**EATING IN THE BUILDING – WHAT’S THE BIG DEAL?**

***Preliminary note from Lanny: While I believe “eating in the building” frames the issue wrongly, I still found this article to be an excellent summary why faithful churches of Christ do not make social activities a part of their work. I hope you profit from reading it, as I did.***

A couple came by the church building several months ago. They were members of an area congregation, a group that was planning to construct a new facility, and wanted to see the layout of our building. I gave them a quick tour. As they were about to leave, the lady said, “I noticed you don’t have a fellowship hall. I guess you just don’t have room for one.”

That says something about how most people look at the work of the church. She assumed that we didn’t have a place for recreational activities because we couldn’t fit it in the budget or on the lot. It never crossed her mind that we would choose not to build one; after all, nearly every church has one anymore. “No, ma’am,” I replied. “The reason we don’t have a fellowship hall is the same reason we don’t have a gymnasium or a softball field. We’ve yet to find Biblical authority for them.” I offer the following suggestions as to why eating in the building is, in fact, a big deal.

Hospitality is a function of the home, not the church. It’s not that the Lord is opposed to His people eating with one another. The early Christians took “their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart” (Acts 2:46). It’s important for the body of believers to be together, to share the joys and common experiences of life, and gathering around a table is one of the best ways to do that. But the New Testament instruction to be hospitable, whether the recipient is a stranger or a saint, is given to individuals, not local churches (Rom. 12:13, Heb. 13:2, 1 Pet. 4:9). Peter may have charged the elders to “feed the flock of God” (1 Pet. 5:2, KJV), but I don’t think he had a covered dish in mind. When the church organizes activities meant for families to plan, it robs the individual both of opportunity and responsibility.

Mixing social and spiritual things is a recipe for disaster. While eating is thought by many to be a form of fellowship, it is not a spiritual work. And the danger of bringing a social atmosphere to the place of worship is seen in the Corinthian’s perversion of the Lord’s Supper. They turned the table of the Lord into such a common meal that Paul told them they were despising the church of God (1 Cor. 11:22). It is interesting that his solution involved eating and drinking at home in order to partake of the Supper in a worthy manner, rightly discerning the body and blood of Christ. I’m afraid that many have gone to the other extreme. They have so emphasized what you can ***get*** out of worship that they have neglected what you’re supposed to ***give*** to God. When the social event becomes the feature of the service, the spiritual element is all but excluded. The people in the pew are no longer hungering and thirsting for righteousness; they’re just hungry and thirsty.

Proper respect for authority cannot be turned on and off. Some appease their conscience by saying, “We don’t have a multimillion-dollar, state-of-the-art fellowship hall. We just use one of the back classrooms for a potluck every now and then.” That is a justification I find hard to swallow. The big deal about eating in the building is not just the unauthorized expenditure of money from the church treasury, funds that could be used for spreading the gospel or helping needy saints (Phil. 4:15-16). It is the irreverent attitude toward the Scriptures, an attitude that allows many to speak where the Bible is silent and to act when no approved example is given. When Jesus said, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matt. 28:18), that implies that He didn’t leave any for us with which to speculate and assume. If you respect what He said about believing and being baptized, you must also respect what is said about the church that He built. ***He is either Lord of all or nothing at all.***

The other day, I saw a sign in front of a church building that read, “We’re redefining church.” Is that really something to brag about?

--Bubba Garner