



**The "Love Feasts" of  
Jude 12**

**By Joe R. Price**

Those among the churches of Christ who advocate church-sponsored social events believe they find scriptural support for this practice in Jude 12 where we read of love feasts (feasts of charity -- KJV). The text says: These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves. They are clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots. {Jude 12} By assuming that agape in verse 12 means a fellowship meal, they conclude that churches today may legitimately plan, promote, and provide social activities, such as fellowship meals, as part of their spiritual work.

Is Jude 12 referring to fellowship meals provided by the first-century churches as part of their congregational work? Can we find in this verse the modern fellowship meal, which has become the custom in many churches of Christ? Did early churches of Christ provide social meals to generate, promote, and enhance love among brethren? Does the New Testament of Jesus Christ endorse, encourage, and entitle churches to provide such love feasts today? The answer to all of these questions is simply, no. The fact is nothing in the context of Jude 12 compels one to conclude the love feasts are the ancient counterpart to modern-day fellowship meals arranged and offered by churches.

Please do not misunderstand. We would not for a moment suggest it is wrong for brethren to eat together. It is not. We encourage all Christians to use their opportunities to share time together with brethren outside of the worship assembly. We are not saying there is no benefit derived from brethren eating common meals together. There is. Such occasions increase and enhance joy, appreciation, caring, sharing, trust, and more. What we are saying is: The New Testament provides no scriptural basis for any church of Christ to plan, promote, or provide the "fun, food, and frolic" commonly defined as fellowship. The love feasts of Jude 12 do not suggest or support such beliefs.

Individual Christians, within the context of the home (1 Corinthians 11:22,34), are to exercise proper oversight of, and provision for, meals that feed the fleshly body. The local church, within the context of the assembly (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:20-22,33), is to exercise proper oversight of, and provision for, the meal that feeds the soul.

We will study the text and context of Jude 12 to see what it actually says and does not say. We will also look at the historical significance of the expression love feasts and whether there is authority for the modern, church-sponsored fellowship meal. We will examine other scriptures that are misapplied during misguided attempts to find Biblical support for church-sponsored fellowship meals.

The Text and Context of Jude 12.

The early churches were being infected from within by false teachers who crept in unnoticed and who had ungodly doctrines and character (Jude 4). Jude was compelled to write this epistle of exhortation so that faithful brethren would "earnestly contend for the faith" against all false doctrine and its promoters (Jude 3).

False teachers turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ (Jude 4). False teachers dishonor God with their false teaching. Just like the unbelieving Israelites, the angels who sinned against God's authority, and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, false teachers are evil workers, marked for eternal condemnation (Jude 5-7).

False doctrine appeals to the flesh, rather than the spirit (cf. Timothy 4:3,4; Romans 16:17). As was true in Jude's day, even so now, false teachers with their false teaching defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries (Jude 8-10). In so doing, false teachers corrupt and condemn themselves as well as those whom they seduce with their pernicious error (cf. Jude 4; 2 Peter 2:1-3; Acts 20:29-30). God's judgment against every false teacher is as sure as were His judgments against those -- Cain, Balaam and Korah (Jude 11) -- whose sins their error emulates.

Within this context, Jude continues to warn faithful saints of the deceptive and destructive work of false teachers: These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves. They are clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots. (Jude 12) False teachers are spots (rocks, hidden reefs) in your love feasts (feasts of charity, KJV). Just as hidden rocks present a constant danger to ships, even so false teachers and their false teachings among God's people are ever-present dangers that must, for our own spiritual safety, be exposed.

The false teacher does not hang a sign around his neck announcing, "I am a false teacher - beware!" Therefore, we must contend earnestly for the faith, always vigilant in the defense and proclamation of the truth. False teachers should be afraid to feast with you without fear. Selfishly serving themselves with their false teachings, they offer nothing of spiritual substance or satisfaction. They are truly clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots (Jude 12).

Many commentators make the definitely erroneous statement that the love feast in N.T. times was a meal taken during the assembly, either before or after the Lord's supper. No doubt influenced by them, some brethren have suggested that we should or may do this.

Comments from early church history demonstrate the futility of using Jude 12 to authorize church-sponsored suppers as is done by many churches today. While it is true that Ignatius (30-107 AD), Clement of Alexandria (153-200 AD), Tertullian (145-200 AD), and others wrote of love feasts in the early church, that in no way proves they were akin to what are being called love feasts today. Indeed, these early writers distinguished between common meals and the agape (love feasts), describing them as events that benefited the needy. Several likened them to the feast Jesus discussed in Luke 14:12-14.

There is no conclusive and compelling reason to interpret the love feasts of Jude 12 to mean church-sponsored-and-provided social activities, such as potluck suppers or fellowship meals. Those who persist in doing so do it without scriptural approval or support from early church history.

Of course, our concern is not whether we are in harmony with early church history, but whether we are in harmony with the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3). It is the apostolic tradition with which all we say and do must agree (2 Thessalonians 2:15; 1 Corinthians 4:17; Colossians 3:17; 1 Peter 4:11). The New Testament is silent in its approval of church-sponsored social events, including the modern-day fellowship meal. This ends the debate for those who refuse to add to God's word (1 Corinthians 4:6).

## 1 Corinthians 11

Love feasts are not mentioned in 1 Corinthians 11. Neither are church-sponsored fellowship meals held in fellowship halls. Those who tell us such fellowship meals are in 1 Corinthians 11 force them into the text by assuming the love feasts of Jude 12 are church-provided fellowship meals.

The Corinthian Christians were abusing the Lord's Supper and, in that abuse, promoting division and class distinctions. Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not (possible, ASV) to eat the Lord's Supper. For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk. (1 Corinthians 11:19-20) Paul's inspired solution to this problem made abundantly clear God's will about church-supplied social activities. The solution? 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 Corinthians 11:22) To avoid division among the saints, and to emphasize the proper nature of the Lord's Supper, the apostle says our houses are where we should eat and drink. It is a matter of individual responsibility, not congregational work. But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home. (1 Corinthians 11:34) This is the correct order concerning the Lord's Supper and common meals (1 Corinthians 11:34).

## What Are the "Love Feasts" of Jude 12?

At least three explanations of the love feasts in Jude 12 satisfy Jude's context without doing violence to the rest of the New Testament passages that deal with this topic.

Jude's love feasts could refer to the continual life of the Christian as he lives according to God's word. This seems to be Paul's use of the term feast in 1 Corinthians 5:8: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. If we use this explanation, Jude was warning Christians of the apostates who pretended to love God, His truth, and the brethren, but who were in fact harmful rocks among them.

Jude could simply be referring to the Lord's Supper. It is the one supper the church has been commanded to observe (Matthew 26:26-29; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34). We partake of the table of the Lord to remember His death for our sins (1 Corinthians 10:21; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:26). If we use this explanation, Jude was warning of false brethren who crept in unnoticed. Although they partook of the Lord's Supper together, their error was, in fact, dangerous, hidden rocks that jeopardized the spiritual lives of the saints.

Jude may have had in mind the meals that Christians ate together "from house to house with gladness and simplicity of heart" (cf. Luke 14:12-14). "So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart." {Acts 2:46} If so, the passage would, at the most, be advocating individual action, not church-sponsored meals.

## Conclusion

Jude 12 warns us against false teachers who disrupt brethren's faith and corrupt the cause of Christ. One such disruptive and corrupting doctrine is that churches have scriptural authority to provide social activities (such as potlucks, i.e., fellowship meals) for their members.

The context of Jude 12 is a warning against false teachers and their false teachings. It does not contain a commandment, an approved example, or a necessary conclusion that the local church has a scriptural right to engage in any part of the social gospel. Jude 12 does not authorize church-sponsored gatherings. They are simply not in the text or its context. Neither can they be found in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 or in Acts 2:46. Relying on Jude 12 to approve church-sponsored social gatherings is a futile exercise of man's wisdom and will (Colossians 2:8,22). Beware!

To ignore the false teacher and his false teaching is even more dangerous than ignoring the presence of reefs and rocks in the ocean! Hidden rocks can take a seaman to his death. False teachers, when hidden among us, will take our souls, with theirs, to eternal destruction! (2 Peter 2:1-3)

Brother Price had done a wonderful job of explaining the truth concerning Jude 12. Brethren would do well to examine the authority they use to support their practices -- no matter what those practices might be. I hope you noticed that brother Price did not write about motive, the heart of the one who promotes these social activities. Why? God judges the heart -- not men. All we can judge is its fruits! Therefore, by their fruits you will know them. {Matthew 7:20} Please give sober thought to the consequences for practicing things not authorized in God's word! -- KMG