

THINK

ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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Unexpected Love

By DAVID DIESTELKAMP

“Love is...” The unending quest of romantics, philosophers, and songwriters is to try to adequately finish that sentence. Each of us probably has an idealized picture of love; people, places and things all coming together in a perfect, indescribable moment. And while we know that, in reality, love is not always running through a field of daisies toward the person of our dreams, romantic visions tend to dance in our heads when real love is what we desire and look for.

Now think for a moment about injustice, terrible loss, and suffering pain and death. With this picture any thoughts of love we were having probably evaporated. Where did all those thoughts of love go? Well, unfair judgments at a trial, the loss of one’s possessions, abandonment, pain and death are not remotely a part of anyone’s love story—but they are part of God’s!

“By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us...” (1 Jn. 3:16). Love is not defined by butterfly feelings in our stomachs, but by the scourging, the loneliness, the physical agony, and blood of Christ who died for us. We would like a prettier picture of His love for us—with Him at sunset, hand in hand on a hilltop, calm, picturesque, warm, fuzzy and nice, but these are not how ultimate love shows itself.

The truth is that the application of love is often quite ugly. Love that sticks around only for romance or pleasure is no more than fantasy or lust. Of Christ, Isaiah prophesied, “He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him” (Isa. 53:2). Oh, the religious world has managed to clean Him up for marketing purposes, but that’s not the Messiah revealed in Scripture. For us, He was “despised and rejected... a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isa. 53:3). He was wounded and bruised, oppressed and

afflicted, taken from prison and judgment (Isa. 53:5, 7, 8). He sweat in agony for us, was beaten, spat on, stripped and then crucified—hands and feet pierced (Psa. 22:16)—for us.

Then, for us, He endured the pain and humiliation on the cross for six hours, then He gave up His spirit into His Father’s hands. So, can there be any doubt? “...God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8).

Now here is an interesting twist to God’s love story: “This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (Jn 15:12). In other words, we are to do more than acknowledge and thankfully benefit from God’s love, we are to emulate it in our dealings with others. We tend to be willing to do this until application turns ugly and distasteful, it is actually at this point that we have the opportunity to demonstrate true godliness, loving like God loves.

If we find it more difficult to love our brother than to love God it is because we are loving like the world. In the words of Jesus: “But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same” (Lk. 6:32). God loves us. In fact, He loved us first (1 Jn. 4:19) and when we weren’t loveable (Col. 1:21-22). He forgives us, is good to us, blesses us, and promises us a home with Him for eternity.

Loving someone like this doesn’t take much. But loving our brother is quite another matter. Our brother isn’t perfect. He doesn’t always love us first, he doesn’t always forgive, do good, bless or fulfill his promises. In our anger and disappointment we use his offenses not to love him, while still claiming to love our good God. God says to us: “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar... And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also” (1 Jn. 4:20-21).

There is a very strong temptation for us to try to excuse hatred based on what a person does. They lied, they cheated, they stole. At times like this, words like injustice, terrible loss, suffering pain and death ought to echo in our ears.

Those are what we required of the love of Jesus—He endured it and then said, “Love one another as I have loved you” (Jn 15:12). We don’t love others this way as payback or even to try to change them, but because it is what love is, it is what God is, and what we desire to be as well.

“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you” (Lk. 6:27) must become more real to us. Jesus was not just talking about some threatening foreign nation or someone we simply fear. He commands us to love those who actually touch our lives with pain and even violence. They hate us, slander us, rob us, humiliate us, inflict emotional and physical pain, and kill us—yet, like God, we are to respond only in love.

When the application of love becomes difficult, even ugly, we are tempted to excuse our hatred by saying, “I’m only human.” Of course, that’s not accurate, we are created in the image of God and therefore able to understand and choose to imitate His characteristics. Often saying, “I’m only human” is our way of really saying, “I’m going to do what my carnal, human, side desires,” or “I’m going to act like the world in this situation.”

Jesus said that it would be our love for each other that would tell the world that we are His disciples (Jn. 13:35). Not simply loving the lovable, but loving, forgiving and blessing, when the world would not, says we are not of the world, but of God. Jesus said, “Love like this” and then died for us. Refusal to do so, no matter who it is or what they have done, is to not know God (1 Jn. 4:8)

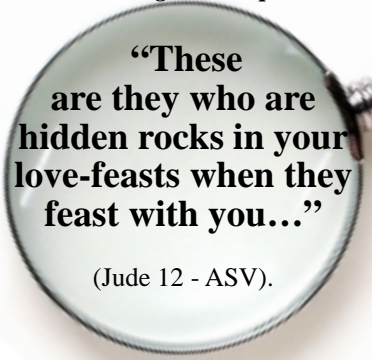
940 N. Elmwood Drive, Aurora, Illinois 60506
e-mail: davdiestel@yahoo.com

'Love-Feasts'

By KARL DIESTELKAMP

There has been a lot of “dust” raised in some quarters about the so-called “feasts of charity” (KJV), “love-feasts” (ASV, NKJV, NASV) of Jude 12. We propose to set forth the truth and *expose the speculation*. All of this is necessary *only* because some brethren seem bent upon finding a way to justify the church in arranging and providing the place for eating common meals, pot-luck dinners, refreshments, parties, receptions and social “get togethers.”

Examining the Scripture



“These are they who are hidden rocks in your love-feasts when they feast with you...”

(Jude 12 - ASV).

The Greek word translated “love-feasts” is “*agapais*,” a plural form of “*agape*” which is translated “love.” For centuries the *speculation* has been that these were feasts provided by the more wealthy Christians for the benefit of the poor among them. There is *no New Testament evidence* that this ever occurred. The “authority” cited for this position can be traced no farther back than the second century. Many defenders of social “love-feasts” cite 1 Cor. 11:20,21 as an illustration of a love-feast. But what proves too much proves nothing at all.

1. If 1 Cor. 11:20,21 was a “love-feast” it was taking place in conjunction with the Lord’s supper. Will our social “love-feast” brethren be consistent and advocate it as a part of the Lord’s supper and worship?

2. They cannot do that because Paul soundly condemned and rebuked what they were doing in Corinth and said, “What, have ye not houses to eat and to drink in?... If any man is hungry, let him eat at home; that your coming together be not unto judgment,” (1 Cor. 11:22,34). Will our social “love-feast” brethren say Paul did not know the truth about *where* common meals were to be eaten and *who* was to provide them?

Some cite 2 Pet. 2:13, “...men ... reveling in their deceivings while they feast with you,” as another instance of a “love-feast.” They *assume* it is a “love-feast” on the basis of the phrase “they feast with you.” The plain fact is that no form of the word “love”

(“*agape*”) is found in this verse or its context.

So, What Was the “Love-Feast”?

1. *It could not be* a common meal eaten in conjunction with the Lord’s supper, since the apostle Paul condemned such as making it *impossible* to properly eat the Lord’s supper.

2. *It could not be* a common meal with the church providing either the food or the place for such a common meal, since the apostle Paul told them to eat such meals

at home and in their own houses. Compare

Acts 2:46: “And day by day, continuing stedfastly with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread *at home*, they took their food with gladness and singleness of heart.”

3. In Jude 12 (as well as 2 Pet. 2:13) the subject is the brazen conduct of false teachers among the saints—“when they feast with you...while they feast with you.” Thus it refers to either while they are feasting in common meals in the homes of brethren *or* it refers to “feasting” with the brethren in something spiritual. And that, brethren, *sounds like* the Lord’s supper—what better describes the Lord’s supper than a “feast of love” or “love-feast?” At the very least this is reasonable and logical.

Brethren who are looking to “agape” and “the love-feast” for justification for the church to provide the means and/or the place for social gatherings and common meals are simply drowning men “grasping for straws.” The New Testament text does not authorize or support such. *Give such social practices back to the denominations from whence they came, and do not call them “love-feasts.”*

If brethren want to gather for social ac-

tivities and eating together and want to also have some spiritual things (singing hymns, etc.) along with those activities, they will have to do that as individuals in their own homes or in facilities borrowed or rented by individuals. The church (the assembly of Christians—the collective body) and its treasury *cannot be involved unless there is scriptural authority*. Keep in mind that a meeting place, provided by the church, is simply the church treasury (the Lord’s money) at work. The work of the church falls into one of only three categories:

1. *Edification* (building up) of the body of Christ—this is spiritual activity.

2. *Evangelism* (preaching the gospel to the lost)—this is spiritual activity.

3. *Benevolence* to needy saints (relieving poor saints)—this is spiritual activity.

Anything that does not fit into one of these categories, is not, *and cannot be*, the work of the church. Eating common meals together and engaging in social and recreational activities and providing the place for such (including weddings and receptions) is not the work of the church.

Some brethren just need to be honest and admit that *they want* social functions as part of church activity *and they are going to have them whether there is scripture for them or not*. If you have read Jude 12 in its context, you know as much about the “love-feast” as anyone else anywhere. Be sure you *do not* base your practice on the *assumptions* of others, or on your own *assumptions*!

If there is biblical evidence for social “love-feasts” I would be more than happy to see it—but it must come from the Bible! I only want the truth and to practice the truth and to do no harm at all.

8311 - 27th Avenue, Kenosha, WI 53143
e-mail: kdienstel@execpc.com

Letters of Commendation

By AL DIESTELKAMP

It was once common, when moving from one location to another, for Christians to bring “letters of commendation” from their former congregations. The practice was likely based on the apostle Paul’s remarks to the church in Corinth: “Or do we need, as some others, epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you?” (2 Cor. 3:1). The fact that Paul’s life was well-known made such letters unnecessary.

The practice has been abandoned by most brethren, and it would be difficult to say that requiring letters is essential, but it *can be*

beneficial when a person is not known. I met a man who admitted that for several years he hid from brethren in his new location the fact that he had unscripturally divorced his wife and married another. In that case asking for a reference from his previous congregation would have avoided that problem since he had not been attending for some time. Of course, even a letter is only helpful if those writing the letter have proper biblical convictions.

Whether by letter or other means of communication we have an obligation, to the best of our ability, to limit our fellowship to those who “walk in the light” (1 Jn. 1:7).

Irreconcilable Differences

By **ANDY DIESTELKAMP**

We are not learning from the mistakes of the past. While some may take solace in the fact that divorce rates seem to have stabilized and that only about half of all marriages fail, the truth is that we have come to accept this statistical plateau as normal. The cultural trashing of marriage has undermined the stability of subsequent generations to the point that more are choosing to live in fornication rather than commit themselves to one another in marriage as husband and wife. Having sown the wind, we are reaping a whirlwind (Hos. 8:7) that is not only ripping apart individual families but is uprooting all that contributes to a moral society. For what reasons? Irreconcilable differences!

Does anybody think we are a better, more civilized people because we offer the vague euphemism of “irreconcilable differences” as a defense for the violent overthrow of what God created to be an intimate, stable, and permanent relationship until separated by death? That the world uses such lame jargon to attempt to justify itself is not surprising. What is disturbing is that those who wear the name of the one who bluntly concluded, “Let not man put asunder” (Matt. 19:6) are separating what God has joined together anyway.

What are we thinking, brethren? Have we learned from the world’s vulgar treatment of marriage that it is better to make a clean break and start over rather than endure the stress of a marriage that is struggling? It was the Pharisees who read that kind of self-serving nonsense into Moses’ words (Matt. 19:3,7). Jesus had no tolerance for it (Matt. 19:8,9). Neither should we.

Nevertheless, too often, saints who are married are separating for lengthy periods and for reasons other than spiritual deliberation. Paul warned against such behavior, implying that it could ultimately lead to fornication (1 Cor. 7:5).



I fear that we have raised up several generations of our own Pharisees. Yes, we know that Jesus gave one exception for divorcing and marrying another (fornication—Matt. 19:9). Armed with that knowledge but devoid of the love that must accompany it (1 Cor. 8:1-3; 13:1-3), some may create circumstances which set their spouses up to stumble sexually. Of course, most would condemn such if it were premeditated. However, when spouses separate without a clear intent to reconcile, it is sin that will lead to more sin.

I recognize that it takes two to reconcile. Indeed, the desire to reconcile may be present with one but not the other. However, other saints should be ready and eager to mediate and admonish one another to choose the moral and loving course (Gal. 6:1; 1 Thess. 5:14).

This is the course that saints are admonished to take with one another in their differences even when we are not married to one another (Matt. 5:24; 18:15-17; Phil. 4:2,3). This becomes all the more necessary when dealing with two saints who are married to each other! Interminable separation is not the solution. Communication is!

Despite Jesus’ unambiguous desire for unity among brethren and His uncompromising teaching about the permanency of marriage, it seems that we tolerate an awful lot of marital separation for causes other than fornication.

As if that were not bad enough, when the spouse with less self-control finally stumbles, the other imagines himself justified in divorcing and then marrying another. Instead of being humbled by the reality that their sin of defrauding one another and separating what God joined ultimately led to fornication, there is joy because—in his imaginative faith—the sin of fornication has provided him a scriptural escape from an otherwise unwanted union. Woe unto you hypocrites! “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to the flesh will of the flesh reap corruption...” (Gal. 6:7,8).

Indeed, the world has made a mockery of marriage, but so have many who claim Jesus as their Lord. Brethren, when two people

separate what God has joined, it is time to take sides. Yes, the sisters may tend to side with the wife while the brothers side with the husband. The fleshly family of each will likely side with their kin. But what ought to happen is that the saints side with their Lord and unite to admonish their brother and sister to reconcile. It is an ugly and messy business to wade into the cesspool of a toxic marriage, but souls hang in the balance. Far too often we believe that the solution is found in separation when what is needed is intervention and confrontation aimed at repentance and reconciliation.

Paul did not suggest that Euodia and Syntyche needed to separate and one of them start assembling with the saints in Amphipolis or Neapolis. Therefore, I urge you also, true companions, help those in troubled marriages to be of the same mind, “having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (Phil. 2:2-4).

The mind of Christ is not being manifested in circumstances where the married have separated from one another. Christ “humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:8). Many spouses are unwilling to be that humble. They have not been crucified with Christ, therefore the life that they live in the flesh, they live for themselves and ignore the will of the One who loves them and gave Himself for them.

Jesus died to reconcile us to God. Irreconcilable differences? If the enmity created between God and man could be reconciled through Jesus (Rom. 5:10; Eph. 2:16), then so can the enmity between spouses if both will humble themselves and be obedient to the point of death. Let’s stop coddling carnal attitudes and actions regarding marriage and start admonishing disciples of Christ to have the mind of Christ in submitting to and loving one another (Eph. 5:22-33; 1 Pet. 3:1-7).

323 E. Indiana Ave., Pontiac, Illinois 61764
e-mail: adiestel@verizon.net

So, You Think You Can Dance?

By AL DIESTELKAMP

An alarming number of professing Christians think they can dance without sinning, and bristle when anyone speaks out against the popular practice. Often their first line of defense is to note that there are numerous positive references to dancing in the Bible. After all, David “danced before the Lord” (2 Sam. 6:14), and Solomon said there is “a time to dance” (Eccl. 3:4). Of course, they know that it is not that type of dancing that we speak against, and it isn’t the type that they (or their children) want to engage in.

Another argument which tries to divert attention away from the real issue is that “not all dancing is wrong—a married couple can dance together without sinning.” While I will agree that a husband and wife may, in private, dance to their hearts’ content, that does not justify others doing so. There are some things married couples may do in private that they shouldn’t do in public.

So some want us to routinely explain the exceptions when we preach or teach against dancing. Perhaps we should, but then some of the same people would likely complain that we are preaching too long if every time we mention dancing we have to explain what we’re *not* talking about.

Now that we have adequately noted that the kind of dancing we’re talking about is the kind that tends to incite lust between those who have no God-given authority to fulfill those desires, let’s ask the question again: “So you think you can dance?”

The kind of dancing that is done at proms

and other school dances places boys and girls in the kind of bodily contact that incites lust that can’t lawfully be satisfied outside the marriage relationship. If there is no such contact then the kind of bodily movements will do the same. It is unreasonable for parents to expect chastity when they allow their children to participate in such activity.

Some who would not usually dance with another man’s wife or another woman’s husband think they can do so at a wedding reception. They are usually the same people who will try to justify moderate drinking at such celebrations. Oops! There I go again! I had better explain that when I refer to drinking, I’m not talking about drinking Coke or Pepsi.

There are probably some who are reading this that think dancing is no big deal. Through the years I have found that it is usually women who have difficulty seeing the danger. Many years ago when I was a teenager I remember a gospel preacher named Bond Stocks who noted the same tendency among women to defend dancing. In response, he issued a challenge to such women to do the following:

1. Ask your husband, in private, to level with you. Can he dance with another attractive woman and not have sinful thoughts? He’ll probably tell you, “No, I can’t.”

2. However, if he tells you that he can, take him to a police station and ask if they’ll give him a lie-detector test, because he’s lying!

3. If he takes a lie-detector test and passes it, take him to a doctor, because he needs one!

We men, if we are honest with ourselves, know that dancing incites lust. As heads of our families we have an obligation to say “No” to dancing even if others in the family don’t see the danger.

The Bible tells us that “each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.” (Jas. 1:15). Why in the world do Christians try to justify a practice that places the spiritual lives of the participants in such peril?

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Editor AL DIESTELKAMP
P.O. Box 891
Cortland, IL 60112-0891
(815) 756-9840

E-mail al@thinkonthesethings.com

Web Page www.thinkonthesethings.com

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Cortland, IL 60112-0891

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