

Tables of Fellowship 03
The Pot-Luck Table
By Bill Denton

INTRODUCTION

A. The past few weeks we've focused on fellowship

1. We've done that by talking about different kinds of tables of fellowship
 - a. we noted that the communion table is a table of fellowship
 - b. we noted that the kitchen table is a table of fellowship

2. Each of these tables is important and engages the body of Christ in sharing together that which we hold in common with one another
 - a. without fellowship, the Lord's table becomes empty and we actually preclude the proper observance of the memorial feast it is to be
 - b. without kitchen table fellowship, we stifle love, prevent deep relationships from happening, and even fail to produce leaders who can effectively shepherd the church

3. While table fellowship was never intended to be the only kind of fellowship we share together, we need to see that it has a high place in God's scheme of things, and provides rich opportunities for fellowship to happen

B. This morning I want to talk about one more table of fellowship

1. I call it the "pot-luck" table of fellowship
 - a. "pot-luck" is probably not a very good theological term, but it sure does speak to something we know and understand
 - b. "pot-luck" isn't something you read about in your Bible, yet it is a term that connects us in our time to practices in ancient times

2. It doesn't really matter if you call it "pot-luck," or "basket dinner," or "diner on the grounds," or "church picnic," or "covered dish dinner," or whatever
 - a. we're talking about a meal in which the whole church participates
 - b. or at least the whole church has the opportunity to participate

C. Not too long ago, our brotherhood went through an intense period of time in which some decided it was unbiblical to eat in a church building

1. That resulted in church splits, and we still suffer a major division over the way some people have interpreted the scriptures on this point

2. Such beliefs are flatly wrong and contrary to what the Bible actually teaches

D. That Christians ate meals together as a church is clear both from scripture and history

1. We'll talk about this today, but we've got too many people who refuse to eat with their brothers and sisters in a whole-church setting
2. They may not realize it, but they are going against scripture and hurting the fellowship of the church

E. So today, I want to talk about the "pot-luck" table of fellowship

I. LET'S BEGIN BY LOOKING AT AN IMPORTANT WORD

A. Mark 6:21 (NASB95) -- 21 A strategic day came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his lords and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee;

1. The word for "banquet" here is the Greek word "deipnon"
 - a. it's the word that means dinner or supper, usually referring to the main meal of the day
 - b. it is also used of more formal meals, or feasts

2. It ought to be clear that when Herod gave a banquet, he provided a meal

B. Luke 14:12–14 (NASB95) -- 12 And He also went on to say to the one who had invited Him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, otherwise they may also invite you in return and *that* will be your repayment. 13 "But when you give a reception, invite *the* poor, *the* crippled, *the* lame, *the* blind, 14 and you will be blessed, since they do not have *the means* to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

1. The meal Herod provided was exclusive and meant to gain honor from guests
2. Jesus' meal, whether one of the earlier meals of the day, or the main meal, was inclusive, and intended to give honor to the guests
3. What I want you to see is that it's clear that the words used refer to a meal in which a large crowd participated

C. John 12:1–2 (NASB95) 1 Jesus, therefore, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. 2 So they made Him a supper there, and Martha was serving; but Lazarus was one of those reclining *at the table* with Him.

1. Here is a meal prepared for Jesus
2. When you see this word, you need to see it is regularly used of a meal

D. John 13:2, 4 (NASB95)

2 During supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, *the son* of Simon, to betray Him,

4 got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself.

1. This same word is used of the meal Jesus shared with his disciples as they celebrated the Passover
2. This is the same meal during which Jesus instituted the Lord's supper
3. I just want you to note the fact that this is a very common word, used to describe very common activities – in these examples, the eating of meals, in both small and large venues

II. EARLY CHRISTIANS PRACTICED EATING TOGETHER

A. Last week we talked about the practice of going house to house and enjoying kitchen table fellowship together

1. it would have been unthinkable to tell early Christians they shouldn't eat together
2. the testimony of scripture is quite the opposite

B. The early church also practiced something called the "love feast"

1. Jude 12 (NASB95) -- 12 These are the men who are hidden reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you without fear, caring for themselves; clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted;
 - a. Jude was identifying a problem in the way the love feast was being conducted, but not a problem with the love feast itself
 - b. the passages seems to refer to something that early Christians would have been very familiar with
 - c. essentially, a love feast was a common meal in which all the church would participate
 - d. this is why I think our modern word, "potluck," applies so well for that is exactly what a pot-luck is supposed to be – a common meal in which the whole church participates

2. 1 Corinthians 11:17–22 (NASB95)

17 But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse. 18 For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part I believe it. 19 For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you. 20 Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper, 21 for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk. 22 What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you.

1. The church at Corinth seems to have had the practice of eating a common meal together, and at some point during the meal or at the end, they also shared the bread and fruit of the vine in what we know as the Lord's supper
 - a. that makes the whole-church meal far more important than we have probably thought
 - b. it also puts the Lord's supper into the same context in which it was begun
 - 1) the Passover meal was just that, a meal shared, and it was there Jesus instituted the Lord's supper
 - 2) our practice today, while I don't believe it to be wrong, is surely different from the early church
2. What we need to understand from Paul's letter to the Corinthians is what he condemned and what he didn't condemn
 - a. he condemned divisiveness – the attitude that kept groups of people within the church separated from others
 - b. he condemned making the love feast, a private party instead of a meal in which all could participate
 - c. he especially seems to condemn the more well-to-do members who didn't care about the less well-off members
 - d. he condemned turning the Lord's supper into something it was never meant to be because of their divisiveness
 - e. but he didn't condemn eating together – that is simply a misreading of the text
 - f. he did say that if you want your own private supper, with your own favorite people, then do that at home, but I'm not sure he's really pleased even with that

C. Acts 20 may well be a record of a love feast

1. Acts 20:7, 11 (NASB95)

7 On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul *began* talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight.

11 When he had gone *back* up and had broken the bread and eaten, he talked with them a long while until daybreak, and then left.

2. We tend to read "break bread" and can't figure out whether it's a meal or the Lord's supper

a. early Christians wouldn't have had the same problem

b. for them, to "break bread" was to share a common meal, during which they also took the Lord's supper

D. Why was the Lord's supper eventually separated from the common meal, and for the most part the common meal discontinued?

1. Perhaps because of the formalism and ritualism that eventually developed in the church

2. Perhaps also because abuses were handled by discontinuing the practice of eating together instead of correcting the abuses

III. WHY "POT-LUCK" FELLOWSHIP IS IMPORTANT

A. I can't think of many things that declare the unity of God's people better than when the whole church sits down and enjoys table fellowship at a meal

1. Isn't it interesting that eating together has become such a problem?

a. we've got whole segments of the church today who refuse to eat together and think it's wrong to do so in a church building

b. we've got others who seldom or never attend a pot-luck because they've got other things to do

c. still others, act like Peter, and hold themselves aloof from their brothers and sisters, and refuse to eat with them

d. others allow personal problems, dislikes, and issues with fellow Christians to come between them and table fellowship

2. All of those things are inconsistent with scripture

a. when we have a pot-luck and you don't attend, why shouldn't we, or anyone, question the unity of our congregation

b. attendance alone won't solve problems, but it's a start

B. Pot-luck meals are a great way for Christians to share their blessings with those who don't have so much

1. I've known some who didn't attend pot-luck meals because they were unable to bring much
 - a. go back and read 1 Cor 11.
 - b. those who had a lot should have shared with those who had little, and those who had little should have come to enjoy the feast!
2. Instead, both groups let their pride get in the way
 - a. at Corinth, pride moved those who were well-off to become gluttons, eating and drinking more than they needed
 - b. the less well-off ended up with nothing
 - c. both sides of this problem can let pride keep them from participating
3. Wouldn't it be great if we could all get our pride out of the way and learn to enjoy both the physical and the spiritual feast before us?

C. Fellowship, in all its forms, is designed to help us become stronger in our faith

1. Knowledge is important, but we have for too long minimized matters of the heart when it comes to our faith
 - a. if you can quote a thousand verses, but won't sit down at the table of fellowship with your brothers and sisters, there is something seriously wrong and lacking in your faith
 - b. the very act of sitting at the table and eating with others might provide you with the opportunity to use your knowledge to help your brother
2. The truth about fellowship is that the more you experience, the more you participate, the more you make yourself available to others, the more you will grow to become like your Savior and Lord
 - a. Jesus was often at the table, sharing a meal with both disciples and sinners
 - b. at the table, sharing a meal is far more important than most of us know

D. The "pot-luck" table of fellowship was designed to encourage the other two tables

1. We see it with the Lord's supper – the common meal was the event in which the Lord's supper happened
2. The common meal, encourages the kitchen table meals
 - a. that's where love grows and relationships happen
 - b. there just might be a direct relationship between failures at both tables

CONCLUSION

A. Someone might have the question, "So you think I ought to attend pot-luck meals?"

1. My answer is, "Yes, I sure do"
2. I've given you three sermons, all based on scripture, that teach the importance and place of eating together
 - a. the Lord's table is important
 - b. the kitchen table is important
 - c. the "pot-luck" or common meal is important
3. It's obvious from scripture that Jesus thought meals were important, and we know the practice of the early church was to eat both common meals called a love feast, and house-to-house meals
4. There are many good things that come out of time spent around any or all three of the tables of fellowship
5. If you don't participate, I think the burden is on you

B. I know for some there might actually be legitimate reasons for not attending

1. There is illness and work
2. There might be a legitimate responsibility that demands your action
3. But probably not every time, not consistently

C. One of the questions we need to ask is, "Do we want this to be a strong church?"

1. I would hope the answer is, "Yes, we sure do want this to be a strong church"
 - a. OK, then we need to do the things that produce strength
 - b. fellowship – deep, rich fellowship is an important part of producing that strength
 - c. a common meal where the whole church sits down together at a table of fellowship is a powerful tool to produce strength
2. Somebody says, "I don't need it, I'm strong enough already"
 - a. you're not nearly as strong as you think because you just want to do your own thing and you don't seem to care about your brethren
 - b. what makes you different from those chastised in 1 Corinthians 11?

D. Three tables of fellowship can produce wonderful results

1. The Lord's table – a memorial feast to help us remember Jesus (fellowship)
2. The kitchen table – love and relationships, even leadership develops
3. The pot-luck table – whole churches unified, caring for one another

E. Invitation