

Tables of Fellowship 02
The Kitchen Table
By Bill Denton

INTRODUCTION

A. The sermons on Sunday mornings this month focus on fellowship

1. Last week I told you I was going to work these lessons around a series title called "Tables of Fellowship"
 - a. we're going to look at three different kind of tables and the activities that occur there because they reveal an understanding of fellowship that is seriously lacking among modern Christians
 - b. table fellowship is far more important than most of us realize
2. It often comes as a surprise to people to learn that eating meals together has always been an opportunity for God's people to express the things we hold on common, and to share together on an intimate level

B. Last week we looked at the first of three tables – the Lord's table

1. The Lord's supper itself is a meal – we refer to it with a word (supper) that necessarily supplies the idea of people sitting down around a table and eating a meal
2. The Lord's supper was begun in the context of the Passover meal
3. That meal happened with a serious element of fellowship because it focused on things that people held in common, and shared with one another
4. Passover was a meal about relationship – and the Lord's supper continues to be a meal about relationship
5. The Lord's supper is a meal that demands unity, and unity only happens in the context of fellowship with one another
6. Where fellowship and unity fail, so we fail in any effort to eat the Lord's supper

C. Today I want to focus on a different table – the kitchen table of fellowship

1. Here is a terribly neglected table of fellowship that might even seem at first to not be so very biblical
2. The truth is that the kitchen table, and the fellowship around it, are vital

I. GETTING A SENSE OF THE KITCHEN TABLE FROM SCRIPTURE

A. Historians provide interesting insights into meals of the common people of Israel

1. The main meal was usually in the evening, with the participants reclining on couches around a low table.
2. Everyone ate from a common bowl, dipping meat and vegetables with a piece of bread – a frequent custom was for one person to share an especially tasty bite with a companion
3. On special occasions like birthdays or marriages, guests received special treatment
 - a. they were greeted with a kiss
 - b. they were provided a refreshing footbath
 - c. they might be provided special clothing or floral wreaths
 - d. the head, beard, face and sometimes clothing were anointed with perfumes and ointments
4. One thing is certain, whether in the house of the king, or the house of the common man, mealtime was an important family and social occasion

B. Meals are mentioned numerous times in scripture

1. Do a concordance search and you will see that the number of times it is mentioned that people ate meals is more than you think (700+)
- 2 So I'll just make the point from the practice of Jesus and his disciples
 - a. Jn 2:1ff – the first miracle of Jesus happened at a wedding – but we might miss that involved here was eating together
 - b. Mk 2:16 – Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners
 - c. Mk 6:35ff – Jesus fed the 5,000 (provided a meal)
 - d. Mk 8:1ff – Jesus fed another 4,000
 - e. Jn 4:7ff – Jesus met the woman at the well while his disciples went to town to get food for a meal
 - f. Jn 6:35 – Jesus called himself the bread of life, using the idea of eating a meal to teach about himself
 - g. Jn 13 – Jesus instituted the Lord's supper at a meal with his disciples

C. We know that eating meals together was the practice of the early church

1. Acts 2:42-46 specifically says that believers took their meals (food) together
 - a. these things were happening day by day and house to house
 - b. I'm persuaded that kitchen table fellowship was a common practice
2. I use the term kitchen table fellowship because it's the kitchen table concept that speaks of family, friends, and close, loving relationships

II. WHY KITCHEN TABLE FELLOWSHIP IS IMPORTANT

A. You learn to love people around the kitchen table

1. John 13:34–35 (NASB95) -- 34 “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”
2. Jesus taught this sitting around a table eating a meal with his disciples
 - a. the meal celebrated the Passover – prefigures Jesus’ loving sacrifice
 - b. it was this meal that served as the basis for our Lord's supper
3. You want to learn to love people – then make it a practice to sit around a table and share a meal with them
 - a. experts tell us this is one of the most important things a family can do to build and strengthen the family ties
 - b. our experience overseas in the Air Force speaks to the shared meal as a way to know people, become friends, establish relationships and create love among people
4. I have often heard church leaders say that one of the greatest needs in the church is for Christians to get to know one another
 - a. we don't really need fancy programs, though they can help
 - b. get people around a table, sharing a meal, and watch relationship bloom

B. You learn to overcome differences, and understand the perspective of other people

1. A lot of relationship building is overcoming differences
 - a. people come from different backgrounds and have different experiences that have made them who they are
 - b. we sometimes just don't understand why people think like they do
 - c. the only way to overcome those things is to sit down with those people and not argue, but just talk out our points of view and way we see things and think
 - d. the kitchen table is a great place to do that
2. There is power in the opportunity to interact with others
 - a. young and old need to interact
 - b. educated and not so educated need to interact
 - c. people of different races and ethnic backgrounds need to interact
 - d. you can set up contrived meetings, or sit down and eat together – I will tell you which is the least threatening to everyone – a meal!

C. Those who would be spiritual leaders need to lead first around a kitchen table

1. 1 Tim 3:2 lists hospitality as one of the qualities for one who would serve as an elder in the church
 - a. we will sometimes make a big deal out of qualifications more difficult to understand and skip over this one that is easy
 - b. a man who will not sit down with others and eat a meal is not fit to serve as a spiritual leader of those people

2. This very thing is what got Peter in trouble with Paul

Galatians 2:11–21 (NASB95)

11 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. **12** For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he *began* to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. **13** The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy.

14 But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, “If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how *is it that* you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews? **15** “We *are* Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles; **16** nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified. **17** “But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be! **18** “For if I rebuild what I have *once* destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor. **19** “For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God. **20** “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. **21** “I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness *comes* through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.”

3. I don't want someone to try to lead me who won't eat with me

- a. there is something wrong with our fellowship
- b. that person can't know me or understand me
- c. someone who won't eat with me, might just want a position more than a responsibility

CONCLUSION

- A. The kitchen table is as important as any of the other tables of fellowship**
 - 1. It is the catalyst for a host of good things we all need
 - 2. It is the place where love, friendship, and understanding happen
 - 3. Fellowship begins and thrives at kitchen tables

- B. Leaders learn to be shepherds by sitting around a table and sharing meals with others**
 - 1. This just might be the most important training ground for prospective leaders
 - 2. It might also be the place where the most effective leadership is provided

- C. Invitation**