

THE LORD'S *DEIPNON*

Roger E. Dickson
Cape Town, South Africa
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We invariably read into the text of the Scriptures our common practices in religious matters. This is especially true in reference to the definition of words. We often attach our own life experiences to the definition of all words that an author uses to express his point. There is nothing unusual about this. It is simply a human characteristic of interpreting the thoughts of an author by our own beliefs and behavior.

For this reason, we must be on guard about interpreting the Scriptures. We must always be cautious about reading our definitions of words into the words of the inspired writers. If we did read our beliefs and behavior into a text of Scripture, we would judge this to be opinionated and biased interpretation of what the Holy Spirit



wrote. It is the task of the objective translator, as well as the reader, therefore, to put himself in the shoes of the original writer in order to understand what the writer sought to communicate. This principle is the task of the honest biblical interpreter. And it is with this principle that we tackle the definition of a Greek word that was used in reference to a memorial event that Jesus instituted in the presence of His disciples two thousand years ago.

The old English word “supper” finds its original definition in a rural family meal centuries ago that occurred in the evening after everyone of the family came in from the fields. The word was based in a rural, farming culture where the laborers of the field could not enjoy a sumptuous feast in the middle of the day while they were in the heat of their manual labors. The consumption of a great amount of food in the heat of the midday sun, and in the midst of great labor, was not customary in the farming culture from which the word “supper” was given birth. Farmers ate in the middle of the day, but their “fellowship” supper, or full meal was in the evening. The evening supper was the time for family, food and discussion concerning the day’s work.

The evening meal was a time for the family to come together for communication and reunion after a hard day's work in the fields. Having grown up on a farm, I can personally testify to the importance of family time during the evening supper. This was a time of communication about the events of the farming that had taken place during the day. It was a time for family renewal and the enjoyment of one another before bedtime. The word "supper" finds its definition, therefore, in this very important evening meal where a family came together to celebrate family and to discuss the work of the farm.

After a hard day of work in the fields, you can only imagine the type of suppers that our mother had prepared for us. During the day and in the heat of the work, farmers ate, but not as they ate in the evenings. A snack was often enjoyed during the day, but a full meal with all the trimmings was enjoyed at supper time. There was

no snack in the evenings. As farmers who had put in a twelve hour day, we were hungry, and the table was spread with the best that could be eaten by those who had labored strenuously in the field. Supper



meant a full meal, the best that could be had on the farm. To farmers, therefore, the word "supper" always meant a full meal from which no one went away hungry.

The translators of our English Bibles did well when they used the word "supper" to translate a Greek word that had a similar setting and meaning in the first century. This is the Greek word *deipnon*. This word refers to a full meal, and was defined after the rural culture of ancient peoples. Food was certainly the primary substance of the definition, but as the English word "supper," there was more to the definition of the word than food. The *deipnon* was an event. It was an event of fellowship and communication. It was a time of renewal and a conscious remembrance of family. It was a feast around which friends and family came together to renew their common bond. In reference to food, there was no concept of a snack in the definition of the word *deipnon*. The sumptuousness of the food necessitated a period of time for communication while the food was consumed. This was the social event of the *deipnon*.

The use of the word *deipnon* in the New Testament verifies this definition, and thus to a great extent, finds a good definition in the old English word “supper” as it was used in rural English culture.

A. Herod's *deipnon*:

Mark 6:21: “Finally, an opportune day came when Herod on his birthday made a **supper [deipnon]** for his lords, high captains and chief men of Galilee.”

Now one can only imagine what type of *deipnon* this was. It was made for the highest ranking officials of Herod's reign. But more important, it was Herod's birthday *deipnon*. Every effort was thus made to make this an event, of which food was the physical adhesive that held the event together. The lords, high captains and chief men did not just come together for food. This was an event of Herod's birthday, and thus they came together to celebrate and give honor to Herod while eating a sumptuous full meal. There was no snack for food. Such would have been an absolute insult to the participants. Herod would have been insulted, and the officials who attended would have been snubbed. A true *deipnon* (supper) was prepared in order that honor be given to Herod, as well as to those who attended.

The duration of this *deipnon* was not determined by how fast the food could be consumed. It was an event that carried on for hours. The amount of food, therefore, was determined by the duration of the event. If the affairs of the event carried on past the time when all the food was consumed, then the host would have been embarrassed. Enough food was prepared for the *deipnon* in order to guarantee that the guests could eat during the entire sequence of what took place during the event.

And there were certainly a great deal of things that took place during this particular historical event. Though our record of this event in Mark 6 was the occasion for the beheading of John the Baptist, the number of events that took place emphasize a great period of time that transpired during the feast. Dancing by the daughter of Herodias took place. Conversation and a command for the beheading of John took place. The actual beheading of John took place. There was enough time for the head of John to be presented to Herod during the time the food was eaten. This *deipnon* went on for hours.

It was not a “snack-and-leave” event.

In the event of Herod’s birthday *deipnon*, the Holy Spirit establishes an initial definition for the word as it is used in the New Testament. The *deipnon* was an event where food was the adhesive around which several other events took place. There was celebration, honor given, activities carried out, conversation, and a renewal of Herod’s kingdom position. Today, our English word “feast” probably better translates the word *deipnon*, though our English translations have stayed with the word “supper.” But keep in mind that the New Testament definition of *deipnon* is first determined by the context of the Scriptures in which it was used. It was used in reference to Herod’s birthday feast, and in a similar manner, it was used in the following events of the New Testament. The use of the word in the following events clearly defines the word according to its common use in the first century.

B. Jesus’ *deipnon*.

Luke 14:12-14: *“Then He [Jesus] said also to him who invited Him, ‘When you prepare a dinner or **supper** [deipnon], do not call your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you prepare a feast, call the poor, crippled, lame and blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”*

The social environment of the *deipnon* that Jesus sought to institute among His disciples was different than the previous *deipnon* that was conducted by Herod. Herod’s *deipnon* was worldly and exclusive. Where Herod sought to receive honor from his guests, Jesus on the other hand wanted the poor, cripple, lame and blind to be invited. He wanted this supper to be an occasion to give honor to the guests, especially to those who were financially and physically disadvantaged. Where Herod sought to be repaid with loyalty from his guests, Jesus taught that we must be loyal to those who cannot repay our good deeds. However, regardless of the difference in the special environment of the two feasts, the event of the *deipnon* in reference to the meal was the same.

The *deipnon* about which Jesus spoke was to be an event of feasting and fellowship. It was an inclusive *deipnon* where a full meal was served. Now imagine inviting the poor,

crippled, lame and blind just for a snack or cup of soup. Was this what Jesus had in mind? The very purpose for which the *deipnon* was to be held would be totally reversed if only a snack was given. If Jesus wanted us to give honor to the poor, crippled, lame and blind, what message would we be giving if we served only a snack? After the snack, we would then go somewhere else and enjoy a full meal by ourselves. We would send the poor home hungry. There is something about the thought of doing this that is repulsive to the Christian's soul.

Jesus' *deipnon* that is defined in the text of Luke 6 is a *deipnon* where one is to manifest fellowship and communication with no strings attached. In other words, the host, through the *deipnon*, was to show sacrifice without expecting something in return. In order to manifest this sacrifice, a full meal of food had to be prepared. No snack would have ever communicated to the attendees that the host was sincere in his or her efforts to fellowship and communicate with the financially unfortunate and physically disadvantaged.

We must not assume by Jesus' reference to those who were not invited that a *deipnon* could not be held for friends, family and relatives. His point in the context of Luke 14 is that we must also conduct a *deipnon* experience **beyond** our friends, family and relatives. Our feasts with friends and family to the exclusion of the financially and physically disadvantaged is the type of feast that Herod conducted. Jesus wanted us



to invite everyone. We must understand the historical context in which Jesus' instructions were given. The culture of the rich and famous at the time was defined by Herod's *deipnon*. Only friends and officials were invited to Herod's supper. There were too many in the culture of the time who wanted to do as Herod. They practiced exclusive suppers. The *deipnon* among the rich and famous became a meal of exclusion, and not inclusion. Jesus initiated a paradigm shift.

Jesus wanted to reverse the exclusive sentiment in reference to the *deipnon* that would be conducted by His disciples. The *deipnon* of the disciples of Jesus was to be **inclusive** of all, not only of friends, family and relatives. The poor, cripple, lame and blind were to be included. Culturally

speaking, therefore, Jesus added a new definition to the *deipnon* of the times. Everyone was to be invited. There were to be no restrictions. There were to be no restrictions because one was not of the financial status of the host. There were to be no restrictions because one was physically disadvantaged. There were to be no restrictions because one was not of the same social as the host. The *deipnon* of Herod was exclusive, but the *deipnon* of the disciples of Jesus was to be totally inclusive. We see in Jesus' instructions of Luke 14 that He was laying the foundation upon which He would eventually establish His *deipnon* that was to be continually practiced by His disciples.

Unless we relegate Jesus' teaching on this matter to the culture of His immediate ministry, we must read again verse 14 where He stated, "*for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.*" The resurrection of the just and unjust will take place in the last day when Jesus comes again (Jn 5:28,29; At 24:15). Thus Jesus expects His disciples to conduct the *deipnon* about which He spoke in Luke 14 until He comes again at the end of time.

Now as a reminder, and because Jesus' instructions concerning His *deipnon* is to be practiced among His disciples until His final coming, we must not forget that this *deipnon* was not a snack. This was not a "soup kitchen" held on the street corner where attendees were given a cup of soup and sent on their way. It was a full meal as would be given to one's friends, family and relatives. As one would prepare for friends, family and relatives, he or she should also prepare a *deipnon* (supper) for the poor, crippled, lame and blind. And we must do so until Jesus comes again. This may be a real paradigm shift for some, but it is a shift that we must seriously consider in order to restore the fellowship of the Lord's Supper.

Lest we stray from the point, we must not assume that the Lord's Supper is the *deipnon* about which Jesus spoke in the context of Luke 14. All that we want from the event of the Luke 14 is the definition of the word *deipnon*. And the definition of the word *deipnon* as it was used in Luke 14 is that it was a full meal around which communication and fellowship took place.

C. A *deipnon* for Jesus:

John 12:1,2: “Then six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom He raised from the dead. There they made Him a **supper** [*deipnon*] and Martha served.”

You can imagine the atmosphere of this *deipnon*. It was certainly an occasion of great celebration and joy. It was a supper specifically prepared for the resurrected Lazarus. The occasion was a time of celebration, for it was probably the first meal that Jesus enjoyed with Lazarus, Mary and Martha after Lazarus’ resurrection. Can you imagine the excitement that was in the air during the eating of the food? This was a time for the reunion of Lazarus with the family of his two sisters, Mary and Martha. In fact, Mary was so overcome with thanksgiving that she bowed to her knees and anointed the feet of Jesus with a very expensive ointment (Jn 12:3). Though an impromptu action on her part, the anointing of Jesus’ feet by Mary manifested that the event was not a “snack-and-run” event. Gratitude moved her to the point of wiping Jesus’ feet with her hair, a very humbling action on her part.

Mary did not do what she did at the time of Lazarus’ resurrection. She did not do what she did at any time between Lazarus’ resurrection and the event of the *deipnon* in the context of John 12. The fact was that the atmosphere of



the *deipnon* presented an opportunity for her to manifest her extreme gratitude to Jesus for raising her brother from the dead. From what took place during this *deipnon*, I would assume that a *deipnon* is a time where unusual things can take place as people

manifest their extreme gratitude for what Jesus has done in raising all of us from our death in sin. For the Christian, the *deipnon* is a sacred event of the week. It is a time for both solemnity and celebration that is centered around a full meal.

D. The last *deipnon* of Jesus:

John 13:1-14: “Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He would depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own

who were in the world, He loved them to the end. And during **supper** [deipnon], the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God, and was going back to God, rose from the **supper** [deipnon]”

The context of this event was the last *deipnon*, the Pass-over, that Jesus ate with His disciples. This *deipnon* carried on for several hours. During this time Jesus rose and washed the disciples' feet. Sometime during this particular occasion, John, the brother of James, was leaning on the breast of Jesus (Jn 21:20). Also during this *deipnon* Jesus rebuked the disciples concerning their competitive spirit in reference to who was the greatest (Lk 22:22-30). There was much eating, much speaking, and a great deal of events that took place. The *deipnon* was the occasion for all this conversation and events to occur. Though the washing of the feet of the disciples, and the institution of the “Lord's Meal” took place on this occasion, it was common for those who ate the Pass-over to enjoy a great feast. It was not a snack-and-run event.

It was customary that those who ate at the *deipnon* of the Passover, and other feasts, to recline or lounge on carpets or pillows around the food that was placed on a low lying table before everyone. On this particular occasion, Jesus metaphorically claimed the “table.” He claimed the common table that was used for the food. He did so when He said to the disciples that they would eat and drink “at My table” (Lk 22:30). Jesus' emphasis was not on the physical wooden table. Neither was His primary focus on the food. However, the food played a significant part in establishing the environment around which the events of this meal took place, and thus became the definition of My “table” which He claimed. Therefore, when Jesus said “My table,” His emphasis was seated in the events that took place on this occasion. There was much food, much talk, and many events that surrounded “His table” meal with the disciples.

When Luke recorded the statement of Luke 22:30 in his letter to Theophilus over thirty years after this event, “the table of the Lord” was known as a time when the disciples feasted. Theophilus would thus interpret this statement of Luke to refer to a table meal of the disciples of Jesus during which Jesus took a portion of the fruit of the vine and bread

in order to establish a memorial of His body and blood. As we read this statement in our Bibles today, we would also interpret “My table” to refer to what took place during this last Passover that Jesus had with the disciples. There is no reason why we would change the environment or substances of “the table.” It was a table of food then, and now the “Lord’s Table,” is still a time for feasting, fellowship and remembrance during which a memorial is made in reference to the body and blood of Jesus.

Our traditional practice has been to make a separation between the *deipnon* of the meal that took place on the Passover and the event of Jesus using the fruit of the vine and bread of the *deipnon* to establish a memorial of His body and blood. We thus establish two “tables,” one “table” meal in



reference to the occasion where the “table” of the Lord was established, and another “table” of the Lord during which we have an abbreviated *deipnon*. But as we dig deeper into the practice of the New Testament church, it is evident that the early church

did not make this separation. They continued with the events of the occasion of the Passover *deipnon*. A full meal was prepared and eaten, during which the bread and fruit of the vine were eaten as part of the meal in remembrance of the body and blood of Jesus. There was no separation between the events of the two “tables.”

E. The final *deipnon*:

Revelation 19:9,17: “Then he said to me, ‘Write, “Blessed are those who are called to the marriage **supper** [**deipnon**] of the Lamb....”’

“Then I saw an angel standing in the sun. And he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, ‘Come and gather yourselves together for the great **supper** [**deipnon**] of God”’

Described in the preceding two statements of Revelation 19:9,17 is the great marriage *deipnon* that is yet to come. This figurative speech was taken after the common marriage meal that was held among men. During such a feast there was great celebration, great food, great fellowship, and many

events that brought rejoicing to the parties who were brought together in marriage. The imagery that we must place on the metaphor, therefore, is what we would experience during a marriage banquet. A metaphor derives its meaning from that which is earthly and literal. What is earthly and literal with the supper (*deipnon*) that is mentioned in these texts of Revelation is a full meal of celebration. The angel in Revelation metaphorically refers to an event the saints will have with the Lord in the “great *deipnon*” to come. It will be great because it will be the *deipnon* of God. Can you imagine a snack being offered at a marriage banquet? Now can you imagine that the “great *deipnon*” that God will provide for the faithful will be only a snack?

F. The Lord's *deipnon*:

We have studied through the preceding texts of the New Testament where the word *deipnon* is used in order to bring ourselves to this last point. In view of the clear definition of the word *deipnon* that is contextually defined in the New Testament, I do not think much discussion needs to be made as to what reference is made in the context of 1 Corinthians 11. Speaking against the Corinthians' wrong attitudes with which they conducted the Lord's *deipnon*, Paul wrote, *“Therefore, when you come together, it is not to eat the Lord's **supper** [deipnon]. For in eating, each one takes before others his own **supper** [deipnon]. And one is hungry and another is drunken ...”*



(1 Co 11:20,21). *“For I have received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night in which He was betrayed took bread. And when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘This is My body which is for you. This do in remembrance of Me.’ After the same manner He took the cup also after **supper** [deipnon], saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’”* (1 Co 11:23-25).

The Corinthians had messed up a completely good *deipnon* event by their inconsiderate behavior in reference to the poor brethren. They had taken the Lord's *deipnon* and

made it their own, thus behaving in a disorderly manner among themselves.

Regardless of the sinful behavior of the rich and arrogant Christians in Corinth in reference to their poorer brethren, what do you think the Corinthians were doing in reference to this supper that Paul had taught them to do? Was it a snack, or was it a full meal with enough food that an inconsiderate person could eat gluttonously and drink enough wine by which to become drunk? And, was there a separation between the *deipnon* that they had made their own, and the *deipnon* of the Lord?