

Sabbath Paper: “Clearly, their situation involves government law that does not allow their type of facility to close 19 minutes before sundown on the shortest day of the year, nor on Holy Days that fall on weekdays. Only recently has their good-faith Sabbath-keeping solution come into question. Consequently, they are reassessing the situation and have requested direction from the Council of Elders.”

Comment: Is it clear? Certain members have done their own investigation and discovered that the Seventh Day Adventists close all their schools early on Friday to avoid a conflict with the Sabbath. All Jewish schools close well before the Sabbath and also close on all Holy Days.

But even if it can be proven that such a law does exist with no exceptions, would such a law of a secular government trump the law of God? “The Sabbath paper” appears to have already rendered a decision – that this is acceptable because of a Chilean law.

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of the paper is that Acts 5:29 is never quoted or alluded to—“we ought to obey God rather than men.”

If compromising God’s law is permissible because of a secular law, then as noted above, what damage does that do to our stand on military service and war? It is the stated belief of UCG and Scripture that *we must obey God not man* (Acts 5:29). Regarding conscientious objectors, UCG will not accept man’s law if it requires us to violate God’s law (see fundamental belief on Military Service and War). If this paper is accepted as official church teaching then it is possible that we will no longer be able to take our children out of school for the Feast if the law changes and removes the religious exemption. The law in most states currently requires that school age children are to be in school these days unless there is a religious exemption. Which do we obey – God or man? The answer is clear.

Sabbath Paper: “On Holy Days, the business relies on non-member employees to care for the children, which is similar to other situations involving businesses owned by Church members.”

Comment: As has already been cited and shown, the official teaching of the United Church of God is the opposite of the above statement. Again, the approved PCD letter states: “It would be inconsistent to believe in the Sabbath and observe the Sabbath, but keep a business that you own open on the Sabbath. This is certainly not being a light to the world (Matthew 5:14). If you believe that the Sabbath is truly a holy day, then you should not open a business you own on the Sabbath.”

The February 2003 *United News* article by Dave Myers states: “We cannot force unbelieving employees to rest on the Sabbath, but we should not hire them to labor for us on that day.”

Sabbath Paper: “In this case the family involved has now become the target of vicious rumors, with Internet jurors rushing ahead to pre-judge, slander and condemn anyone associated with the

situation – and this before their request for input and guidance has even been heard and responded to.”

Comment: It is wrong for people to judge the motives and attitudes of people they don't even know. But it is equally wrong for church leaders to declare this case decided before it has even been investigated. The “Sabbath paper” clearly implies that what the family is doing is acceptable and that their request is to help them see how to do it better. Working on the Sabbath and keeping a business open on the Sabbath and Holy Days is wrong according to the Scriptures and the ruling made by the church in 2002. This paper contradicts that position and renders a judgment without investigation.

This “Sabbath paper” is, in fact, guilty of doing exactly what the above quotation accuses others of doing—prejudging the situation before it has been addressed by the appropriate channels.

Sabbath Paper: “According to the Chilean law # 19,865, article 3, it says: ‘Child Care Centers are those educational institutes that take care of children during the day, until they begin their basic education, and provide an integral education.’ To fulfill this task we have to conform to the statute N. 19,864 which states the Department of Education establishes regulations for forming day care centers and the programs for the basic teaching of day care centers. This day care program is strictly bound by the School Calendar and the decrees from the Department of Education that regulate our operations and establish we can't close ‘unless it is an emergency’ (Article 5, decree N. 7895 of December 10, 2009).

Comment: As noted above, this needs to be investigated to confirm the facts. *But even if there is a requirement under human law, it cannot trump the law of God.*

Sabbath Paper: “We have thought that our situation is similar to what is mentioned in two sections of the UCG papers on Sabbath keeping. First, the one titled, ‘People Working in the Medical Field Who Keep the Sabbath’... We read in another paper, ‘Remember the Sabbath to Keep it Holy,’ this same principle ‘Today, judgments may need to be made regarding dairy farmers, ranchers, physicians, nurses, nursing home operators, home health care workers, and others as to how to observe the Sabbath...’”

Comment: What is strange about the above paragraph is that they don't reference the paper that specifically deals with operating business on the Sabbath. A day care center is a business—not a medical facility, farm, or nursing home. To ignore the one paper that most closely addresses this particular issue is concerning. See Appendix I and II.

Sabbath Paper: “After reading the family's concerns about how they keep the Sabbath, how can one say they are working on the Sabbath themselves? How can one accuse Church leaders of advocating breaking God's Holy Sabbaths? How can one infer that the United Church of God, *an International Association*, is changing its Sabbath doctrine?”

Comment: The above statement serves as unequivocal proof that this position paper released by the president and chairman *did represent a change* in the traditional teaching

of the United Church of God on this issue. The current practice of the Chilean family is defended even though the paper clearly showed that they do operate their business on the Sabbath and some of the Holy Days. The 2002 position of the church is carelessly ignored.

The authors of this document change the issue from operating a business on the Sabbath to “working on the Sabbath.” The family has never been accused of “working on the Sabbath themselves.” Why raise this issue if this accusation was never made?

The question is and has always been regarding the operation *of a business* on the Sabbath and the Holy Days. Again, the paper itself clearly establishes that the family does keep their business open during these times.

Regardless of the intention of the leadership, it should be noted that doctrine (and especially the *practice* and *application* of doctrine) can also be changed by compromise, watering down standards, and making careless judgments. Mr. Luker and Mr. Rhodes try to delegitimize anyone who raises concerns as being Pharisaical. They should be sympathetic to the fact that the church experienced an attempt to change the Sabbath 15 years ago by the leadership at that time. The leadership of the Worldwide Church of God began that change by first loosening the standards of Sabbath observance (playing golf, community service, etc.). Mr. Luker and Mr. Rhodes should be very understanding of the sensitivity of many when it comes to our teaching on the Sabbath—and not recklessly label people as judgmental Pharisees.

Conclusion

The “Sabbath paper” that was recently removed from the church’s web site contained serious errors. The Doctrine Committee *had no knowledge of the paper before it was posted on the Member’s Website*. This is a flagrant violation of UCG policy.

The “Unified Doctrinal Review Process for the United Church of God, an International Association” approved by the Council of Elders in November 1998 states: “The Doctrine Committee requests a courtesy copy of all printed material that contains doctrine at least one week prior to publication.”

The following is taken from the Pastor’s Policy Manual (Section 1.3.2.1.2), which can be obtained from any UCG pastor. This represents “the formal process, with steps for doctrinal review, for all material of a doctrinal nature produced by the United Church of God, an International Association.”

“Steps for Doctrinal Review

“Step One

“Article, tape or paper is submitted to the church for distribution. If it contains doctrinal material, then it must be reviewed by a process which has been developed by the individuals responsible for the content. This process requires the use of at least three (3) ministers with

appropriate background in church doctrine as reviewers. (The Doctrine Committee approves these reviewers).

“Step Two

“If all parties agree that the doctrinal material is in conformity with church doctrine, the article or tape may be distributed. If there isn’t unanimous agreement among the reviewers, then the material must be submitted to the Doctrine Committee for a resolution to the problem if there is a desire to publish or distribute the material.”

Since the Doctrine Committee was not given copies of these papers before they were published, it is clear that the approved procedures for doctrinal review were not followed.

As already noted, the “Sabbath paper” does not quote or even acknowledge the previously approved paper on the issue of businesses and the Sabbath/Holy Days. To ignore this approved paper that has served as the official UCG position for seven years is to open the door to doctrinal change. The president and chairman could have closed this door by simply referring to the approved 2002 position statement of the United Church of God. The official teaching is that if you are the sole or primary owner of a business that you must close that business on the Sabbath and the Holy Days.

Appendix I

February 2003 *United News* article: “Remember the Sabbath to Keep It Holy: Business Questions”

Should members of the Church of God own businesses that remain open on the Sabbath?

By Dave Myers

As the sun sinks low in the sky on Friday afternoon and approaches the horizon, the people of God wrap up their daily toil and prepare to honor God by resting on the Sabbath. This Sabbath rest is a time earnestly anticipated by the laboring man and woman, but what about the business owner? Can a Christian employer or business owner keep the business open during holy time by hiring others to work during that time? What are the biblical principles involved in business owners keeping the Sabbath holy? Let’s examine several biblical principles regarding Sabbath observance.

The Sabbath Is Holy

In addressing this issue, we must start with the basic Sabbath command. Exodus 20:8-11 states: “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work; you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.”

The first principle stated by God is that this 24-hour period He refers to as the Sabbath should be remembered by humans so that it can be kept holy. This 24-hour period is special—unlike the other six days of the week. In the second half of verse 11 we read that this period of time is *hallowed* (holy). God reveals in the Bible that new days begin at evening or sunset (Genesis 1:5; Joshua 8:29; 2 Chronicles 18:34; Nehemiah 13:19; Mark 1:32). So the time from Friday sunset until Saturday sunset is holy and our responsibility as humans is to remember it in order to keep it holy.

God also reveals that each Sabbath is to be a memorial to the Creator. Keeping the Sabbath holy acknowledges that God is the Creator and Life Giver (Exodus 20:11; 31:17).

Rest, Not Work

God set the example of rest when it came to the Sabbath (Genesis 2:2). Exodus 31:16-17 states: “Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.”

God did not carry on His creative work during the Sabbath through the angels (righteous or fallen) but instead set an example of rest and refreshment.

God also reveals that humans are to keep the Sabbath holy by not working on this day—“in it you shall do no work” (Exodus 20:10). God clearly shows that the other six days are for working and laboring. “Six days you shall labor and do all your work” (verse 9). The Sabbath is to be very special—so special that God proclaimed the death penalty upon those Israelites who ignored the command to hallow this day (see Exodus 31:14-16).

Since the Sabbath is holy time, God instructs us that He did not want His people to make others disrespect Him by forcing them to work during the Sabbath. Everything that was under the control of one’s household was also to cease from work on the Sabbath—even including slaves and animals! “In it you shall do no work; you, nor you son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates” (Exodus 20:10).

It is clear that God did not want regular work to go on during the holy time of the Sabbath. He did not want His people to continue regular business through others—even if those workers are currently unconverted. Therefore, He commanded that children, slaves, animals and even foreigners not be compelled to work in our place. “But the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant or your ox or your donkey or any of your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you, so that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you” (Deuteronomy 5:14, NASB).

In Leviticus 23:3, we are told, “For six days work may be done; but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation. You shall not do any work; it is a Sabbath to the LORD in all your dwellings” (NASB). The biblical principle seems clear: as much as possible the Sabbath should be a “complete rest” from our normal working or secular activities. The overriding principle is that we are to show respect and honor toward God by respecting and hallowing the time He set aside as holy. This cessation from work and respect for holy time was—and continues to be—an example of our respect for God as our Master and Creator.

Avoid Doing Business

Another Sabbath principle is brought out in Nehemiah 13:15-17: “And I warned them about the day on which they were selling provisions . . . Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said to them, ‘What evil thing is this that you do, by which you profane the Sabbath day?’” Nehemiah was clear in his instructions to shut the city gates and not allow regular business to continue. The Sabbath had become a “market day” in Jerusalem with all sorts of items being bought, sold and bartered. These were not just food items. While we must be careful not to extract too much from this example, there is a business principle here for our day—conducting normal business activities is not acceptable for Christians on the Sabbath. God’s people were not to be involved in regular commerce during holy time.

Our Example and the Gospel

If a Christian operates a business on the Sabbath and has others work in his or her place, what is he teaching others about the Sabbath?

In Numbers 15:32-36 we have the example of a man who was discovered working on the Sabbath by gathering sticks. He disrespected holy time and thereby disrespected God by not using the preparation day properly and by not resting on the Sabbath. It was judged that he should be put to death. Would it have been acceptable for this man to hire an unconverted person to pick up his sticks for him on the Sabbath? No. The principle is that God desires His people to rest from their work and for their workers to be able to rest as well.

To hire another person to work on what we know is holy time sends a very confusing message to that person. It conveys, "I rest on this day, but it is not important for you to do so." What gospel are we preaching by our personal example? Are we saying, "The Sabbath is holy for me, but I feel that it is fine for you to break God's law and work as my employee"?

We are told in Isaiah 58:13-14, that on the Sabbath we are not to do our own ways. Certainly that would include our employment and our enterprises. Instead we are asked to devote the Sabbath to God's business and pleasure. Instead of engaging in our own pleasures we are to engage in God's pleasure on the Sabbath. We aren't supposed to even speak our own words on His day because the Sabbath should be the one time of the week that nothing should hinder us from becoming completely absorbed in God and His Word.

Matthew 5:19 states: "Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." Can we see that employing others to work while we rest is a confusing contradiction?

On the other hand, what beneficial effect could a proper Sabbath-keeping example have on an employee? On our neighbors? On the community? Wouldn't it be another means to show the significance of the truth of God and how precious this holy time is to us? Not only are we to rest, but those who work for us are to be given the opportunity to rest also. If we own a business, it is not acceptable to have our employees working while we enjoy a restful Sabbath day.

Is an Employee a "Manservant"?

What was a manservant? Was he roughly equivalent to today's employee? A close reading of the Scriptures shows that a manservant was a bond servant or slave who lived in the owner's household. Deuteronomy 16:11 and 14 show that a manservant was taken to the Feast of Pentecost and Feast of Tabernacles to worship as a part of the family. Deuteronomy 12:18 shows that an owner was to take his manservant to the place where God set His name to worship and offer sacrifice (that is, the tabernacle and later the temple).

An employee, therefore, should not be classified as roughly equivalent to a "manservant" since such a servant was a household slave.

Yet, it is clear that God intended that everything under the control of the believer—sons, daughters, servants, slaves and animals—have the opportunity to rest on the Sabbath. This principle clearly extends to employees. They likewise should not be working for a Christian who understands that the time during the Sabbath is holy. We cannot force unbelieving employees to rest on the Sabbath, but we should not hire them to labor for us on that day.

Exceptions to the Rule

Judgment is required in many circumstances because there may be exceptions to the general rule. For example in Matthew 12:5 we read, “Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless?” Some work was done on the Sabbath by priests and Levites in order to be able to worship God. Today this principle is applied in our setting up chairs for Sabbath services, assembling public-address systems, information tables, coffee service, traveling to services, etc. Like the priest’s labor of old, this kind of Sabbath labor seems to be a legitimate exception to the rule because it enables us to worship God together in the “holy convocation” He commands.

In Matthew 12:11 we read, “Then He said to them, ‘What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out?’” Here we see that the need of an animal in distress took precedence over the complete rest of the Sabbath day. The clear principle is that if a genuine emergency occurs, action should be taken to handle that emergency.

Also, in John 7:22-23 we read, “Moses therefore gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath, so that the law of Moses should not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made a man completely well on the Sabbath?” The Jews had judged that the work that needed to be done to circumcise a male child also took precedence over the complete rest usually observed on the Sabbath, and Christ did not disagree.

In Luke 13:15-16, “The Lord then answered him and said, ‘Hypocrite! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or donkey from the stall, and lead it away to water it? So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound—think of it—for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?’” Jesus was upset with the Pharisees because of their hypocrisy. While they cared for the routine needs of livestock on the Sabbath so that the animals would not suffer, they refused to permit the healing of this woman on the Sabbath to end her suffering. While the lesson was about people, in passing, Jesus showed that it is acceptable to do the minimal labor to care for the routine needs of livestock on the Sabbath day.

Today, judgments may need to be made regarding dairy farmers, ranchers, physicians, nurses, nursing home operators, home health care workers, and others as to how to observe the Sabbath command in their circumstances. (See the accompanying three letters addressing some of these issues.) Yet we strive to be consistent in our application.

We teach Sabbath observance from the strength of biblical principle, not from exceptions to the rule. The principle is clear—all who are in a Christian's direct control should be given an opportunity to observe the Sabbath rest.

Recommendations

Therefore, the Church of God teaches that a believer should not hire employees to work on the Sabbath and Holy Days. It does not set the right example of respecting holy time; it does not teach them the holiness of the Sabbath; and it does not give employees the benefit or option of rest during holy time. Employees working on the Sabbath place the member business owner in a position of responsibility. Employing others on the Sabbath also brings into question our motivation for owning a business that is open on the Sabbath. Is it just to make money? Does this lead to other problems?

Therefore, as a church we recommend that members who own businesses close them on the Sabbath from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset in order to observe the commanded Sabbath rest. We encourage them to have faith that God will bless them for respecting His holy time and setting the right example for others. UN

SOURCE: <http://www.ucg.org/un/un0302/sabbath.htm>

Appendix II

Letters on Keeping the Sabbath as Ranchers, Caregivers or Business Owners

Below are three letters the Council of Elders approved Dec. 13 to be used by the Personal Correspondence staff in dealing with questions from members on Sabbath observance.

Specifically they cover questions about farming and ranching, the medical field and owning businesses that operate on the Sabbath.

These short letters do not give a full picture of the biblical teaching on Sabbath observance, and we encourage members to read our booklet *Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest* for a more complete overview of this important subject.

Ranchers and Dairymen and the Sabbath

Dear Member,

You asked about ranchers and dairymen and the observance of the Sabbath. As in all cases dealing with Sabbath observance, we must look to the Scriptures for the applicable principles. The Bible does address the issue of the Sabbath and work.

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it” (Exodus 20:8-11).

In this reference, even the cattle one owns are not to work. Of course in the society of that day, animals were the primary means of doing work since there were no pieces of modern machinery. According to the commandment all work was to cease when the Sabbath began as the sun set on the sixth day.

The Sabbath was never considered a day of fasting and is actually listed among the festivals in Leviticus 23 (of course, the Day of Atonement, a day of fasting, is listed here as well). If we are not required to fast on the Sabbath, neither should our animals be required to fast on the Sabbath. Whatever work would be required to feed and water your animals would be appropriate on the Sabbath, but one should not be using his animals for work on the Sabbath—plowing a field, etc. Christ made reference to this principle in the New Testament.

“The Lord then answered him and said, ‘Hypocrite! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or donkey from the stall, and lead it away to water it?’” (Luke 13:15).

In the case of dairy cattle, it would not be wrong, applying this principle, to relieve the animals by milking them on the Sabbath. Different dairymen may choose to do differently. Some milk

late on Friday and then don't milk again until after the Sabbath on Saturday evening. Others milk on Sabbath morning. The actual practice can be worked out as to what is best in each individual case.

Thank you for your question. We hope this helps.

Caregivers and the Sabbath

Dear Member,

You asked about people working in the medical field who keep the Sabbath.

Sometimes people wonder if these occupations illustrate that the Sabbath cannot be kept in the modern world. Actually, there are many people working in various facets of the medical profession who are Sabbath keepers. They simply schedule their time off to coincide with the Sabbath, just as people in other lines of work do.

Another line of reasoning presented in this regard is that people working in the medical profession are "doing good on the Sabbath" and are therefore exempt from the law. It is certainly right and proper to do good for others on the Sabbath.

However, if someone's occupation, his (or her) way of earning a living, is in a medical profession, then he is paid for the work that he does. That is, it is a job, not a charitable contribution.

One type of job about which you asked was "caregivers." If you mean by this people who hire themselves out as practical nurses, then this occupation is covered by the above. If, however, you are referring to people who own a care home, other principles apply. There are certain routine chores that would need to be done on the Sabbath in these homes, just as in a private home. Some examples of routine chores would be meal preparation and clean-up, as well as making beds; however, we recommend that these activities be kept to a minimum.

By comparison, the farmer in ancient Israel would need to feed his livestock on the Sabbaths. He would not, however, plow or plant a field—that is, undertake work that could and should be done on other days of the week.

The two principles that guide us about the Sabbath are that it is a day on which we congregate with others in God's Church to worship Him, and that it is a day on which we rest from our regular work.

Have you had an opportunity to read our booklet titled *Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest?* It examines and explains what the Bible teaches about the Sabbath, as well as how today's Christian can observe it. You can order a copy of this booklet from this office or through our Web site at www.ucg.org.

Business Owners and the Sabbath

Dear Member,

You asked whether it was proper for a church member who owns a business to hire employees for his business to work on the Sabbath and/or the Holy Days.

God commands us to keep the Sabbath day holy. We are to labor and do all of our work in six days, “but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God” (Exodus 20:10). God instructs us not to work, breaking down His instruction into details: “In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you” (Deuteronomy 5:14). Running a business on the Sabbath, even if you as the owner do not work on that day, creates several problems for a Christian.

In light of God’s law, as a business owner we should not employ people to work on the Sabbath and/or the Holy Days. In addition to the reference above in Deuteronomy, Exodus 20:10 gives instruction to the people of God that neither “you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates” should work on the Sabbath.

If one is to be diligent regarding his servants and even strangers, then the same principle could be applied to employees. The issue is one of control. In the case of servants or family members living in the home and under the control of the owner or head of the family, it was expected that they would keep the Sabbath. In the case of a business owned by a Christian, where the Christian has the controlling interest in the business, the same principles would apply. It would be inconsistent to believe in the Sabbath and observe the Sabbath, but keep a business that you own open on the Sabbath. This is certainly not being a light to the world (Matthew 5:14). If you believe that the Sabbath is truly a holy day, then you should not open a business you own on the Sabbath.

Due to your ownership and your position as an employer, you would be the responsible party in a business that operates seven days a week and therefore on the Sabbath and Holy Days. Since it is the view of the church that this would be a violation of God’s law, a Christian should not be involved in such business ventures unless he is willing to close on the Sabbath and Holy Days. We realize that ownership may not give absolute control in all situations. If you have any questions, we would advise you to seek further clarification before making a decision to buy or sell a business of this nature.

SOURCE: <http://www.ucg.org/un/un0302/sabletters.htm>