

Is a common meal the work of a local church?

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Introduction: There are things that the world sees as trivial that are in fact connected to eternal matters

A. Many laugh at the question we are considering. They cannot conceive how anyone would oppose "eating in the church building."

1. Satan likes to frame an issue in as harmless a way as possible. To Eve he simply wanted her to have "greater knowledge." (**Gen 3:5**)

Genesis 3:5 (NKJV) ⁵For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

a. Is there anyone here who wants to be labeled "anti-knowledge?"

b. This was a matter of authority! They choose not to submit to God.

2. What if we asked this question: "Should the church be submissive to the authority of Christ?" There is no problem in answering this one.

B. We must always base our answers on God's word.

1. When must decide to give book chapter and verse for all answers. (**Col 3:17**)

Colossians 3:17 (NKJV) ¹⁷And *whatever* you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

2. If we believe the scriptures will furnish to "every good work" then we will have no problem in submitting to God's choices. (**2 Tim 3:16-17**)

2 Timothy 3:16 through 2 Timothy 3:17 (NKJV) ¹⁶All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

I. What is the local church?

A. It consists of individual Christians who are under Christ as their head. (**Eph 5:23**)
Ephesians 5:23 (NKJV) ²³For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.

1. Every Christian is in this universal body. In this sense there is but one church. (**Eph 4:4-6; 1:22-23**)

Ephesians 4:4 through Ephesians 4:6 (NKJV) ⁴*There is* one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶one God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all.

Ephesians 1:22 through Ephesians 1:23 (NKJV) ²²And He put all *things* under His feet, and gave Him *to be* head over all *things* to the church, ²³which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

2. This one body is not speaking of a local church. There is but one church that consists of every faithful Christian. There are many local churches. **(Rom 16:16)**
Romans 16:16 (NKJV) ¹⁶Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you.

3. You cannot be in this one church without Jesus being your head. **(Lk 6:46)**
Luke 6:46 (NKJV) ⁴⁶“But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?”

B. There are three things necessary to have a local church.

1. There is an agreement to work and worship together as a church. **(Heb 13:17)**
Hebrews 13:17 (NKJV) ¹⁷Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

2. There is a common oversight. **(1 Pt 5:1-2)**
1 Peter 5:1 through 1 Peter 5:2 (NKJV) ¹The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: ²Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly;

3. There is a pooling of resources. **(1 Cor 16:1-2)**
1 Corinthians 16:1 through 1 Corinthians 16:2 (NKJV) ¹Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: ²On the first *day* of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.

4. Some say any coming together of Christians constitutes a local church. For example some Christians may get together and pool their money to buy pizza. This is not a local church at work!

C. God has given local churches unique responsibilities.

1. In discipline there is a time and place for the church to act. **(Mt 18:15-17)**
Matthew 18:15 through Matthew 18:17 (NKJV) ¹⁵“Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that *‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’* ¹⁷And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

2. In benevolence there are differing responsibilities concerning the local church and the individual Christian. **(1 Tim 5:16)**

1 Timothy 5:16 (NKJV) ¹⁶If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows.

3. Because of this we need to find the local church addressed in the context of a passage before *assuming* church responsibility.
4. If a scripture addresses only the individual Christian this would not be enough to authorize church action. If not, then whatever the individual Christian may do, the church may do!
 - a. This would involve secular business. **(Eph 4:28)**

Ephesians 4:28 (NKJV) ²⁸Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with *his* hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.

- b. This would involve politics. **(Rom 13:1-4)**

Romans 13:1 through Romans 13:4 (NKJV) ¹Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. ²Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. ³For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. ⁴For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to *execute* wrath on him who practices evil.

- c. This would involve recreation and many other things. Are you ready?

II. What is the work of the local church?

A. When we take all the passages that show church action then we have all God has authorized a local church to do!

1. God may specify a certain thing. In this we must not substitute! **(1 Cor 16:1-2)**

1 Corinthians 16:1 through 1 Corinthians 16:2 (NKJV) ¹Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: ²On the first *day* of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.

2. In the authority to act there may be things authorized that are necessary to fulfilling the things to be done. This is sometimes called "general authority."

B. The church may use its **resources** for that which it is authorized to do.

1. God has authorized a collection for the work of the local church.
2. The resources of the local church constitute the treasury and those things purchased from the treasury that are overseen by the church.
3. This would include the building or other things purchased from the treasury.

C. The church may do only that which is **wholly** its work.

1. Only that which is authorized may be done with God's approval. To mix that

which is authorized in with things that are not authorized is in effect is a substitution for what God has said.

2. For example, playing baseball is not authorized wider passages that instruct us to preach the gospel. Someone may preach while the game is being played, but playing baseball and preaching the gospel are *two separate activities!*

D. The work of the local church can be described in three areas.

1. God has authorized local churches to be involved in the preaching of God's word. (**Phil 4:15-16; 2 Cor 11:8**)

Philippians 4:15 through Philippians 4:16 (NKJV) ¹⁵Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. ¹⁶For even in Thessalonica you sent *aid* once and again for my necessities.

2 Corinthians 11:8 (NKJV) ⁸I robbed other churches, taking wages *from them* to minister to you.

2. God has authorized local churches to be involved in the edifying of its members. (**Acts 9:31; 1 Cor 14:26**)

Acts 9:31 (NKJV) ³¹Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.

1 Corinthians 14:26 (NKJV) ²⁶How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.

3. God has authorized local churches to be involved in the relief of its members. (**Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-35; 6:1-6; 11:27-30; Rom 15:26; 1 Cor 6:1-4; 2 Cor 9:12-14**)

Acts 2:44 through Acts 2:45 (NKJV) ⁴⁴Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, ⁴⁵and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.

Acts 4:32 through Acts 4:35 (NKJV) ³²Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. ³³And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. ³⁴Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, ³⁵and laid *them* at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.

Acts 6:1 through Acts 6:6 (NKJV) ¹Now in those days, when *the number* of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. ²Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. ³Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of *good* reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint

over this business; ⁴but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”

⁵And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, ⁶whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.

Acts 11:27 through Acts 11:30 (NKJV) ²⁷And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. ²⁹Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. ³⁰This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

Romans 15:26 (NKJV) ²⁶For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem.

4. Where does a social meal fit? (**Eph 4:11, 12; Jn 6:44, 26-27**)

Ephesians 4:11 through Ephesians 4:12 (NKJV) ¹¹And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹²for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, **John 6:44 (NKJV)** ⁴⁴No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.

John 6:26 through John 6:27 (NKJV) ²⁶Jesus answered them and said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. ²⁷Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.”

5. Consider some common examples of liberal churches in this area.

III. New efforts to justify a social meal as the work of a local church

A. LaGard Smith book “radical restoration” has found a receptive audience.

1. He claims the Bible demand that we change many practices.

- a. That there be no fully supported local preacher.
- b. That churches be small groups that meet in homes.
- c. That elders be over many churches in an area.
- d. That there be no collections except for specific temporary needs.
- e. We must abandon the uniform use of the name “church of Christ.”
- e. That the Lord’s Supper be part of a common meal.

2. LaGard Smith has spoken at Robuck Parkway, the Central church in Tuscaloosa and in many other places in Alabama.

- a. There are at least 4 churches that have divided over these doctrines.
- b. Brother Smith has a following among many in this area.

3. I want to examine the claim that the Lord’s Supper be a part of a common meal.

B. There is only one example of Christians bringing a social meal into the work of the

church. In this case it is not an approved example! **(1 Cor 11:17-34)**

1 Corinthians 11:17 through 1 Corinthians 11:34 (NKJV) ¹⁷Now in giving these instructions I do not praise *you*, since you come together not for the better but for the worse. ¹⁸For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. ¹⁹For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you. ²⁰Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. ²¹For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of *others*; and one is hungry and another is drunk. ²²What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise *you*.

²³For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the *same* night in which He was betrayed took bread; ²⁴and when He had given thanks, He broke *it* and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." ²⁵In the same manner *He* also *took* the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me."

²⁶For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.

²⁷Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks *this* cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. ³⁰For this reason many *are* weak and sick among you, and many sleep. ³¹For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. ³²But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.

³³Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. ³⁴But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come.

1. They should have come together for the Lord's Supper. **(1 Cor 11:17, 20)**

1 Corinthians 11:17 (NKJV) ¹⁷Now in giving these instructions I do not praise *you*, since you come together not for the better but for the worse.

1 Corinthians 11:20 (NKJV) ²⁰Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper.

2. By bring in an unauthorized action into the assemblies they in fact defeated the purposes of God! **(1 Cor 11:20-22)**

1 Corinthians 11:20 through 1 Corinthians 11:22 (NKJV) ²⁰Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. ²¹For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of *others*; and one is hungry and another is drunk. ²²What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise *you*.

“The major argument that LaGard sets forth in this chapter is that we must observe the memorial Supper IN CONJUNCTION WITH "a normal, ordinary meal with the usual variety of food"(p.128). Somewhere in this normal meal of chicken, butterbeans, deviled-eggs, and camp stew, we are to pause with some unleavened bread and wine, and remember the offered body and blood of Jesus. He says that this is what the early Christians did, and he says that we "may" be abusing the Lord's Supper if we do not, and he says that we have definitely NOT restored anything akin to the Lord's Supper if we do not combine the memorial with a common meal.” – Terry Benton

3. Did Paul give instructions for the Lord's supper or a common meal? (**1 Cor 11:33**)

1 Corinthians 11:33 (NKJV) ³³Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.

"The ritual we now euphemistically call "communion"(not wholly unlike the Catholic's sacramental Eucharist) doesn't hold a candle to the dynamic koinonia communion of the first-century disciples in their sharing together of the Lord's Supper within the context of the fellowship meal." LaGard Smith, Radical Restoration (p.135).

a. I heard brother Smith in Tuscaloosa say that “crackers and grape juice” in

a “snack and not a ‘supper.’”

b. Paul plainly told us that hunger was not be fulfilled at the Lord's Supper!

4. Where was the common meal to be eaten? (**1 Cor 11:34**)

1 Corinthians 11:34 (NKJV) ³⁴But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come.

B. Does authority for a “love feast” this authorize church fellowship halls? (**Jude 12**)

Jude 1:12 (NKJV) ¹²These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving *only* themselves. *They are* clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots;

LOVE FEASTS: Feasting on Food? Or Feasting On Love? LaGard assumes that "love feasts" were common meals together. I would argue that the memorial associated with unleavened bread and fruit of the vine (per Jesus' instructions) is a feast of love, and it is a feast of the heart and not the stomach. It is feasting on Jesus, His kingdom and righteousness, that fills us with commonality and brotherhood, and a common meal is not itself a "love feast". It is the purpose of the Supper to provide us with united focus and concentration as we devote our attention together on what Jesus said for us to "remember". When we are casually eating chicken and butterbeans, we are not called to focus our thoughts on his body and blood. That is no more a love feast than a baseball game together is a "love game". We feast on Jesus' love, our love and admiration of Him, and share common salvation and faith, when we take that bread and cup of blessing in a worthy manner in memory of Him together. THAT is a feast of love. In the Lord's Supper we are advocating our faith and love, and we are communing with Him. – Terry Benton

1. What is being done here?
2. Is this church action or individual?

C. Is this passage dealing with church action? (**Gal 2:11-13**)

Galatians 2:11 through Galatians 2:13 (NKJV) ¹¹Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; ¹²for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. ¹³And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.

D. What kind of food feeds the soul?

1. It is not the food that perishes. (**Jn 6:27, 32-33**)

John 6:27 (NKJV) ²⁷Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.”

John 6:32 through John 6:33 (NKJV) ³²Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

“Moses did not give the bread from heaven. The Father has given the "true bread" from heaven. That true bread is Jesus who gave His life to the world. The physical elements of the Lord’s Supper do not, themselves, give life. It is the remembrance made of those elements that allows or guides our minds to feast on the "true bread". We feast on the "true bread" and remember that He gave His life for us. Truly, then, the supper is a special occasion when we unitedly focus our attention on the true bread and feed our souls together. That is a feast of love. That is the "love feast", not a common meal together, not a game together, not an earthly pleasure together, but a moment of singularity in our sharing the love of God together in memory of what He did for us on the cross.” – Terry Benton

IV. Let us not fail the "test case."

A. Often major changes are brought in by a small test case.

1. Churches in Alabama and Colorado bought existing denominational buildings.
2. The preacher and others wanted to use it for common meals!

B. We must always stand on principle and never yield. (**Gal 2:5**)

Galatians 2:5 (NKJV) ⁵to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.

Conclusion: Will you give book, chapter and verse for your practices?

RADICAL RESTORATION

Bro. LaGard Smith has given us a book entitled, “Radical Restoration.” Rather than help elders and preachers navigate through stormy waters now before us, Bro. Smith’s approach to “restoration” would do irreparable harm to any church which chooses to follow his suggestions. He perhaps inadvertently predicts the fruit of his plan by

saying, “The very nature of radical restoration is such that the act of demolition is as vital as the act of creation. Invariably, wrecking crews must raze the old structure before they can begin to build anew” (p. 39).

Smith would resurrect the “mutual ministry” practice of the late Carl Ketcherside and Leroy Garrett. To see just how successful that approach to teaching and church building is, one need only consult Mac Lynn’s directory of “Churches of Christ in the United States.” Those who do will note that congregations identified by a “ME,” i.e., a mutual edification symbol, are few in number and often as few as 10 or 15 in membership. That is the result of 75 years of mutual ministry without “located preachers.”

He would confound the Lord’s Supper with a common fellowship meal. Paul addressed this question in I Cor. 11:20-23. He made it clear that the Lord’s Supper is not a meal where hungry appetites are satisfied. For those who wished to dine and commune together, he said, “In this I praise you not.” Coziness and intimacy are not ingredients of the Lord’s Supper.

He would have our congregations abandon their public meeting houses and resort to private homes. He and others who are enamored with house churches seem to overlook that literally hundreds of our congregations began in homes of members. As they grew they eventually secured their own public places of assembly. Generally we build because it is more economical in the long run than renting and provides facilities that are designed to meet congregation needs. Also, because it gives us permanency and presence in a community that a rented hall cannot provide. His recommendation would forever limit the church to small “home” sized congregations that would be endlessly dividing into more small groups.

He would have us consider the possibility of having one set of elders to supervise all the churches in a particular city. Even this concept has been floated before. It has flourished best in the diocesan concept of Catholicism with its citywide bishop, but it is not biblical. The apostles “appointed for them elders in every church” (Acts 14:23).

To further complicate our survival, he would have us to exist without specific identify in a world of competing and confusing religious organizations. Although he cannot fault the Bible name “church of Christ” he would have us discard it for other, less distinctive, names that would not help the most diligent searcher find in which private home we are meeting. Also he evidently would have us discontinue placing our addresses and phone numbers in the yellow pages of the phone directories lest we by so doing join the ranks of denominations.

He would have us operate without funds except those gathered for occasional emergency benevolent situations.

Granted, Bro. Smith is a learned man of the law and he is currently riding a crest of popularity on the campus scene. He would have been more convincing if he had first launched just such a congregation as he proposes and after ten years reported back to us with a progress report. But one need not have a PhD to perceive that his “Radical Restoration” will only result in radical decline and ultimate demise for those who follow his program. His suggestions are indeed radical but they have nothing to do with the restoration of New Testament Christianity. They might however eventuate in a new kind of church...one looking back to Smith as its originator. – John Waddy