

01-Dec-09

THE SOLID SABBATARIAN & SITUATIONAL ETHICS

Dear Emilio,

Thank you for your letter. I read your desire to become a better Sabbath keeper, and I am glad for your zeal in this area. As we all reach for the same goal, let us do it from a completely new perspective. Let us no longer take the “play-book” approach to the law thinking that there are well defined rules of confinement which we assemble so that we all can agree. There will always be new situations or additional variables for different people which will require personal application, judgment, of the Law that a “play-book” will not satisfy. To answer these questions, we must determine, is the Sabbath

Your Blessing or your Yoke?~~~~~ You wrote the following:

“... Can the services that the world provides on the Sabbath be considered a blessing to those who do not wish to 'labour' or 'work' on the Sabbath? Like appliance mechanics, Transit system, plumbers, caterers etc. When I purchase the food that is prepared by the 'world', so that I can instead use that time to focus on God, how is that breaking the fourth commandment? In addition, on my way to bro. E_____ home in Beaumont, I stopped at a corner store to purchase a beverage, as it was over 30 degrees Celsius [86+ degrees Fahrenheit] and I wanted to quench my thirst after a long drive. Was this unlawful for me? We had a discussion today about my activities, and I feel the group was divided on this issue. Some reasoned that on 'emergency' situations it would be right to 'fill the car with gas' but would be wrong to fill the gas in the car otherwise (I'm not sure why anyone would fill their car otherwise). Again is this 'situational ethics'? Some will say it is alright to eat out in restaurants when they are travelling? The SDA will have camp meetings and have Adventist pay ahead of time for the Sabbath meals? How is that anymore 'just'? The question was also raised whether or not we can use EGW or VTH to answer these questions, or are we to base our judgment according to the Testimony of Jesus?...” —Your E-mail, Sunday, 2: 10 AM; [] brackets added.

“Can the services that the world provides on the Sabbath be considered a blessing...” —considered a blessing by whom? Those who keep the Sabbath and regard its benefits examine anything that helps them, along with those within their gates, and consider such things a blessing. Those who do not keep the Sabbath perceive blessings just like they appraise the benefits from the sun and the rain: they take it for granted. Let us not worry about how things are considered by people who do not appreciate the *Testimony of Jesus*. Instead, let us pattern our work after His. Like the gathering of extra manna on preparation day, the activities that we can pre-plan before the Sabbath, we should so do. Those things that we cannot, a flat tire, a traffic jam, a wife goes into labor, an injury occurs, a mid-winter furnace breakdown, a flight from an invading army, etc, require a different analysis. Those situations will demand that we take action; they may cause us to lose an opportunity of rest; however, like the animal in the ditch, heaven approves of the wise exceptions that you make to the Sabbath rule. In such cases, one must look to the next week to recover from their labors. Remember, the Sabbath graciously comes every seven days. Therefore, the question should not be, is help from the world a blessing, but is it wisely employed? Which brings me to your second point, doing your shopping on the Sabbath. Necessity answers this question: for why would anyone want to be in the busy markets on that day of rest? The only possible answer is sheer desperation; in which case, heaven can honor your need to buy food. It is like asking, if one should go to the market to buy food even though he is ill and very uncomfortable in leaving his cozy, restorative bed of rest. He indeed can go to the market, but it may become the cause for some debilitating reactions

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and embarrassing moments. But God is not going to punish him; he is punishing himself! Let us not miss the point: The Sabbath is your blessing not your yoke. To be blessed in it, you must

Select the Perfect Choices~~~~~. These questions that you asked manifest that discerning the Sabbath as a blessing is a point that has been underemphasized in your analysis. To illustrate the faltering of your perspective further, consider another abstract example: If in apple harvest season, I knew of your great love for apples so I give you a bag and invited you to help yourself to my orchard that would be like the Sabbath; a gift designed for your own benefit. Some apples, you will discover, have glaring defects, some have worm holes, some have bird droppings; some are not ripe; some have been partially eaten by insects. But most, within your reach, are perfect. Would you spend any time debating over the efficacy of choosing the defective apples? Going to the market on Sabbath is to choose an inferior rest. Would you chose the rotten ones and then feel the need to justify yourself or even apologize because you denied yourself the prime choices? No, you would do as expected of you and pick the ones that are for your own good, that are so inviting that you joy even in the smell. If, on the other hand, the pickings were very limited, then all can understand the debate: I can pick these apples and wash off the bird droppings, I can choose these apples and eat around the worm holes, I can cut out the portion that has been eaten by insects, etc.

The Sabbath is really no different; our pickings, regarding Sabbath worship are not slim; we have ample opportunity to plan for our rest. To risk unsettling that rest by going into the busy market should only be considered when you have few other options for a meal. In the market, many unanticipated things can happen to disrupt your Sabbath peace. The store could go on lock down because of a missing child, a robbery, or a gun-toting and disgruntled employee or husband, etc. The police may need to intercede and may require you to go to the station as a witness. You may become the victim of identity theft, causing you to spend months to correct that problem. A utility outage could occur locking in everyone until power is restored. A bad weather system could bring hazards. You could run into your employer and he, seeing that you are not keeping holy your rest, may give you an assignment; you could run into a former enemy or friend causing extenuating circumstances. Just like you take a chance at getting sick by eating a polluted apple, just so do you likewise take a gamble when you make a casual or glib Sabbath-day trip to the market. The gentiles are there desiring to bless you, but the enemy desires to curse you. Thus, it behooves all to understand that many things can work to destroy your Sabbath, and then you are faced with the oncoming week of burdens without proper recovery. So why risk it; why risk losing your gift from heaven even if heaven graciously honors your choice? Remember, to violate the Sabbath is to violate yourself; thus, the MSA urges all to respect themselves. The play-book strategy causes you to list circumstances that allow for shopping on the Sabbath. The MSA approach is, to not seek a list of ways to eat the bad apples; instead, it prepares all to gather the appealing ones, and if the pickings are slim to then proceed to the less than perfect choices. To further this analysis

Consider the Flip Side~~~~~ of the Fourth Commandment. What happens when events occur that cause you to miss work during the six days leading up to the Sabbath? Before further consideration, allow me to remind you of that which you pointed out in your E-mail: the Sabbath Law has a mandate that in the six days leading up to it, one must do all their labor. So, we have two clauses to the same commandment, the first describes your duty during the first six days and the second describes your duty on the seventh day. We all seem to understand the first clause; we understand that it is for our own good! When frustrating events happen, we all make provisions to either catch up or allow work assignments to be eternally rendered as lost opportunities. If it never gets done, then our homes or families suffer and we are blamed. I have jobs here in Pittsburgh that have been on the drawing board for months; I have, to date, failed to do all my work; thus, those things are not a blessing to me. God does not suffer loss; I do! But in this, I thank Him that with every passing week, I am given another week to do “all my labors”. This will occur for an eternity! So, there is a lesson from the flip side of the Sabbath Law. Suppose you hire a laborer to work within your gates, and she breaks an ankle and resultantly cannot clean your

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house? How much time will the group exhaust debating your sin in this? Suppose you plan to take the family on vacation requiring you to wake up on Sunday morning and drive for eight straight hours; only to find yourself unable to sleep the night before? Suppose on Wednesday, you rush home after work to cut the grass; you get stuck in traffic and miss the assignment due to darkness. On Thursday and Friday it rains. Just as events interfere with the second clause, Saturday Sabbath, they also interfere with the first clause of the Fourth Commandment. Since both are mandated by God, then we can infer His displeasure when either clause is violated —His displeasure that we are not fulfilled and satisfied. Thus, these examples also violate the Fourth Commandment, the requisite to complete all your work in six days. Surprisingly, no one ever seems concerned with this dimension of the Sabbath law; it is “least” among them. We assume that God understands and forgives; so, why cannot we have the same faith regarding the requirements of the Seventh-day clause of the Fourth Commandment? In final analysis, whose loss is it anyway when you fail to do all your work in six days, to drive the proverbial family on the long trip; the burden is shared (by a helpmeet) or the opportunity is lost. Whose loss is it when you fail to keep the lawn trim or to clean the house? Is it your loss or God’s? Of course it’s your loss. The only thing that you can do pertains to the next time: then you must be wise and conjure up a plan B. Try this also with your Sabbath meals, Sabbath thirst, Sabbath fuel stops, etc. In so doing, you will become a master of the Fourth Commandment. Remember, **“The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath”** —Mark 2: 27. Let this Testimony-of-Jesus wisdom resonate in your next meeting. As you do so, never let yesterday’s prophets, men resting in the grave, have pre-eminence over His wisdom and that of His *mustard seed*. The rest given to yesterday’s prophets is not your rest; the MSA was given to escape you from receiving their rest; how then should we seek their counsel?

Furthermore, by seeking a set of rules, apart from the Testimony, to help us with the rules, we miss the entire lesson of the Law, we fail to become judges, and we adopt the very same demeanor of the Pharisees. The Law is not an invisible electric fence that jolts us when we breach its barriers, it was given with the flex needed to meet all situations for every generation. The cure that provides the flex is the judges (the disciples indeed); the men elected to measure human behavior by the law. In ancient Hebrew society, they learned the Law of Circumcision, the law that all males must be circumcised on the eighth day after their birth, and they harmonized their Sabbath duties accordingly. Whoever it was that originally made that judgment, we know that he was brilliant because Father honored his rendering of circumcision on the Sabbath and put that “situation-ethical” analysis in the Testimony. On the other hand, some made less wise judgments, like the refusal to heal on the Sabbath. The Lord could have listed that as a historic sin against the church, a failure to honor the Sabbath with healing; instead, He bypassed their ignorance yesterday. In so doing He directed His ministry to accommodate the church of tomorrow, to the ability to

Become Better Sabbatharians~~~~~. The condemnation that came from Him to the leaders came —not because they were foolish about the gift of healing, but— because they refused to soften their hearts to wisdom giving preference to their traditional analysis, the rule book which they wrote for themselves. Consider this generous approach to poor judgment when you are shown a more perfect way to preserve your rest; you have an eternity to become an expert practitioner. This approach dashes to pieces the “play-book”, fear-of-reprisal approach to the Sabbath. The Text says,

“And he entered again into the synagogue; and there was a man there which had a withered hand. And they watched him, whether he would heal him on the Sabbath day; that they might accuse him...and he said unto them, is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath days, or to do evil? To save life, or to kill? But they held their peace. And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, stretch forth thine hand...and his hand was restored...”—Mark 3: 1 – 5.

Notice, the Lord was not grieved because every Sabbath before this episode, they missed opportunities to heal; He was grieved because they could not discern the doctrine, the righteousness of healing on the Sabbath. The Lord posed the arguments, and instead of His opponents

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surrendering to the power of His teaching, they remained silent as if His theology did not defeat their opinions. Let us not grieve the Lord today; let us get the lesson of the Testimony. Instead of deliberating over issues to create a protocol like, no shopping for groceries on the Sabbath, no repairing water heaters, no gasoline purchases —instead of rewriting the law— a different mind-set is in order. Purge your mind from what you have learned from yesterday’s ministries of death; forget about every protocol that you have learned. Take that excessive baggage, and as revealed in EGW’s impressive dream, cast it below into the deep abyss. Then, as you hold onto the cords, the *Testimony of Jesus*, reinstall all the laws, even the Fourth commandment in the light of Jesus’ testimony. Become a judge; measure everything according to the Lord’s expressed wisdom. If your conscience tells you that you have worked or found illegal pleasure on the Sabbath, then cross examine that conclusion in this manner. Do not presume that because a practice is a long standing, legal standard, condemned by theological catch phrases, that it is resultantly right. Before excusing or condemning the work or the play of yourself and others, first discern if the presumed violation could have been anticipated and done during the week; was it part of your six days of work? If this logic condemns you, praise Father for His insight to lead you, and the next time do all your work in the six days before the Sabbath. Remember the lesson of circumcision: A baby in need of that service on Saturday, could not, by law, have been serviced on the Friday before or the Sunday after! If you are on the road, and after a long drive have become thirsty, the thing is to not compound the sin of being ill prepared by torturing yourself for another hour so that you can keep the Sabbath. The Lord’s testimony, so far as I now can see, does not offer awards for disciples who torture themselves. The next time that you convene with the group, show to them your growth by manifesting to them that you pre-anticipate your thirst and brought your own water. Show then that you are becoming a master of the Sabbath. Then, you will not only be lauded for that but you will also know to

Never offer to God Strange Fire~~~~~. You mentioned the concept of “situational ethics”, and integrated that standard into a parameter to determine or measure righteousness. It is disturbing that such a phrase has wormed itself into our judgment to discern good from evil. This tactic, the use of a false standard directly opposes the theme of the MSA. We should not mix the ordained with the profane; we should not bring strange fire to the altar. The expression, “situational ethics”, is not a Bible theme, and it should not resultantly become a cute phrase to answer Bible issues. It is merely a man-made buzz word, a label that someone conjured to gauge rigidity to the law; it is not a part of Testimony-of-Jesus inspired judgment. Though it may ring with authority; it does not enforce the Lord’s theme when He charged Israel **“To keep the commandments of the Lord, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good”** — Deut 10: 13. Here we see that if the law yields a circumstance that is detrimental, if by honoring the Law he brings suffering to his innocent neighbors or himself, then he must seek a judgment that can facilitate his love for his neighbor, himself, and his higher love for God. For example, a man does a thing never done before in the history of the world until this age, on Friday he travels hours before sunset in his time zone. He takes a five hour journey west into another time zone and there he spends the weekend. He lands hours before sun set in the new time zone and hours after it has set in his home land. As the sun sets, he observes the Sabbath with the new community and in accordance to the new time zone in the new land; that is the legitimacy of situational ethics; he is not condemned. What about the pilot who must return the airplane back to the old time zone? You are not cheating him of his rest by purchasing a ticket with his airline. He, just like you, had his chance to embrace the Sabbath, and he chose to ignore its requirements. Thus, if he embraces the Kingdom call and passes the measurement of *Matt 25*, he will therein be an eternal servant, with a station of servitude or “least” in the Kingdom. This is his election, as you so noted in your E-mail, the Lord says,

“Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but

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whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” —Matt 5: 17-19.

The Kingdom will be made up of great men and rulers, earth’s solid sabbatarians. Then it will be made up of people of lesser distinction: those who are not so great, those whose evangelical efforts were to teach men to ignore the Commandments, the Commandments which they dismissed as insignificant. Each have a different standard to pass from death to life. But everyone therein will be a blessing, even the ignorant teachers of the law. This includes our Sabbath-breaking pilots, auto mechanics, gas station attendants, police officers, electric-plant workers, utility suppliers, etc. And since the Kingdom begins with the *mustard seed*, and the *mustard seed* is now here, then we can even now avail ourselves of the blessings which they can contribute, hence the week-end time traveler is justified. So you see, God can save those who comply and those who refuse to by extending rank so as to give separate rewards. But, in final analysis, salvation will only come to those who do the will of the Father. Let us take care then to never reach out of the Bible itself, looking to the “wise and prudent”, to gauge our commitment to the Bible’s laws or to gauge the ethics of our situations. Big impressive words, though they may make the theologians feel superior, cannot garner legitimacy over Bible ethics.

Speaking of the medical profession to address your other question, any medical provider must make themselves available to extend their services on any day of the week. The Law of Circumcision manifests this with great clarity. However, they do wise, as the one who picks the perfect apple, to avoid working on the Sabbath and passing such duties to their gentile co-workers who seek to bless them. Revisiting your question about the Law requiring us to work for six days, the Fourth Commandment does indeed mandate that we should work for six days. Special care must be taken to discern the meaning: This Commandment is absolutely not limited to the work assignments of our employers requiring that we adopt a six-day work week schedule for them. It applies to your duties to the home also. The yard needs cleaned, the children need to be tended to, the car needs to be washed, bills need to be paid, exercise needs to be done, home repairs need attention, the list goes on and on. If your employer only requires three instead of five days of labor from you, you will still have work to do that is considered your job, for “*six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work*”. Here we see that all our work must be done —not just that which our secular employer puts in our hands.

I hope that this help you,

Sincerely,

Derek