

Taking Meals Together

Sermon by Andy Sochor

Text: Acts 2:46-47

The New Testament repeatedly emphasizes the togetherness of brethren in the early church. Shortly after the church was established, the first Christians were meeting and eating together. Many churches today host “fellowship meals” – meals hosted by a congregation and conducted as part of the church’s work. But was Luke describing a church-sponsored meal? If not, are these meals at least authorized?

Benefits of Eating Together

- Brethren differ on whether a local church is authorized to host meals as part of their work – yet all should recognize the importance of Christians eating together
- Sharing meals helps strengthen the bonds we have with one another (cf. Acts 2:44, 46; 4:32-35) – we can give and receive encouragement as we sit across the table from one another (cf. Hebrews 3:13)
- These meals are also helpful when it becomes necessary to exercise church discipline (1 Corinthians 5:11) – by not associating with a brother in sin (including meals), hopefully he will repent (cf. 2 Corinthians 2:8); this can still work IF there is something to miss when we withdraw from the unrepentant brother; yet if we never shared a meal with him before his sin, what is different about our social interaction with him after he refuses to repent?

The Place Where Christians Eat Together

- Paul’s instructions about the erring brother assumed they were accustomed to eating together (1 Corinthians 5:11) – later in his letter, he wrote about where these meals were appropriate and inappropriate
- Paul discussed eating together AND eating the Lord’s Supper together; he addressed three problems – (1) they changed the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 11:20); (2) they were divided (1 Corinthians 11:22), shaming those with nothing; (3) they were not eating at home (1 Corinthians 11:22, 34)
- Most brethren recognize the first two points – the Corinthians needed to correct their observance of the Lord’s Supper and heal their division; but by ignoring the third problem, it is easy to conclude that church “fellowship meals” are authorized
- But if that were true, why did Paul tell them to eat at home? – why not tell them to fix the first two problems, then their church meals could be bigger and better than ever? ... instead, he told them to “eat at home” (outside of the assembly)
- Again, it is good for brethren to eat together (Acts 2:46) – but not as part of the function of the local church

What About “Love Feasts”?

- Some brethren latch onto this phrase (Jude 11-13) – they argue that these were meals shared by the church as part of their authorized work
- This is the only time the term is used in the New Testament, and Jude did not describe/define them – one has to use extra-Biblical sources to determine what these “love feasts” were; such sources can be helpful, but not when we ignore what else is revealed in the New Testament
- Some argue that this was a meal shared in connection with the Lord’s Supper (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:20-21) – they argue that there were two meals; (1) the Lord’s Supper and (2) a feast shared by the brethren
- This is just an assumption – but IF the “love feast” was a common meal, additional assumptions must be made to conclude that (1) this was an authorized practice and (2) it was part of the church’s work; before we cite extra-Biblical sources, we need to remember what Paul wrote; “eat at home” (1 Corinthians 11:34)
- This also misses the main point of the passage – warning about false teachers (Jude 4, 8, 10-16); they were tolerated in their “love feasts”; John warned of this fellowship at home (2 John 10-11); the Christians to whom Jude wrote needed the same warning

Conclusion

- Brethren who disagree on this question will agree that it is good for Christians to eat together – we KNOW it is good to do this in one another’s homes (Acts 2:46)
- The church is “the pillar and support of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15), not the coordinator of social events – we can and should spend time together outside of the assembly to grow closer, encourage one another, and hold each other accountable; then as we come together as a local church, we must focus on the work the Lord gave the church to do