

Can We Use Public Transportation on the Sabbath?

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All Scriptures are from the New King James translation unless otherwise noted.

To begin, consider the context of this question. Some erroneously teach that chefs, hostesses, and waiters would be working in a restaurant anyway on the Sabbath, and, therefore, they believe that this fact gives them an excuse to have restaurant personnel work directly for them by preparing, cooking, and serving them meals. They incorrectly conclude that because a restaurant is open this allows them to pay for their services on God's holy day. This argument is fallacious because, even though restaurant workers would already be working on the Sabbath, they would not be working for us unless we deliberately solicit them to do so.

However, it is our belief that the argument, "they would be working anyway," can apply when it comes to public services such as electricity, gas, and water. We don't cause utility companies to work when we flip a light switch or flush the toilet. The natural gas, water, and electricity are automatically provided with no need to pay someone to work for us on the Sabbath. This same principle applies to public transportation such as a train, subway, or bus.

Sabbath keepers may use public transportation on this Sabbath if passes are purchased in advance so that the believer is not paying for services on God's holy day. This would be a proper application of the preparation day. Thus, riders are not conducting business in order to use public transportation.

Further, like electricity or water, the bus follows the same path each day whether someone is riding it or not. Riding in a vehicle that is going in the direction that we desire to go is not breaking God's law. It would be no different than purchasing gas on Friday and then using the gas to drive to services on the Sabbath. It is paid for in advance and the Sabbath keeper is simply along for the ride. This avoids the two real issues that the Scriptures forbid; causing others to work directly for you and doing business on the Sabbath day.

There is yet another difference in this scenario which Christ addressed to the Pharisees. When it came to healing a man on the Sabbath, the religious leaders believed Christ was breaking the law. However, Jesus said:

Then Jesus said to them, "I will ask you one thing: Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy?" (Luke 6:9)

Performing things that are good such as visiting the infirmed or healing the sick are allowed on the Sabbath. In a like manner, attending services is a good thing to do on the Sabbath. The day is called a holy convocation (Lev. 23:2). God's intention is that we convoke with Him on the Sabbath and this is a good work. It is not driven by a selfish motive such as dining out at restaurants. Therefore, even if a person thought that taking a bus in order to convoke at services might possibly be breaking the law, Christ explained that there are times when there are extenuating circumstances.

For example, there are occasions when we face a conflict in the Commandments. In such cases, a physical law may have to be abrogated in order to keep a higher, spiritual law. Christ

gave us an example of caring for our animals in order to save life or property on the Sabbath (Luke 13:15; 14:5). The Savior also explained that the purpose of the law was judgment, mercy, and faith (Mat. 23:23). He also explained how priests do work in the temple on the Sabbath that is necessary for services, and yet they are blameless (Mat. 12:5). Eating out for our enjoyment causing people to work by cooking, serving, and cleaning up after us is not an example of good judgment, mercy, or faith. It is clearly breaking God's fourth commandment in order to serve lust of the flesh. In another example, the Messiah healed on the Sabbath day. He also spoke of other priestly obligations in which enduring principles still apply today:

“Did not Moses give you the law, yet none of you keeps the law? Why do you seek to kill Me?” The people answered and said, “You have a demon. Who is seeking to kill You?” Jesus answered and said to them, “I did one work, and you all marvel. 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? Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment” (John 7:19-24).

God expects us to judge righteous judgment. It makes sense that eating out and causing others to specifically work for us so that we may enjoy our own pleasure is NOT righteous judgment. However, purchasing a transportation pass in advance and riding along in a vehicle that is already going in the direction we desire to go so that we may attend a Sabbath service is good judgment. This would be a correct application of mercy and of faith.

In that context, we have our own question to ask. If distance is an issue with the brethren in a particular area, why don't we ask someone in the congregation if they can give us a ride? Why doesn't the church leadership provide some sort of transportation so that services can be attended by all members? Have we lost our sense of love for one another in that we do not want to be put out in order to help someone attend services? This is a reasonable service that we can provide to a fellow brother or sister in need, but it would also fall under the responsibilities of deacons in the congregation.

Consider yet another point. If some people are so far away from the hall that it is actually difficult for them to get to services or if they feel there is no choice than to do business in order to attend, why not have services locally? In other instances individuals unable to travel could attend over the internet or on a phone line. In many cases ministers could train hosts in remote areas that can attend to brethren's needs. Paul gave us an example of this in his letter to Titus.

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you (Titus 1:5).

We see no evidence in the Bible indicating that the apostles expected people to purchase transportation on the Sabbath in order to get to services. In the times of Christ and the early New Testament Church, those who did not live close to the temple simply assembled in their homes (1Cor. 16:19). In that context, as we live in our modern technological world, we ask God's people to personally evaluate these things in the light of the Scriptures. God's Sabbath is clearly a time to rest from our weekly activities. The fourth commandment also forbids us to work or cause others to work for us.

What is deeply disappointing to us is that many Church leaders treat the Sabbath as though the commandment actually states that members are to attend their services no matter what the cost. Some have even told members to drive hundreds of miles on the Sabbath just to be with their particular group. To them the issue is attending THEIR services. We ask the churches in areas where this might be an issue to repent. Do whatever is necessary to put God first and to keep His Sabbath Holy according to His commandment. Help brethren who desire to be with those of like mind on God's Sabbath. Remember what the Sabbath pictures and keep it holy!