



## “LOVE FEASTS”

September 23, 2018

During our last gospel meeting one of our visitors asked me if we held “Love Feasts”. I explained the following to him with the hope that he would understand. Many misapply the term “Love Feasts”, as if it were a command and practice of “the church”, and neither is true. Because there have been some questions concerning the meaning of these passages I thought an article might help.

The text referred to is, *“These are [a]spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves. They are clouds without water, carried [b]about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots”* (Jude 12). In quoting Jude 12 notice the [a] before “spots”. The word [Strong’s 4694: σπλάς], pronounced “spee-las” is used only once here by Jude. Strong’s states, “a rock in the sea, ledge or reef; of men who by their conduct damage others morally, wreck them as it were, equivalent to σκάνδαλα (R. V. text hidden rocks)”; “a hidden rock, false teacher”. Jude is referencing false teachers whose aim is to damage the faith of those who attend these meals.

Jude uses the expression, “love feasts” which is translated, “fellowship meals” (NLT). What does “love feasts” refer to? Was it a practice of the church or individuals? Should we be practicing today as the church? To find answers first we turn to the scriptures, asking what the Bible says about these “love feasts”, as found in Jude 12. Peter possibly alludes to it in 2 Peter 2:13 although similar language Peter doesn’t directly mention love in connection with the feasts. Also, the word that Peter used for “spots” is different from the one used by Jude. Peter’s word is (Strong’s 4696: σπῖλος “spee'-los”) and means: a spot, fault, stain, blemish as Paul used it, *“that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having **spot** or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.”* (Eph. 5:27).

Because of the vagueness and lack of diligence, some have had difficulty properly making sense of this. [A] Some contend these love feasts refer to a spiritual feast, where things of spiritual nature are taught. [B] One source claims the actual term love feasts is absent from the original language of Jude 1:12. The word Jude uses is [ἀγάπαις] agapais, which is a plural form agape and thus claim the verse could be literally translated, “These are hidden reefs at your **loves**, as they feast with you without fear.” Their take on the wording has led some to interpret Jude’s words as a warning that false teachers are “feasting” on the church members, taking advantage of their acts of love without giving them anything in return. [C] Still some associate “love feasts” with the Lord’s Supper, and 1 Corinthians 11. But context for that passage never mentions “love feasts” at all. [D] Some point to the modern day Moravian churches who continue to practice what they call lovefeasts. But it is important to note the Moravian church is a denomination whose origin was in Bohemia in the year 1457 and not Jerusalem, in 32 A.D.

So, in context Jude’s and possibly Peter’s rebukes surrounding these feasts, are concerns for the church’s foolish toleration of false teachers in their midst, who will cause some to falter. We must be careful to note that neither of the quoted passages of scripture make any claim whatsoever of any Apostolic command, or example given to “the church”. Important because some brethren have referenced these texts in attempts to justify the church’s going into the “entertainment” business. I want to make it very clear that there is nothing in these or any other scripture that remotely suggests that these “feasts” were put on by or sponsored by the church. If there is, I say, produce the passage. It is not the mission of the Lord’s church to engage in social activities. Some have turned to Acts 20:7, to prove that the church conducted “love-feasts (?)”. Clearly this passage refers to the saints eating the Lord’s Supper. Notice the language, when our Lord instituted the Supper, *“And He took bread, gave thanks and **broke it**...”* (Luke 22:19). In 1 Corinthians 11:20 Paul uses

the term “*Lord’s Supper*” and it obviously refers to communion, **breaking bread** (vss. 23-26). Acts 20:7, “*Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread*”. All referring to this special Supper. Also note a specific day is mentioned, “*first day of the week*”, which separates this from eating a common meal such as in (Acts 2:46) where they ate a common meal any or every day of the week.

**Historically:** Pliny the Younger in [“To Trajan” AD 90] wrote: “the love feast was common among Christians in Rome.” The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, quotes Tertullian, as saying, “The Agape served for the refreshment of the poorer brethren, as well as for the general edification...were held at the time of the principal meal, and frequently were prolonged until dark” and “it may be inferred that the giving of these feasts and the inviting to them of widows and the poor was, in the East, one of the forms usually taken by the benevolence of the wealthier members of the Church.” Adam Clark: “Among the ancients, the richer members of the Church made an occasional general feast, at which all the members attended, and the poor and the rich ate together. The fatherless, the widows, and the strangers were invited to these feasts, and their eating together was a proof of their love to each other; whence such entertainments were called love feasts.” (Clarke's Commentary, Vol. 6, p. 954). Many others have written similarly, and it seems to be the consensus of opinion, that these "feasts" were conducted as a social affair, that the richer members for the benefit of poorer members, and probably to promote love among the Disciples of Christ who hosted them.

**Explanation of Jude 12:** Remember that context is everything so let’s examine that. Jude encourages “*those who are called, sanctified by God the Father*” to “*contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints*” (vs.1-3). Why such an exhortation? Because “*certain men have crept in unnoticed*” among them. He describes these men as “*ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ*” (v.4). Then Jude reminds them of three events; 1.) The Israelites were once saved from Egypt, but later were destroyed because of unbelief (v.5). 2.) “*...the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day*” (v.6). and 3.) What befell the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, because of their wickedness (v.7). Then he describes those men who had crept; “*dreamers defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries*” and said that they “*corrupt themselves*” in what they know naturally (vs. 8,10). “*Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah*” (v. 11). **We see these persons, ungodly, unholy, impure and wicked as they were, continued to be fellowshiped by the faithful. The error is to eat a common meal with a man and include him in your social circle for this acknowledges him as a worthy equal (1 Cor. 5:9-11).** Is it any wonder then, that Jude says, “*These are they who are hidden rocks in your love-feasts*” (ASV, v.12). Can you see the image of devastation as a ship comes into the hidden rocks just underneath the surface of the water? In the same manner some are truly, “hidden rocks” upon which the whole church of God can be shipwrecked, and Jude is warning us. Men who pervert the Scriptures to justify church entertainment, church kitchens, church socials, and such. They are in the same class as those who are described by Jude as being “*spots in your love feasts*”. Jude warned that even Enoch prophesied of the terrible judgment that will come upon such people (vs. 14-15). Note that both Peter and Jude teachings are concerned with false teachers; see Jude 4, 2 Peter 2:1. It is still the false teachers about whom Jude wrote in verse 12.

**What does “love feasts” refer to?** Times brethren would come together and share a common meal with other members who were often in poverty and need. Time to share their love for one another regardless of status. **Was it a practice of the church or individuals?** It is clearly not commanded, nor is there Apostolic example of the church hosting such, therefore, it was individuals that came together in support of one another much in the same way members host pot-luck dinners today. **Should we be practicing today as the church?** No! But we can and should come together often, meeting in each other’s homes. That would strengthen brethren and show the world our love and hospitality.

Jude in verses 20 and 21 he wrote, “*But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, 21 keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.*” So, building ourselves up through the most holy faith, that is growing in faith (2

Peter 1:5-8), being diligent in our study (2Tim. 2:15), testing the spirits, whether they are of God (1 John 4:1), and ultimately testing ourselves to be sure we are still in the faith (2Cor. 13:5).

We invite you to come, hear the gospel preached.

God Bless you

In Love

D. Scarpino