

The Lord's Supper

"The Supper of Shame"

First Corinthians 11:20-22

I know what you want to ask me: "How can the French stay so slim, with all those luscious croissants, cheeses, pastries, and sauces?"

[From WebMD]

A new study brings home what's known as "the French Paradox." Despite France's rich cuisine, the French are decidedly slimmer than Americans. Only 7% of French people are obese, compared with 30% of Americans.

A group of scientists set out to investigate this phenomenon - comparing French and American foods, restaurants, cookbook recipes, even eating styles.

Researchers weighed portions at 11 similar eateries in Paris and Philadelphia - fast-food outlets, pizzerias, ice cream parlors, and ethnic restaurants.

- The average portion size in Paris was 25% smaller than in Philly.
- Chinese restaurants in Philly served meals that were 72% bigger than Parisian Chinese restaurants.

They looked at foods sold in supermarkets:

- A candy bar in Philadelphia was 41% larger than the same candy bar sold in Paris.
- A soft drink was 52% larger, and a hot dog was 63% larger.
- A carton of yogurt was 82% larger.

Even American cookbook recipes - from *The Joy of Cooking* - produced larger portions than the French cookbook, *Je sais cuisiner*. Larger meat and soup portions, and smaller vegetable portions, were in the American cookbook than the French.

Also, Parisians spent 22 minutes on average dining at their McDonald's, compared with the 14 minutes that Philadelphians spent on their burgers, fries, and soft drinks.

The apostle Paul suggested that the Corinthians exercise portion control when they gathered for the communal meal that preceded the Lord's Supper:

1Co 11:20 Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper.

1Co 11:21 For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of *others*; and one is hungry and another is drunk.

1Co 11:22 What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? 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 do not praise *you*.

Those first in line took too much food and wine, gorging themselves, and getting drunk. It was shameful.

The problem was, of course, spiritual. Portion control would have helped, but this was a heart issue rather than a stomach one.

Every Sunday evening, the believers in Corinth gathered for the Lord's Supper. Prior to celebrating it, they shared what we would call a pot-luck meal.

It's not a requirement; it's not part of the Lord's Supper. But we thought it could be fun and fellowship-building to have a common, or what we call, family meal, prior to our monthly celebrations of the Lord's Supper.

We are also taking advantage of these evenings to do a little teaching on the subject from First Corinthians, where we get perhaps the clearest instruction on the Lord's Supper anywhere in the New Testament.

We saw in verses 17-19 that the behavior of the Christians at the Lord's Supper ought to show an onlooker the unity of the believers. They should be caring for one another as if they were all members of the same body - which, spiritually speaking, we are.

Sadly, they were splitting into factions rather than mingling together. An onlooker saw only disunity.

1Co 11:20 Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper.

If a neighbor asked a Corinthian believer who was coming out of their house, "Where are you off to?," they'd say, "To celebrate the Lord's Supper."

If Paul was within earshot, he'd say, "No you're not!" They would go through the motions of the Lord's Supper, but their actions would deny its purpose and its power.

It might be good for each of us to ask ourselves, when we gather, "Why am I here?" There are any number of answers we could give. Some would be spiritual; some might be carnal.

If my reasons *are* spiritual, e.g., to worship and study and fellowship and serve, am I doing it in the power of the Holy Spirit?

Regarding the name, "the Lord's Supper," commentator Albert Barnes writes:

It is called "the Lord's," because it is his appointment, and is in honor of him; it is called "supper" because the word denotes the evening repast; it was instituted in the evening; and it is evidently most proper that it should be observed in the after part of the day. With most churches the time is improperly changed to the morning - a custom which has no sanction in the New Testament; and which is a departure from the very idea of a supper.

Let's talk about his restriction of the celebration to evenings. Churches approach the Lord's Supper very differently - not just in what it symbolizes, but in how it is served. It's really a matter of how much freedom we think we have in observing it.

If a group, or a person, starts adding restrictions to be more biblical, how far should they go? Is restricting the Lord's Supper to an evening observance really the only accurate time to serve it?

Without becoming irreverent, we observe it with quite a lot of freedom.

- We're not too hung up on it being in the evening. That's when we do it on Wednesday's, but a morning observance isn't unbiblical to us.
- We aren't sticklers for the elements. Grape juice and crackers work. The crackers can be leavened or unleavened.

Seriously, where do you draw the line? This is an important consideration in other areas as well. Some of you probably have friends who are Adventists. They 'keep the Sabbath.' But they don't; not really. They pick and choose from the Old Testament Law, keeping what 'laws' make sense, but ignoring other things.

1Co 11:21 For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of *others*; and one is hungry and another is drunk.

The Corinthians were mostly Gentiles who had been saved from pagan religions. In those religions, the worship of the deity was often accompanied by a feast in which meat sacrifice to an idol would be eaten, and in which drunkenness would ensue.

It's possible that at least some of the believers had this in mind when they came together. If so, they were simply, but wrongfully, introducing the customs of the world into the services of the church.

Christians all too often bring the world into the church. There's a long and ever-lengthening list of how we bring the world into the church.

We need to study the church, as it is presented by Jesus and the apostles, and stick to the teaching we receive from the Word.

It seems impossible to avoid the conclusion that alcohol was common at the love feast. If they were consuming enough of it to get drunk, it must have been standard fare. No one was spiking the punch.

Should you start bringing booze on Wednesday nights? No; let's not.

Alcohol and its consumption can be understood in context of culture. I read an article recently about Christians, and drinking, in which it was pointed out that, in some countries, if a believer drinks, it automatically destroys his or her testimony with nonbelievers.

Does that Christian have liberty to drink alcohol? Of course. Should he or she abstain? Of course.

In our current American church culture, alcohol is making a comeback. Pastors are leading the charge - arguing for liberty and against legalism. They drink publicly, and they introduce wine to the Lord's Supper.

Without violating anyone's liberty, we are a no-alcohol-at-church group. Why risk stumbling anyone? Why flaunt liberty?

If you want to argue that because wine was undoubtedly served at the Lord's Supper, you'd better know whether it was red or white, and how diluted it was.

And you'd better be ready to do everything else that happened at the Lord's Supper. You can't claim "accuracy" for wine, but be slack on the other elements, and the order, and the time of day.

For example, you'd better sit at a low table, on cushions, and drink from one cup. You get the idea. You can't argue for wine while ignoring other things.

1Co 11:22 What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? 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 do not praise *you*.

In the interest of being thorough, I should mention that some commentators argue that Paul was telling them to quit gathering before the service for a meal. When he said, "do you not have houses to eat and drink in," they say he means that having the love feast was wrong.

I guess that solves the problem. But I can see nothing wrong with a meal prior, as long as there is love and unity at it, rather than division.

Again, where do you draw the line? Is it wrong to worship before the Lord's Supper? If you are going to sing, should you only sing the Hallel Psalms, and only after the Supper?

More likely, he was pointing out that those who brought sumptuous baskets of food, only to consume it themselves, were "shaming" the poor, by comparison, who had little or nothing to bring.

That reading best fits his main theme - which is unity being experienced at the Supper.

"Despise the church of God." That sounds bad. The church of God isn't the building; it's the saints. The behavior of the wealthier members was showing spite on the poor members.

How do you think that's going to go at the Judgement Seat of Jesus?

Paul ends, "What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise *you*." It sounds like they were proud of their love feasts.

Have you ever talked 'church' with other believers from other fellowships? It's not uncommon to compare things; to compare the order of service, and what goes on in each part of the service.

The Corinthians were excited about their love feasts, but they shouldn't have been. They were a disaster.

Most of what the Corinthians did at their services was a disaster. Paul was writing, out of grace, to correct them.

A theme I see running through this, tonight, is our freedom in Jesus. Don't give up any of your freedom unless it is to be able to better minister to folks.

When people try to tell you you are doing things wrong, listen carefully, but think it through. Most of the time they are operating on some tradition that isn't more biblical - just different.