

Publishing Editor's column

PICK UP a newspaper today and you will likely see the results of a survey of some kind. Sometimes these make you stop in your tracks and think. One such I can remember was to do with the extent to which families eat a meal together these days. About half either never do so, or do so only once a week. It is, of course, the existence of a wide range of chilled and frozen meals and the invention of the microwave oven that enables this to be so. Individual members of the family can now eat what they like when they like; the old idea of mother preparing and cooking a meal for the family to eat together has gone for many families. It apparently takes an average of twenty minutes for a meal to be got ready today, and the aim of the food industry is to get this halved, which means a considerable growth in the use of ready-prepared food.

This is but one of the ways in which society has changed remarkably in recent years from what it once and always was. Another is the extent to which children, often quite young ones, watch television and surf the Internet in their own rooms; the idea of families doing things together and children learning from their parents the necessary practical skills of running a household is fast fading. Yet God's intention is that children should grow up in families, doing things together and at least eating the main meal of the day together. The psalmist, in speaking of the blessings of the God-fearing man, refers to "thy children like olive plants round about thy table" (128:3). Today the family dining table is becoming obsolete, meals are likely to be consumed in haste in the kitchen or upon trays in front of the television. For some the idea of meals as places where families get together has already gone, for others it is fast going, with a detrimental effect on the lives of the individual family members.

The most important date in the Jewish calendar is the Passover, and it centres around a family meal at which the family members are reminded of the circumstances of their existence as a nation. The Lord Jesus Christ used this feast as the basis of the only piece of ritual that his followers are commanded to keep after baptism. It is a ritual with a profound significance, the partaking of food and drink together in remembrance of his great work. The intention is surely that, just as families get together to partake of the food necessary to sustain bodily existence, so the family of God in each place should meet together to remember Christ in a symbolic meal. The remembrance is not intended to be done individually, in our own homes, but collectively (though some may of necessity be cut off from contact with others and have to do it on their own). But if meals are no longer times when families get together then perhaps the importance of breaking bread and drinking wine together as the family of God will gradually lose its significance to us. It is important that we do not let advances in modern technology take away the importance of family life together and cause us to place less importance on remembering our Lord together in the way he appointed.

Tony Benson

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