

Eating in the Church Building

Larry DeLong

A few weeks ago, a gentleman from out of town visited us being in the area due to work. Many of our members visited with him as did I. He told me he enjoyed the worship service until it was announced that we had a fellowship meal following services in the annex. When asked if there was a problem, he responded with the same old verse and song that most of the anti-persuasion brethren use. He quoted Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 11:22, "*What, have ye not houses to eat and to drink in?*" I tried to reason with him concerning what Paul was teaching here, as did others, but to no avail.

We don't encounter many people with this mindset in this part of Texas, but it is very prevalent in East Texas. I don't condemn anyone who holds to this view, until they start binding their opinion and condemning those who disagree with them on the matter. After trying to reason with him I told him that I understood that this was something that he had believed for quite some time, and it would not be settled in a few minutes of talk. I told him I did not want him to violate his conscience by eating with us but encouraged him to come back and discuss this more to eliminate this division within the body of Christ. To that he agreed and left. Again, we don't encounter too many people who hold to this doctrine, but when we do we need to be ready with an answer (1 Peter 3:15).

At the Denton Lectures (1982), John Waddy gave some very good things to consider when addressing this issue.

1. Whatever the Corinthians were doing, they were not eating in a church *house*. Meeting places (church buildings) were not purchased by the church until the late 2nd to early 3rd centuries. Early Christians frequently met in homes (Romans 16:5), at public places like the temple porches (Acts 2:46), and private buildings (Acts 19:9-10).
2. The church building is not holy like the temple was. It is not sacred. The people are the church.
3. If the building may only be used for worship activities, how then could weddings be scripturally performed therein? Weddings are social events at best.
4. Many preachers who condemn eating in the building have offices in the meeting house. Can they drink a cup of coffee or eat their lunch while at work in their office? If it is a sin to eat a common meal in the church building as they affirm, then their Coke or snack would be sin, even as a pot-luck meal for 50 brethren.
5. Most folks who stand against eating in buildings have water fountains in their buildings with no apparent sense of wrong. Yet if we look carefully at Paul's words, he condemns both eating and drinking (1 Corinthians 11:22). (When I asked this gentleman about this his reply was, "We don't push the issue that far." LD)
6. Those who condemn using church funds to provide "kitchen facilities" have no problem using the same for providing toilet facilities in the church house.
7. Congregations who condemn others who eat in the church house build a preacher's house on the same lot with God's money. His family eats in the church's house and then the congregation has showers, parties and meals in the facility. If it is wrong to use the Lord's money to provide eating facilities for the congregation, then they have sinned.
8. If it is sinful to eat physical food for the physical body in the church house, do mothers sin who feed their babies in the church building or give a two-year-old a cracker to quiet him during worship?

The problem in Corinth was not eating in the church building. The context shows they were mixing a common meal with the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:20-21). Some were selfishly refusing to share their food with the poor brethren who had little to nothing (v. 21). For those two wrongs Paul rebukes them.

Common sense and study are two ingredients necessary to distinguish between custom and doctrine. May we always be a people who give diligence to show ourselves approved unto God, rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15).