

Church “Love Feasts”

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The church “love feast” argument is back and I have now addressed it twice in recent months. The argument has been traditionally made by denominationalists and those in institutional churches of Christ. However, I am now hearing it from brethren who consider themselves to be “conservative.” The argument is based upon a misunderstanding and misapplication of Jude 12 and 2 Peter 2:13. *(More on this later, but I have noticed that most people prefer the language of Jude rather than Peter in making the “love feast” argument. The reason is obvious. Jude’s account doesn’t emphasize the role and influence of false teachers as much as Peter’s account. In this study I will be proving that that “love feast” of Jude 12 was a corrupted version of the Lord’s Supper that was used by false teachers to promote themselves and satisfy their own sensual desires. God designed the Lord’s Supper to be the greatest love feast known to humanity and was intended as a means of honoring Christ’s sacrifice, but it was corrupted by sinful men. The Lord’s Supper is the only meal that Christ instituted to be observed in the church assembly. However, like the errorists at Corinth (1 Cor. 11:20-21), the errorists in Asia Minor had perverted the Supper and hijacked it for their own carnal purposes.)*

Some errors and erroneous practices just never die. They may appear under new or different terminology but the essence of the false doctrine or practice is basically the same. There are several different reasons for this:

- Some people are stuck in circumstances where they simply don’t learn the truth. They are shielded from hearing anything that might challenge or expose their views or practices. The Catholic Church has been notorious for this. Pope Leo XIII issued the edict: “That the unrestrained freedom of thinking and of openly making known one’s thoughts is not inherent in the rights of citizens, and is by no means to be reckoned worthy of favor and support.” Their Council of Valencia (1229 A.D.) forbade the reading of the Bible by “common people.” William Tyndale was executed for printing the Bible in the language of the people. Other religions also work hard to “protect” their members from teaching that might be viewed as critical of their practices. This prevents their members from learning what the Bible actually teaches about their doctrines and practices. The corrupt Jewish chief priests, elders and pharisees of Jesus’ day said, “*this people who know not the Law are cursed*” (John 7:49). However, it was not the Law that the common people did not know, but the *self-promoting interpretations* of it by their corrupt leaders. The eyes of the “people” were being

opened by the teaching of Christ and the false leaders had to discredit Christ in order to prevent the loss of their power.

- Some false doctrines and practices require more time and effort to examine, understand and refute than do others. Sophistry and deceit abound in religious thought and practice and they sometimes make it difficult to identify the actual error. Also, some errors are refuted, not by *explicit* Bible teaching but by *implicit* teaching. Implicit teaching involves Scripture *implications* and the necessary *inferences* that may be deduced from those implications. Some people just won't invest the time and effort that are necessary to research and examine these types of errors. Having at different times in my life worked both in secular work and in preaching and teaching at the same time, I can understand time limitations, but each Christian must do what he can to “search the Scriptures” in order to distinguish truth from error (Acts 17:11 + 1 John 4:1, 6).
- However, the most common problem is that some errors are simply appealing to people, both carnally and emotionally. I suspect that the “love feast” error is in this category. **People love to socialize and eat meals together and they want to be able to do both in the name of “the Lord” or in the name of “the church,” or as a so-called “fellowship” activity.** They so want to satisfy these social desires that are willing to redefine Bible terms and ignore key biblical contexts in order to do so. In other words, some people just don't care what the Bible says about a practice if it's something that they really want to do. Perhaps they need to be reminded of the basic admonitions to “*speak as the oracles of God,*” to “*abide in the doctrine of Christ,*” and to “*do all in the name of (by the authority of) Jesus Christ*” (1 Peter 4:11; 2 John 9; Colossians 3:17). Perverting or disregarding Scripture will result in damnation (Galatians 1:7-9; Revelation 22:18-19).

Church Socials

Many human churches provide social meals as a part of their work. Some people admit that they attend the services of a particular church merely “because of the food” that they serve. We are reminded of certain followers of Christ who were reprimanded by Him for following Him merely because they “*ate the loaves and were filled*” (John 6:26-27). Sadly, this carnal motivation is alive and well today.

Many churches devote substantial time and resources to food (as well as other forms of social entertainment). They build kitchens and dining halls (so-called “fellowship halls”) or use their “multi-purpose” facilities. They buy appliances and equipment that are necessary for large scale food preparation and preservation. They buy cleaning equipment and supplies. They buy serving dishes, plates and

utensils. They invest heavily in providing regular meals for people. However, is this even scriptural? People often attempt to defend church “socials” with cute sayings and sentiments such as, “*people who meet together should eat together.*” However, such sayings do not constitute Bible authority. Sadly, the the so-called “fellowship” meals (not the Lord’s Supper, but common meals provided by the church for the purpose of socializing and entertaining) are so popular that many religious people simply assume them to be an authorized function of the church. They feel no need to consult the Bible regarding this practice. Other people feel compelled to invoke Scripture in some way but end up twisting the passages that they cite. One such passage is the “love feast” passage of Jude 12.

Jude 12

The 12th verse of Jude says, “*These are they who are hidden rocks in your love-feasts while they feast with you, shepherds that without fear feed themselves; clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumn trees without fruit, twice dead; plucked up by the roots.*”

Religious people and churches of all varieties have for centuries cited this verse as authority for church-provided, church-housed and church-funded **social meals**. But does Jude 12 address purely *social meals* when it speaks of *love-feasts* or *feasts of charity* (KJV)?

The answer is no. While it is certainly scriptural and right for churches to provide food or other basic living necessities to **saints who are in need** (Acts 4:32-35; 6:1-4; 11:29-30; Romans 15:25-27; 2 Corinthians 8:4 + 14 & 9:12), there is no scriptural authority to use church funds to feed either the *non-needy* or *non-saints*. 1 Timothy 5:16 actually forbids the use of church funds to provide for Christians who have relatives to care for them. Whatever Jude’s “love feast” was, it cannot be a practice that contradicts the plain rules that are established by these other passages. Jesus said that “*the Scripture cannot be broken*” (John 10:35). This means that no one passage can teach something that is contradicted or disallowed by other passages of Scripture. All Scripture is *inspired of God* (2 Timothy 3:16) and God is “true.” He cannot be contradicted nor can He contradict himself (Romans 3:4).

Proponents of error typically ignore context. While the term “love feasts” may conjure up thoughts of joyous occasions of saints (and sinners) “feasting” together in honor to God, this is not the “feast” of Jude 12. The context leads us to conclude that it was something else and served far from noble purposes.

I have noticed that though Peter and Jude both addressed this feast, people prefer Jude’s language over Peter’s. There is an obvious reason for this. Peter did not call

the feast a “love feast” or “feast of charity.” Peter merely called it a “feast,” and the context of Peter’s account paints a very grim picture of what this “feast” had become. This “feast” was (had become) a mechanism for false teachers and corrupt men to fulfill their godless and sensual lusts. (*Note that Jude’s account makes exactly the same point. However, Peter’s account more clearly connects the false teachers’ objectives to the “feast.”*) Peter wrote,

“But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption, and 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, having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children” (2 Peter 2:12-14).

These feasts were not so-called “fellowship” meals that were provided by the church as an outreach to the lost or as a means of feeding the needy. They were forums used by corrupt and powerful men to prey upon women for sexual advantage. Whatever the “love feast” was, false brethren had perverted it for carnal purposes.

Jude’s “Love Feast” Was NOT:

The love feast could not have been a mere *social meal* eaten by church members as a function of the local church assembly. We know this from the above church benevolence passages which authorize the church to feed *needy saints* but *not the non-needy and non-saints*.

We also know this from verses 22 and 34 of 1 Corinthians 11. Paul said, “*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*” (1 Cor. 11:22). “*But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come*” (1 Cor. 11:34). The meal (and the *only* meal) that Jesus instituted for observance in local church assemblies (Matthew 26:26-29) is NOT for the purpose of satisfying physical hunger. Paul makes it clear that the Christ-instituted meal serves the purpose of reminding Christians of the body and blood of Christ’s sacrifice (1 Cor. 11:23-29). This excludes it being done for mere social or physical purposes. It is untenable to believe that the saints to whom Jude wrote were acceptably engaging in a practice that Paul elsewhere condemned! “*The scripture cannot be broken*” (John 10:35). Jude could not have contradicted Paul.

The “Two Meal” Argument

Some object to this conclusion on the basis that Paul spoke of “two meals” in 1 Corinthians 11. These folks are more wrong than many may realize. Paul actually spoke of *three meals* in 1 Corinthians 11: the *true Lord’s Supper as designed and instituted by Christ* (vs. 20, 23-ff), the *perverted Lord’s Supper as sinfully practiced by some at Corinth* (vs. 20-21), and *ordinary home meals* that served the purpose of satisfying physical hunger (vs. 22, 34).

The Lord’s Supper is authorized in the church assembly (1 Corinthians 11:33). The common and social meals are authorized as a function of the home (1 Cor. 11:34). The perverted Lord’s Supper is condemned (1 Corinthians 11:22).

Those who see two *approved* assembly meals in 1 Corinthians 11 cite verse 21 in an effort to prove another meal that was in addition to the Lord’s Supper. Paul said, “*For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk.*” They make the “meal” of this verse and of verse 33 something different than the Lord’s supper. However, Paul had already identified the meal as **the Lord’s supper**; not some other type of “love feast.” (1 Cor. 11:20). Had Paul intended to reprimand the Corinthians regarding an abuse of some other “love feast” type of meal, then he would not have called it the Lord’s supper! He would have said in verse 20, “*When you come together into one place, this is not to eat the love feast.*” However, no such language exists.

In order to know what the Corinthians were doing wrong with regard to the “meal” that they were “eating,” one needs only to look at Paul’s words of correction to them. Paul said, “*Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper*” (v. 20). That is, the Corinthians were not doing what they were *supposed to be doing*, which was to observe the “Lord’s Supper!” They were doing something different — something that involved other purpose (satisfying hunger). Paul said that eating to satisfy hunger was a function of the home, not of the church.

Conclusion

The sacrifice of Christ upon the cross was the *greatest act of love* ever shown for humanity (Romans 5:8; John 15:13 — “*greater love has no man than this...*”). The Lord’s Supper commemorates this great and loving event. It is the quintessential *love feast*. There is no greater. Sadly, there have been and there continue to be many corrupters and corruptions of the Lord’s Supper. People in the days of Paul, Peter and Jude used it to fulfill sensual and physical cravings. People today regularly ignore its design, purpose and frequency. Godless people misuse it, believing it to be a “sacrament” for absolving them of their sins. Others observe it as a common meal. Others are constantly working to make Bible passages such as

Jude 12 support their social gospel objectives. We must work to respect and practice what Jesus taught about the meal that He set in the local church — the Lord’s Supper.

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