

USE OF THE CHURCH BUILDING

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The apostolic church enjoyed common meals together, called “love feasts” (**1 Peter 2:13; Jude 12**). Historians indicate that these meals took place immediately before or after worship and at the place of worship (as with congregational “fellowship meals”). With the advance of apostasy following the apostolic period, the concept of the sacredness of the church building evolved. In the mid-fourth century, A.D., the Council of Laodicea handed down a series of “canons” (i.e., laws) that included the following (Canon 28 in the list): “It is not permitted to hold love feasts, as they are called, in the Lord’s Houses, or Churches, nor to eat and to spread couches in the house of God.” Those today who oppose eating in the church building are not imitating the apostolic church, but the apostate church.

Those who hold such a view commit at least two faults: (1) They view the building rather than the people as the church, and (2) they make a law where God has not made one. The first of these may be due to ignorance of what the church really is. The second often arises from a brazen attempt to usurp the dominion of the Lord and to bind their private scruples on all others. Whether or not by intent; such folk are themselves governed and they seek to govern others by human traditions rather than by the Word of God, which the Lord roundly condemned (**Matthew 15:6-9**). Paul warned that the traditions of men have the power to “spoil” us (lit., take us as the booty of war).

God does not live in any kind of building, including a church building: “THE MOST HIGH DWELLETH NOT IN HOUSES MADE WITH HANDS” (**Acts 7:48; 17:24**). To eat food in a church building does not desecrate it, it is not God’s temple to begin with. We, God’s people, constitute the temple, the dwelling place, of God (**1 Corinthians 3:16-17, 6:19-20**). To misuse the body and its abilities is to desecrate God’s temple (**Luke 10:27; Romans 12:1-3**).

Does not Paul’s order that if one is hungry he should “EAT AT HOME” forbid eating in the church building (**1 Corinthians 11:22, 34**)? If so, it would mean that Priscilla and Aquila (**Romans 16:3-5**) and others in whose homes the church met would have been both *commanded* and *forbidden* to eat in their homes. If we ignore the actual context and purpose of the passage, it forbids us to eat anywhere besides our own homes. Further, Paul included *drinking* as well as *eating* (**1 Corinthians 11:22**). Strangely, the church buildings of those who object to eating in the building almost always have a water fountain. Yet, it is clear that “eating and drinking” stand or fall together.

An honest consideration of the context reveals that Paul is not addressing the right or wrong use of the Lord’s *building*, but of the Lord’s *supper* in **1 Corinthians 11 (vv. 17-29)**. He directed his rebuke at the practice of making the Lord’s supper into a gluttonous physical meal, which is what we would have to do in order to duplicate the abuse Paul addressed. It is no more sinful to eat in a church building than it is to drink in a church building.