

Restudying Issues Of The '50s And '60s: *Kitchens and Fellowship Halls*



A Historical Perspective
By: Bill Hall

INTRODUCTION

The following three lessons were first preached on consecutive Sunday afternoons for the Pepper Road church of Christ in Athens, Alabama. They have been repeated many times. While we have revised the original text somewhat, we have tried to preserve the wording and sentence structure that is characteristic of extemporaneous public speaking. Hopefully the reader will overlook literary flaws.

This is not intended to be an exhaustive study of the problems that created so much division during the '50s and '60s. It is an effort to help people see the real issue in each of the controversies discussed, to briefly point out some of the arguments presented on both sides of the issues, and to do so in a fair and respectful way.

It is our conviction that churches of the 21st century can fulfill their God-given responsibilities in benevolence and evangelism without institutional boards or sponsoring church arrangements. Greater dedication is the need, not centralized oversight; greater sacrifice, not more complex organization.

May the Lord use this material to promote better understanding among Christians to His glory.

Bill Hall

KITCHENS AND FELLOWSHIP HALLS: WHAT WAS THE ISSUE?

I don't know how to thank you enough for the opportunity to come and deliver these lessons on these Sunday afternoons. It has been a very challenging experience for me, and I hope the lessons have been challenging to you. To see the number of people who have come each Sunday afternoon to visit with us, to listen to these lessons, and to study them and consider them has been an encouragement to me. Thank you so much for this opportunity.

We are on our third of these lessons. Two weeks ago we talked about the question of the orphan's home, what was the issue? And then last Sunday, the sponsoring church. We included in that study questions concerning the Herald of Truth and the more recent "One Nation Under God" campaign. What was the issue?

This one is a little different in some ways from the other two in that this one has gained acceptance for the most part in my own lifetime and in my own memory. There were church supported orphan's homes when I was born. There weren't many of them, but there were a few. There were some sponsoring church arrangements when I was born. They occurred on a rather small scale, but they existed then. But the general acceptance of dining areas and kitchens in the buildings owned by churches of Christ has come, not only within my lifetime, but within my memory.

In 1947, M. Norvel Young, on the lectureship in Abilene, encouraged churches to build new buildings, to build them in good locations, and to include in their buildings, among many other things, a large fellowship room and cooking facilities that would be near this large fellowship room. He followed that up with some articles in some of the papers that were circulated, lending his encouragement to the idea of building fellowship halls and kitchens. Now, that didn't catch on very well. I remember when I was in high school, one of the churches in the city where we lived built an addition on their building, and indeed, they put in it a place for eating. But they felt a little pressure about this and defensively said, "We're also going to have a Bible class in this room." That's the way they excused themselves. But they felt pressure in doing that. And I just couldn't believe that a church of Christ would do that.

In 1954, I went to school in Montgomery. I attended meetings in churches all around Montgomery. To my knowledge, there was not a church in Montgomery in 1954 that had a fellowship hall and kitchen in its building. Now, such might have existed, but I didn't know it if it did. For a number of years while I was in college and after I graduated from college, I would indiscriminately either lead singing in meetings or preach in meetings for churches that supported institutions. I was not aware of it if any of these churches had a fellowship hall and kitchen in its building. Few churches had them in those days. But toward the end of the '60s and on into the '70s, churches that planned new buildings would include a fellowship room and

kitchen in their plans. It became an accepted practice. But that is something relatively new among churches of Christ, and I think many people are not aware of that.

Now we raise the question, what was the issue? On what basis did many object to this practice?

What Was Not The Issue?

Let's first of all ask the question: What was not the issue? The issue never was whether one could eat something in a building owned by the church. There were people who said, "Why, if these people are right, a mother couldn't even give her baby a bottle of milk in the building." Well, of course we never said anything like that. That was never the issue.

Second, the issue was not whether or not the building is sacred. Now, I'm not sure how we are using that word "sacred". The building is certainly built to be used for spiritual purposes. If it is not to be used for spiritual purposes, then it has no right to exist in the first place. But at the same time, if we're talking about the brick and mortar, the roof, the carpet, and other materials that go into the building - No, they are not sacred. That was never the issue.

Let me say again, that when differences arise, and it doesn't matter whether it's over these things that we've been talking about, or over divorce and remarriage, or whatever, one of our problems is we don't listen to one another. We either already have our minds made up, or we are thinking about what we are going to say next, or how we're going to answer this person, that we really don't listen. And consequently, a lot of times, we try to answer an argument before we even know the argument. We try to answer an issue before we even know what the issue is. And we make a very sad mistake. I may have been guilty of that. Any of us may have been. But we need to listen to one another.

What Was The Issue?

What was the issue? Well, here basically is what the issue was: Is there New Testament authority for the local church to plan and provide materially for social activities in its program of work? There's the issue. Let's read it again. Is there New Testament authority for the local church to plan and provide materially for social activities in its program of work? Now there's the issue.

I want to emphasize what we have emphasized throughout this series of lessons: Is there New Testament authority? Is there authority for that institutional board that stands between the churches and their work with the institutional board taking the oversight of the work for the churches? That was our question two weeks ago. Is there authority for one eldership to take the oversight of the work of a thousand churches? That was our question last week. We keep coming to the question of authority.

We've quoted all these Sundays 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." If it is a good work, you're going to find the authority in the Scriptures. If you cannot find the authority in the Scriptures, it's not a good work no matter how good it looks to us.

Consider Colossians 3:17, which we have just sung: "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." But you can't do anything in someone's name unless that person has authorized it. 2 John, verse 9: "Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son." Is it in the doctrine of Christ? Can we do it in the name of Jesus? Is it authorized by the Scriptures? Those are the questions that we must constantly ask.

I have before me a list of activities that brother Franklin T. Puckett gave in the Arlington meeting concerning what a local church, a local congregation, ought to do. And I've just borrowed that. I have looked over it and agree with it, and I don't know of anything else myself that a local church is to do. Let me just give you some of the things that a local church is authorized to do.

He says, first of all, to have an assembly of the saints. And he gives us a Scripture, Hebrews 10:24 and 25. I might add Acts 20:7. The local church is to provide an assembly for the saints. Now, in keeping with that, the Pepper Road church has a comfortable and commodious building. Where is the authority for this in which we're sitting right here today? Well, it is in the fact that the church is to arrange for assemblies of Christians.

Then he says, number two: In such an assembly, the saints are to observe the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week; Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 11:33. All right, in keeping with that, the church here has provided a table, bread plates, a tray with glasses, and buys bread and fruit of the vine. Why? Because that's one of the things that the church is to do.

Number three: They are to sing psalms unto the Lord and with spiritual songs teach and admonish one another; 1 Corinthians 14:23, Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16. All right, in keeping with that, the church here has furnished song books. Where's the authority for the song books? We answer: One of the things the church is to do is to arrange for singing. They arrange for Tony to lead the singing. Where's the authority for that? The church here is providing for singing.

Number four: They are to pray together.

Number five: They are to preach and attend to the teaching of God's word; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 14:26. In keeping with that, a pulpit is provided and an overhead projector as an aid for our teaching. There is a board here and a public address system. What's that for? To enable us to efficiently teach the word. Over on this other side there are some classrooms with various types of equipment there to help in the teaching of the word. Where is the authority for these

classrooms? It's in the fact that the church is to provide for the teaching of the word, and so this church has furnished an auditorium that is comfortable and commodious and classrooms where the teaching of the word can take place.

Number six: They are to lay by in store on the first day of the week as they have been prospered to finance their collective responsibilities; 1 Corinthians 16:2. I don't see them, but somewhere around here I guarantee you there's a hat or something that can be passed around to collect some money. Where's the authority? It is the command to give of our means.

Number seven: They are to support the preaching of the gospel. I suspect you've got a treasury, and you not only support Bruce, you support men in other places. I think I know some of them that you support. Where's the authority for that? Well, that's exactly what the church is to be doing.

Number eight: They are to provide for the fulfillment of needs of certain destitute saints; Acts 4:34, 35, 2 Corinthians, chapters 8, 9 - we went through all those two weeks ago. And we made the point two weeks ago that in keeping with the care of destitute saints, the church, under the oversight of its elders - let me emphasize that - the church under the oversight of its elders, could buy a house, pay somebody to supervise, buy groceries. Where would the authority for that be? It is in the command to care for the destitute saints. Now, they wouldn't send it to a board of directors, who in turn would take the oversight, but under the oversight of the elders they could furnish such things. Are you getting the point? When we see what the Lord has authorized the church to do, then that gives us the authority for providing whatever is needful for the efficient carrying out of what God has told the church to do.

Now, if we could just find the Scripture where the church is to plan and provide materially for social activities, then, in this building, we need to provide a room for eating together with a kitchen nearby. How did Norvel Young say that? A large fellowship room with cooking facilities near this room in order to facilitate this particular activity. But if the authority is not there for this activity, then the authority is not there for building the nice fellowship room and the kitchen to go with it. There's the problem. So in order to have our kitchen, and in order to have the large fellowship room, what we've got to find is the authority for the local church to plan and provide materially for social activities in its program of work. That's what we've got to find. The issue is simply this: Do we add a ninth activity to the eight we have just listed, the ninth being that the local church is to plan and provide materially for social activities? If so, we have authority for kitchens and dining areas. If not, there is no authority for them.

The Water Cooler

Well, somebody says, "Surely somebody came up with some arguments that would favor that." Yes, that's right. Now let me just say that, as far as I'm concerned, at least the first argument should never have been taken seriously. But

some tried to compare the fellowship halls and the kitchens with a water fountain. Those of us who were living back at that time will remember an article, and it was circulated widely, on "Willie the Water Cooler". Does anybody remember "Willie the Water Cooler"? It was a satire type of thing. Willie the Water Cooler in this article was getting very concerned because Willie had learned that some of the people thought it was wrong to eat in the church building, and if some of the people thought it was wrong to eat in the church building, they might decide it was wrong to drink in the church building, and therefore Willie the Water Cooler might be moved out of the church building. That was the argument they made. They missed the point.

The point is not whether we can drink some water in the church building. The point is: Can we plan and provide materially for social activities as a program of the local church's work? Lynn Headrick, my brother-in-law, who, of course, passed away a little over a year ago, made a very astute observation when he said, "When we find the church planning social activities around the water cooler, then we'll take the water cooler out." Now that gets right to the issue.

May I make another point with you: Nothing is right (and let me make sure we say this right) - nothing is right because it is consistent with something we're already doing. A thing is right or wrong on the basis of whether it agrees with this book. Do you know how churches get into apostasy? They don't go into apostasy in one giant leap. They take just a little step, sometimes it's only a half step, in the wrong direction. And then the first thing you know, they get to thinking, "Well, I don't see any difference in that and this." And so they take another step. "And I don't see anything different about this and this." And they take that step. "Well, what's the difference in this and this?" And the first thing you know, each thing they do, they justify on the basis of something they have already been doing. That is not how you establish authority for anything. Everything we do in the Lord's work must be established on the basis of what the Scriptures teach, not on whether it's consistent with something we've already been doing. If the water cooler argument proves anything, maybe it proves that the water cooler ought to have gone out. But I don't think it is the issue. That was not a serious argument.

Love Feasts

Now, there were at least two serious arguments that were made.

One had to do with the love feasts that the Bible talks about. If you have your Bible, turn to 2 Peter, chapter 2. You remember that the book of 2 Peter is written to a great degree to combat false teaching that had arisen, and apparently these false teachers were just as corrupt as men could have possibly been. And in describing them, Peter says, verse 13 of 2 Peter 2, they "will receive the wages of unrighteousness, as those who count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime. They are spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you." While they feast with you. Now turn to the book of Jude. The book of Jude is

almost a repeat of 2 Peter 2. Look at verse 12. In Jude verse 12, the writer says, "These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves." Now, some looked at that and said, "Now, here are love feasts that people had back in the first century, and that's basically what we have in our fellowship halls, so here is the authority for it - it is in the love feasts."

In the first place, I don't know that anybody knows what these love feasts were. It's interesting to me that Albert Barnes just says it's the Lord's Supper. And he makes his argument as to why this just has reference to the Lord's Supper. I don't know that that's correct. Others have said that they were dinners that wealthier people in the church gave for the sake of the poorer people in order to show their love for those who were poorer in this world's goods. That may be correct. I don't know what these love feasts were. The one thing I know is, there is nothing in 2 Peter 2 or Jude that suggests that they were activities planned by the church. And I seriously question that they were the same thing that's taking place in the typical fellowship halls and kitchens of our day. But that is one of the arguments that was made. One thing is certain: We do not have enough information concerning love feasts for them to serve as authority for kitchens and dining rooms in our buildings.

Fellowship

Probably the argument that most of us who are sitting here are wondering about is simply: "What about fellowship?" Doesn't the Bible teach that the church is to have fellowship? Indeed!

The Bible does teach that the church is to have fellowship. But what a lot of people have overlooked is the fact that the word "fellowship" in the Scriptures has to do with spiritual activities. I have before me a photocopy out of a book that I have which contains every Scripture that uses the Greek word for fellowship, *koinonia*. An interesting thing about this is: not one time does it have reference to social fellowship. Here really we're getting to the basics: fellowship. What does the word fellowship mean? Sharing, communion, participation in, joining together. The very definition itself suggests that we have to decide what we're "joining in", what we're "sharing".

One interesting thing is the word "fellowship" in the Scriptures - that is, the Greek word - is used for a business partnership. Turn to Luke, chapter 5. Let me show you this usage. Do you remember the time that Jesus told Simon to launch out into the deep, and let out the nets for a catch - "a draught", I believe the King James version says - and they caught so many fish that their nets began to break? Now look at verse 10 of Luke chapter 5, "and so also were James and John the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon." Partners. This is the same word that is translated "fellowship" in other places. Business partnership. They were having fellowship in the business of fishing.

Now, another usage of "fellowship" is social fellowship. This is where we smell the doughnuts and coffee. Friday night a bunch of us got together and had some elk stew, and I tell you it was all right. We had a good time together. We socialized together. We shared in the eating of elk stew and a few other things that some of the people brought. Are you aware that the Bible never uses the word "fellowship" in reference to such social activities?

Now, another use of "fellowship" has to do with spiritual things. Every time, every time the word is used in regards to the church's activity, it is always this. And to my knowledge, there is not one Scripture in the Bible that uses the term "fellowship" in regards to eating elk stew, or whatever socializing we do together. Not one Scripture that uses the word "fellowship" like that. Let me show you, for instance, 1 Corinthians 1:9 (We'll not turn to these). We were "called into the fellowship of His Son." In Philippians 1:5, Paul commends the Philippians for their "fellowship in the gospel." Fellowship in the gospel. He says in Philippians 2:1, "if there is any fellowship in the Spirit..." Philippians 3:10, he wants to know the "fellowship of the suffering of Christ." Notice none of that has anything to do with having a good time together. It has everything to do with our relationship with God and our relationship with one another as Christians.

1 John, chapter one. I want to turn to that one with you. Look at 1 John, chapter 1. Here is the fellowship that the Bible emphasizes. If we could ever learn this, then we're going to realize that this term "fellowship hall" is really a misnomer. It may be for social fellowship, but it's not for the fellowship that the Bible talks about. Now, 1 John 1, beginning with verse 1. John says, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life - the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us - that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." John says, I am writing these things concerning Jesus Christ that you might have fellowship with us. I want to tell you, there's not a thing in the world you can read in 1 John that has anything to do with doughnuts and coffee and elk stew. It has everything to do with our sharing together in spiritual things. And then he says our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

What has happened to us, brethren, when every time we hear the word "fellowship" we immediately think in terms of fun and games and eating and drinking together? What has happened to us that we see that, every time we see the word "fellowship", when it's never even used in the Bible that way?

No, you cannot find the authority for a local church, as a part of its program of work, planning and providing materials for social activities in the word "fellowship" in the Bible, because it doesn't use the word "fellowship" for that.

May I make this point? The church at Pepper Road has a fellowship hall. Let me say that again. The church at Pepper Road has a fellowship hall. You're in it. We're in it right now. We are sharing in worship to God, in the study of His Word. We are learning what John wrote to us, that we might have fellowship not only among ourselves, but that we might have fellowship with the apostles. And indeed, our fellowship is with God and with Jesus Christ. We must learn that this is the kind of fellowship that the Bible talks about.

May I make another point? The Pepper Road church has a fellowship meal in this fellowship hall. It's called the Lord's Supper. Turn to 1 Corinthians, chapter 10. Look at verse 16: "The cup of blessing which we bless, it is not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" What is the word *communion*? Same word. You know, sometimes we just refer to the Lord's Supper as the "communion". I don't know how we got started doing that. That's the same thing as saying "I'm going to go prepare the fellowship for Sunday." That's what the word communion means. And what that passage is saying is when we eat the bread and drink the fruit of the vine, we are having fellowship, communion, with the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Now, let's read further, verse 17: "For we, being many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread." Oh, now, that's not just communion with the body and blood of Christ, but there's communion among all of us within the one body. And let me tell you, that one body is not a local church. That one body is God's people. When we partake of the Lord's Supper, we are having not only communion with the body and blood of Jesus Christ, but we are having fellowship around a fellowship meal, if I may use that term, with all of God's people, all over the world, who can legitimately eat of that bread and drink of that fruit of the vine. There's one bread and one body, and we all partake of one bread. You may have five or six pieces of bread. At New Georgia, we may have four pieces of bread. But there is one bread, one bread, and all of us partake of that. What a fellowship!

One of my favorite passages in the Scripture is that passage that talks about us all sitting together in the heavenly places in Christ (Eph. 2:1-7). It is as though this building were one huge building that is constantly expanding, and we look over here and we see Paul and Peter and Stephen and Barnabas and Lydia and Dorcas, and we see faithful Christians we've known in our lifetimes who've already passed on, and there are the faithful of our present generation, and all of us are sitting together. And the central figure with whom we sit is Jesus Christ. And we have a fellowship meal; it's called the Lord's Supper. And what a fellowship! And then somebody comes along and every time he sees the word "fellowship", he thinks in terms of having a good time. What we have done is just missed the whole principle of Bible fellowship. But somebody says, "Doesn't the Bible talk about people eating together and enjoying one another?" Yes. Before the church was ever established, I remember Jesus went to a feast that Levi gave - Matthew. A great feast. Publicans and sinners were present. I remember another time when Jesus went

to a feast, and apparently Martha gave the feast. Lazarus sat at the table, John, chapter 12. You might want to look at Acts, chapter 2. Here were Christians eating together. In Acts chapter 2, verse 46, we read concerning the activities of some of those early Christians. We are told, "So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart." May I pause to say that the term "breaking bread" may sometimes refer to the Lord's Supper, while sometimes it may refer to eating a common meal. You have to let the context determine. In this case, we're talking about a common meal. But notice they broke bread from house to house, and ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. But nothing here would imply that it was part of the church's program of work to provide for that.

Consider also 1 Corinthians, chapter 11. The church at Corinth was not observing the Lord's Supper as Jesus had instructed. It seems that there were two problems. First, they had turned the Lord's Supper into a common meal, and, second, in their divided state, some were eating while others had nothing to eat. There was total disregard for the poor among them. In dealing with this problem, Paul writes, "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." You have houses to eat and drink in, Paul said. "But Paul is correcting abuses of the worship", someone may be thinking. That's right. But he did not say, "You should wait until after the worship for the church to provide for eating and drinking." He said, "You have houses for these activities."

Turn with me to 1 Timothy 5:16. Let's bring all this, hopefully, to a conclusion. 1 Timothy 5:16: "If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows." Now, I'm going to take that and enlarge on it. I've got a widowed mother. Now, whose responsibility is that widowed mother? Well, I'll tell you what, it's not the church's responsibility. It's my responsibility, and my two sisters' and Sewell's to take care of my widowed mother. Charlotte has a widowed mother. Whose responsibility is Charlotte's widowed mother? Not the church's responsibility. It's the responsibility of me and Charlotte, and Charlotte's three sisters. Let me do this so the church won't be burdened.

May I just enlarge on that a little bit? Suppose that I want my children to be educated in math and English. Let me provide for the education of my children. Don't let the church be burdened with that, so the church can do the wonderful work that God has given the church to do.

Suppose I want my children to have recreation. Suppose there are not only my children, suppose there are other young people within the group, and I want them to have good wholesome recreation. Let me provide recreation for my children. Don't let the church be burdened with that, so the church can do those things that God has given His church to do.

Is there a place for social activities? Indeed. I enjoyed that good elk stew we had the other day. I wouldn't want to eat it every day, but that was good! But let me provide for hospitality. Let me provide for social events. And if others want to join with me in that, that's fine. But let not the church be charged or burdened with providing for social activities, so the church can do the things God has told His church to do. It's just that simple. And nowhere in the Scriptures is there anything to indicate that the church is to provide materially and plan for social activities. That is the issue. That's where it lies.

Let me close this series of lessons with this. We are either going to take this matter of restoration of New Testament Christianity seriously or we're not. We are either going to take the idea of "speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where it is silent" seriously or we are not. If we are not going to take the concept of restoring New Testament Christianity seriously, then by all means let's quit giving it lip service. Let's just forget the whole thing and do anything we want to do, whether we have Bible authority for it or not. But, on the other hand, if we are really serious about restoring New Testament Christianity - if we are really serious about making the local church according to the pattern given in the New Testament - then let's rid ourselves of these things that have been introduced into the church for which there is no New Testament authority. Let's go back and become what the Lord intended His church to be. It's one way or the other. We can't have it both ways, talking about restoring New Testament Christianity while accepting all kinds of innovations for which there is no New Testament authority. It just won't work.

You have listened well. I appreciate it. And I hope you've understood where the issue lies. That's been our goal. I hope you have been able to focus on the issue, two weeks ago, last Sunday, and today, to know what really caused all the divisions that took place in the '50s and '60s and created so much trouble among families and among churches - preachers being fired, churches being divided; it was a sad time.

If there's someone in the audience who's not a Christian, another thing this church has provided is a baptistery - a place where you can be baptized - and clothes that you can change into so that you can obey the simple command of baptism. If you have repented of your sins, and will confess your faith in Christ, and be buried with Him in baptism, you can be forgiven of sins, and you can go home a Christian rejoicing in the Lord. Or, if you've fallen back, why not return to the Lord today as we stand and sing.