



SEPTEMBER

Feasting in Vain: When Celebration Becomes Condemnation

BY: Tim and Phyllis York

Throughout Scripture, feasting is a recurring theme that often symbolizes celebration, covenant fellowship, and divine blessing. However, the Bible also offers stern warnings about feasts that are corrupt, self-indulgent, or carried out in a manner that dishonors God. These occasions, though seemingly joyful and spiritual on the surface, often mask deeper issues of hypocrisy, idolatry, and rebellion. This study will explore what Scripture says about dishonoring feasts, showing the serious spiritual danger they bring and God's call to true worship and holy living.

Feasts Are a Gift of Celebration: God's Blessings

Feasting, in its proper form, is a celebration of God. The Mosaic Law prescribes several feasts, such as the Passover, Feast of Weeks, and Feast of Booths, that call the people to remember God's acts of redemption, provision, and presence (Leviticus 23). These feasts were not mere social events but spiritual observances — practices intended for worship and thanksgiving.

In Deuteronomy 16:14-15, God commands joy during the Feast of Tabernacles, saying, *"You shall rejoice in your feast...because the LORD your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you will be altogether joyful."* Feasting, when rightly practiced, honors God, promotes unity, and affirms God's provision.

However, the same structure that brings blessing can become a source of judgment when corrupted. Feasts that are ritual in form but dishonoring in heart and action provoke divine anger rather than favor.

Something to consider:

1. How can you incorporate joy, gratitude, and worship into times of personal celebrations? Consider whether your celebrations (holidays, meals, gatherings) intentionally reflect God's provision and presence, or if they have become routine or self-centered.

2. Is your heart aligned with God in your spiritual practices, or have they become rituals lacking true reverence? Examine whether your outward observance of spiritual traditions (like feasting or holiday worship) matches an inward posture of worship, humility, and joy in the Lord.

Feasting Without Righteousness: A Rejected Offering

The prophet Amos issues one of the strongest rebukes against empty religious festivals. In Amos 5:21-24, God declares:

"I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."

Here, God condemns Israel's feasts because they are disconnected from moral obedience. The outward appearance of worship — the singing, sacrifices, and celebrations cannot substitute for lives marked by righteousness. God sees the hypocrisy and is not honored by empty rituals.

This passage reveals a central biblical truth: God is not pleased with worship that is external only. Worship that ignores mercy or indulges in sin is offensive to a holy God. When feasts become a cover for disobedience, they cease to be acts of worship and become acts of defiance.

Something to consider:

1. Are you honoring God with your worship and daily life, or are you separating your spiritual activity from personal obedience? Reflect on whether your spiritual practices align with a life of integrity, justice, and compassion.

2. Do you participate in worship or church activities out of genuine love for God, or to maintain appearances, or soothe your conscience? Consider your

motives and whether your heart is truly engaged in seeking God's will through your worship.

3. Is there any hypocrisy in your life that you need to confess — areas where you outwardly honor God but inwardly or privately walk in disobedience? Be honest about any disconnect between what you profess publicly and how you live privately.

The Golden Calf: A Feast of Idolatry

One of the earliest and most vivid examples of a feast that dishonors God is found in Exodus 32. As Moses ascends Mount Sinai to receive the law, the people grow impatient and demand that Aaron make them gods. Aaron crafts a golden calf, and the people proclaim: "This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!" (Exodus 32:4)

Aaron then builds an altar and declares a feast "to the LORD" (Yahweh). The people rise early, offer sacrifices, and engage in revelry. This event, which appears to be a religious festival, is actually a distor-

tion of true worship, a mixture of idolatry and moral debauchery.

God's response is swift and severe. He tells Moses, "They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them" (Exodus 32:8). Thousands die in judgment, and God's anger burns against Israel. The lesson here is stark: Not all religious festivals are acceptable to God, even if they bear His name. Feasts rooted in false worship are spiritual treason.

Something to consider:

1. Are you ever tempted to reshape your view of God into something more convenient or comfortable to suit your desires or timeline? Reflect on whether impatience, fear, or cultural pressure leads you to compromise or distort your view of God.
2. Do you ever justify sinful behavior by labeling it as worship or attaching God's name to something He has not endorsed? Consider if you've ever cloaked selfishness, idolatry, or moral compromise in biblical language or activity.



3. What “golden calves” might you be allowing in your life — things you prioritize, trust in, or celebrate more than God Himself? Examine your heart for idols: people, possessions, achievements, or habits that have taken God’s rightful place.

Isaiah’s Rebuke: A Show of Religion

The prophet Isaiah delivers a similar indictment against the feasts and rituals of Israel in Isaiah 1:11-15:

“What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?” says the Lord; “I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts? Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations — I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.”

God’s rejection of their feasts is not because the ceremonies themselves were wrong — they were commanded. The problem lies in the hearts and lives of the worshippers. Their hands are “full of blood” (verse 15), and their supposed devotion is a lie.

Isaiah continues, calling the people to repentance: *“Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow’s cause” (Isaiah 1:16-17).*

The clear message is this: Ceremonial observance without moral integrity offends God. A feast that pretends to honor Him while the participants persist in sin is a form of mockery.

Something to consider:

1. Are you offering God outward acts of worship while knowingly holding on to sin? Reflect on whether your spiritual practices are sincere or a cover for unaddressed disobedience.
2. Do you equate church attendance, prayer, or activity with righteousness, while neglecting justice, mercy, or personal repentance? Consider if your faith expression is rooted in a transformed heart or simply a routine habit.
3. Is there an area of your life where you are going through the motions spiritually, hoping God will be pleased, even though you know He is calling you to real change? Ask yourself if there’s a specific behavior, attitude, or injustice you need to confront and repent of today.

Jesus’ Confrontation with Hypocritical Feasting

The Gospels also reflect this is an issue for all people. Jesus often confronted the religious elite of His day, who used feasts and religious customs as a veil for pride and hypocrisy. Jesus attends a feast hosted by a Pharisee. He watches how guests pick the places of honor, revealing their self-exaltation. He tells them to invite the poor, crippled, lame, and blind to their feasts if they want to be blessed (Luke 14:13-14).

The implication is their feasts, though formal and religious, lacked true humility and charity. They were self-serving, not God-honoring.

In Matthew 23:27–28, Jesus calls the scribes and Pharisees “whitewashed tombs...full of dead people’s bones.” He said that they appeared righteous on the outside, but inwardly they were hypocrites.

This condemnation applies to all feasting or celebrations that project pietism but lack inner transformation. When the feast is for appearance, status, or self-glorification, it becomes a spiritual danger.

Something to consider:

1. Do you use church or social gatherings to elevate yourself in the eyes of others, rather than to honor God and serve others? Reflect on your motivations when participating in or hosting celebrations — are they driven by humility or self-interest?
2. Are you more concerned with how you appear outwardly than with the condition of your heart before God? Consider whether you're investing more in appearances than in genuine spiritual transformation and obedience.

The Church at Corinth: Profaning the Lord's Table

In the New Testament, 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 gives a sobering account of a feast that dishonors God — the Lord's Supper itself. Communion is given to us by the Lord to commemorate, celebrate, and anticipate. Paul rebukes the Corinthian church for turning this precious reminder into an occasion for division, gluttony, and drunkenness: *"For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in?"* (verses 21–22)

Paul warns that those who eat and drink *"in an unworthy manner"* are guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord (verse 27). He even connects this abuse with physical consequences: *"That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died"* (verse 30).

This passage shows the seriousness of treating holy things lightly. Even a divinely instituted feast like the Lord's Supper becomes dangerous when approached irreverently. Feasting without discernment, humility, and unity invites God's judgment.

Something to consider:

1. Do you approach the Lord's Supper with reverence, examining your heart and relationships before partaking? Reflect on whether you truly prepare spiritually for communion or treat it as a routine ritual.

2. Do you honor the meaning of communion by living a life that reflects gratitude for Christ's sacrifice? Ask yourself whether your daily life displays the humility, repentance, and love that communion symbolizes.

The Wedding Feast and the Excluded

In Jesus' parables, the theme of the feast often represents the Kingdom of God. In Matthew 22:1-14, Jesus tells the parable of a wedding feast where invited guests refuse to come. Some mock, some murder the messengers, and others are too busy. The king is angry and pronounces judgment. Later, one guest is found without proper wedding garments and is cast out.

This parable highlights that not all who attend the feast are accepted. Feasting in the Kingdom is reserved for those who are clothed in righteousness — those who truly honor the King. Participation without transformation leads to exclusion.

Something to consider:

Do you take seriously the holiness of God's Kingdom, preparing your heart and life to honor the King in all you do? Ask yourself if your life reflects the reverence and readiness expected of a guest at the King's feast.

The Danger of Mixed Feasting in Revelation

The Book of Revelation provides a final and intense warning. Jesus rebukes the churches in Pergamum and Thyatira for tolerating teachers who seduce believers to *eat food sacrificed to idols and commit sexual immorality* (Revelation 2:14, 20).

The issue here is not merely dietary but idolatrous participation in pagan feasts. These feasts, common in Greco-Roman culture, often involved temple banquets and moral compromise. Gwyn Pugh in the Randall House Commentary on the Book of Revelation states, "some taught that participation in these local festivals that indulged in sexual immorality with temple prostitutes, or confessed Caesar as Lord, was acceptable, perhaps even a necessary evil. They

said there was no other choice if they wanted to survive economically.” Some used a wrong view of Christian liberty as an excuse to participate.

The danger here is the turning away from Christian identity to pagan cultural practices. This form of feasting is not only offensive but spiritually deadly — it entangles believers in idolatry and adultery against God.

The previously referenced commentary says that “recent research points out that, although the number of professing Christians in America has increased, there has not been a corresponding change in behavior. Christians are not really different from their unbelieving neighbors.”

Jesus calls the churches to repentance and warns of severe consequences, including divine judgment (Revelation 2:16, 22–23).

Something to consider:

1. Are you compromising your faith by participating in cultural practices or environments that conflict with God’s standards, even if they seem necessary for success or acceptance? Reflect on whether you’re justifying morally or spiritually harmful choices for the sake of comfort, career, or belonging.
2. Do you use Christian liberty as an excuse to blur the lines between holiness and worldliness? Ask yourself if you’re distorting the grace of God to tolerate behavior that dishonors Him.

Principles for God-Honoring Feasting

To avoid the dangers of dishonoring feasts, Scripture points to several principles:

1. Holiness Before Rituals – God desires clean hands and pure hearts over outward rituals (Psalm 24:3-4).
2. Justice, Mercy, and Walk humbly with God – Worship must be linked with ethical living (Micah 6:6-8).
3. Christ-Centeredness – All feasting must point to Christ, not self (1 Corinthians 10:31).
4. Spiritual Discernment – Believers must guard against cultural compromise (Romans 12:2).
5. Unity and Humility – Feasting should build up the body of Christ and not create division (1 Corinthians 11:33).

Feasts can be expressions of worship, fellowship, and joy when they are rooted in truth, righteousness, and humility. But when corrupted by sin, pride, idolatry, or hypocrisy, they become spiritually dangerous. The biblical witness is clear: God despises religious gatherings that dishonor His holiness, even if they bear His name.

From the golden calf to the Corinthian abuse of the Lord’s Supper, Scripture testifies that dishonoring feasts can provoke divine judgment. The call to the Church today is to examine our celebrations, ensure our worship is authentic, and offer to God what He truly desires: hearts that walk humbly and glorify Him in spirit and in truth. *W*

About the Writers:

Tim and Phyllis York live in Smyrna, Tennessee, where he pastors two churches: The Grove in Smyrna and Rejoice Free Will Baptist Church in Antioch. Phyllis is the administrative assistant at Women Active For Christ. Married for 46 years, they enjoy spending time with their grandchildren.