

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**)
 - 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**)
 - 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**)

I. What is the local church?

- A. It consists of individual Christians who are under Christ as their head. (**Eph 5:23**)
 - 1. Every Christian is in this universal body. In this sense there is but one church. (**Eph 4:4-6; 1:22-23**)
 - 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**)
 - 3. You cannot be in this one church without Jesus being your head. (**Lk 6:46**)
- 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**)
 - 2. There is a common oversight. (**1 Pt 5:1-2**)
 - 3. There is a pooling of resources. (**1 Cor 16:1-2**)
 - 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**)
 - 2. In benevolence there are differing responsibilities concerning the local church and the individual Christian. (**1 Tim 5:16**)
 - 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**)
 - b. This would involve politics. (**Rom 13:1-4**)
 - 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**)
 - 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**)
 - 2. God has authorized local churches to be involved in the edifying of its members. (**Acts 9:31; 1 Cor 14:26**)
 - 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**)
 - 4. Where does a social meal fit into any of these works?
 - 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. They should have come together for the Lord's Supper. **(1 Cor 11:17, 20)**

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

“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)**

"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)**

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

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)**

D. What kind of food feeds the soul?

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

“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**)

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