

STARS IN THE RIGHT HAND OF CHRIST

Peter Hay, prepared for word ministry, 19 June 2020

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Introduction

In our last study, we considered how Christ built His church, and how we are joined to the church, which is His body. We learned that we are joined to His church through *new birth* and through *fellowship* in His offering and sufferings.

In our study today, we will talk about the work of a *star*.

When Jesus was drawing the apostle John's attention to both the lampstand and the star, He said that this was a *mystery*. I am sure that, for some people, perhaps many, the *presbytery* is something of a mystery.

What is a presbytery? Who belongs to the presbytery? What is their work? How do they get to be part of the presbytery?

Today we are going to consider the presbytery, and the nature of a *star* and the work of a star to minister *the light of life* from Christ's hand among His lampstands.

We will explain the relationship between the presbytery and the church.

We will highlight the reality that the fellowship of the presbytery is, in fact, the fellowship that we are to join by hearing and receiving the same word that has been ministered among them.

The mystery of the seven stars in the right hand of Christ

Let us begin with a passage in Revelation where Jesus highlighted the fact that the lampstand and the stars are a mystery.

'The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches.' Rev 1:20.

Now, you remember that when Jesus wrote His letter, He addressed the 'angel' of a church. He said that the angel that belongs to a lampstand is a 'star' in His hand.

In the natural sense, a star is a *light-bearing* entity, isn't it? We look up into the sky at night and see stars because they are shining light. The first

thing that we note about light-bearing stars, which John observed in the hand of Jesus, is that they belong to and minister from Christ's hand to the lampstand churches.

The star does not firstly belong to the church.

Rather, it belongs to Christ's *hand*.

Jesus explained to John that each star in Christ's *hand* was an *angel* of a church.

The Greek word for angel is *aggelos*, and you will previously have heard that term. The way in which *aggelos* is pronounced is not the way in which it is spelt. It is spelt *aggelos*, but it is pronounced as 'angelos'.

The star is the light of the lampstand

With the understanding that a church is a 'lampstand', we know, then, that the star which belongs to the lampstand is the *light* of that lampstand.

Because a star is a light-bearing entity, and there is a lampstand, Jesus was saying that that star, or light-bearing entity, belongs to the lampstand. It is the *light* that the lampstand is supposed to shine.

When we spoke about the lampstand last week, we noted that the light from a lampstand is actually *seven lamps*. This means that 'a star in the hand of Christ' is actually seven lamps to a church; to a lampstand.

The first thing to note, recognising that one star is seven lamps, is that a star is not a single 'guru-like figure' who has a notable following or around whom a church is established. We are not looking at the stars of the church being the prominent figures around whom a church is configured.

A star is actually *seven lamps*.

A lamp is a presbytery to minister light to the lampstand church

The next point to note is that, in the same way that one star is not one person, but seven lamps, each *aggelos* lamp of a church is also not one person.

Neither is it an angel like Gabriel or Michael or another angel. That is not who Jesus was writing

to. We know this because of the way in which Jesus addressed the angel of each church. I have selected an example to demonstrate the point.

‘And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed *among you*, where Satan dwells.’ Rev 2:13.

Clearly, when He addressed the angel, and said, ‘This happened *among you*’, there were others of them. So, it obviously has to be more than one person.

He continued, ‘I have a few things against you [angel, or corporate group of leaders of the church], because you have there those [those among you] who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.

‘Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.’ Rev 2:14-15.

So, the point is reasonably clear that one star is seven lamps to a church; and each lamp is a presbytery of leaders of the church whose responsibility is to minister the light from Christ’s hand to the lampstand church, so that the church itself can reflect and shine that light.

We are all called to be a fellowship of firstfruits believers

So, a star is seven lamps, or *the fullness* of lamplight, for a lampstand.

A lamp is a *fellowship* of what the Scriptures describe as *firstfruits* believers whom God the Father has named and set apart to oversee, lead and care for the church. Rom 16:5. 1Co 16:15.

A lamp is a fellowship of firstfruits believers.

Here is a key point. *Every* Christian is supposed to be a firstfruits believer.

We are all supposed to *bear* the fruit of the life of God that we have received when we were born of the incorruptible seed of God.

We were born of that seed, and a firstfruits person is one who is *bringing forth the fruit* of that of which we have been born.

So, you can see that every believer is supposed to bear firstfruits.

We are firstfruits believers when the divine nature, which is the love of God, is the culture of our life. That is, we live by *offering* in fellowship with other firstfruits believers in Christ. That is what it means to be a firstfruits believer.

While we are all to be firstfruits, not every firstfruits believer is called by the Father and equipped by Christ to oversee and care for the church.

Everyone is supposed to bear firstfruits.

Then there are those who are called by the Father as part of a lamp to oversee and care for the church.

The minimum condition for being part of this group is to be a firstfruits believer.

Christ gives authority to some to feed and care for those in His household

Jesus explained and highlighted this point that we are all servants, or all firstfruits believers, and then He appoints some to care for His household in a very particular way.

‘And the Lord [Jesus] said, “Who then is that faithful and wise steward [slave], whom *his* master will make ruler over his household, to give *them their* portion of food in due season?”’ Luk 12:42.

This does not refer to a person who is presumed to take authority in the house.

This is a *slave* in the house, whom the master, who is Jesus, has *set over the house*.

For what purpose is he set over the house? It is in order to give them their *portion of food* in due season.

Their authority over the household is not for the sake of the exercise of power; it is for the sake of *feeding* everyone in the household.

‘Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has.’ Luk 12:43-44.

Christ, the Master of the house, sets servants, or slaves, over the church, and He does this according to the name that the Father has given this person. They are slaves of Christ whose primary work is to *feed* those who are in the house with their portion of food in *due season*.

Our portion of food in due season is the word of present truth

I love the phrase that Jesus used here - 'their portion'.

It is not the entire volume of food; it is a *portion* of it in *due season*, or at the right time.

The apostle Peter described this food that is ministered in due season, or at the right time, as being *the word of present truth*. 2Pe 1:12.

He connected *a word*, which is our *food*, with what we are to *receive* by the Spirit presently. This is what is being fed to us, by those whom the Father has put over the house, to give us the food that we need in order to be sustained in our Christian walk in its due season.

The presbytery is not a position, but a work

Now, the apostle Paul used the term 'presbytery' to identify the *fellowship* of those who had been given care of the church.

I want to make this point because, obviously, the word 'presbytery' comes from the Scriptures. In our fellowship of churches, we use the term 'presbytery' to describe those who have been set apart for this particular care.

However, not every church calls their leaders 'a presbytery' or 'presbyters'. I do not want to get 'hung up' on the term, but to highlight that it is a scriptural term.

When we use it, we are not designating a particular *position*.

Rather, we are describing a *work* to be done for the sake of the *edification* of all those who are a part of the body of Christ.

This is a passage from Paul's letter to Timothy. 'Neglect not the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.' 1Ti 4:14.

We will consider the laying on of hands later, but I want to make the point that it is *multiple* hands being laid on this person.

These were the hands of the presbytery to set apart Timothy to a particular work.

The presbytery is set apart to oversee and care for the church

Now, a presbytery is a lamp of a lampstand.

So there is a star, an *aggelos*, which is seven lamps, for a lampstand.

We recognise that it is firstfruits believers who have been set apart to do a particular work in overseeing and caring for the church, and in giving it its food in due season.

And we have come to the point now where, as Paul said, that group who are responsible for that work are called *a presbytery*.

A presbytery and ascension gift ministers among a fellowship of firstfruits believers

So, a presbytery, which is a lamp of a lampstand, is a *fellowship* of overseers, elders and deacons, along with those who have received *specific ministry grace* from Christ as part of an apostolic administration.

These graces are *gifts* from Christ, and they are given to specific people who are not 'above' the presbytery in any sense of a hierarchy of authority where there is the congregation, a presbytery, and the ascension gift group above that.

Rather, there is *a fellowship of firstfruits believers*, and a group from among them who have been set apart to the work of 'feeding'.

Among that group are those who have received specific ascension gift grace from Christ to equip every person for the work of their ministry.

'Some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers.' Eph 4:7-11.

I do not want to look today at what it means to be an overseer, an elder and a deacon.

I want to look at the basic, or fundamental, *mode of relating* within a presbytery so that there is an effective ministry of *the word of life*, which is *a light* to us.

The corruption of leadership and ministry modes

Let us draw our gaze from our fellowship now and look at *seven golden lampstands*, remembering that it encompasses the diversity of Christian churches in the whole world for the whole church age.

There are various ways through which a person may end up as a leader in the church.

Some may become leaders of the church because of their personal sense of calling. They have this drive because they have a particular motivation toward that particular work.

Others may be driven by ambition and self-definition. Some are narcissistic and believe in their capacity to lead and give direction. They are quite enamoured with their own sense of perspective on the world, and believe that everyone needs to hear what they have to say and the direction they need to give.

They can be quite compelling, can't they? They can draw people into the *charisma* that is associated with that self-valuing of one's own ideas and direction. That is a narcissistic drive.

Then, others end up being leaders because no one else wants to take the responsibility.

Now, I am not particularly interested in all the different reasons why people end up in leadership. There are many ways in which that happens, but there is only one way by which we are *restored* to a particular work that will be effective in *the ministry of the light of life*.

While there are different ways in which a person becomes a leader in a church, or presumes to become a leader in a church, there are also various expressions of leadership that have nothing to do with the presbytery.

Jesus addressed this in His letters. We found that Jesus identified those who advanced the doctrine of Balaam, for example, as a viable and legitimate ministry mode in the church.

There was the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. This is 'congregationalism', where every congregant has a vote, and the authority, or power, rests with the people.

And there is the spirit of Jezebel at work in the church.

Of course, Christ identified those whom He described as 'the synagogue of Satan' in the church itself.

Obviously, the synagogue of Satan is not part of a lamp fellowship. However, they have a notable teaching effect within the church. With regard to the Corinthians, Paul described ones who had come from a synagogue of Satan as 'apostles of

Satan, to whom they had given their ear and attention'.

These were not even presbyters! They were not even the ones whom Jesus was addressing. He said, 'You must get rid of that out of the contributions to the church.'

Now, Jesus addressed all of these corruptions in His letters, which were written first to the *presbyteries* of each church.

So, while I focused last week on the reality that we are all to hear what Jesus is saying to the churches - and that is absolutely true - the point to note is that He was *first* writing to the *presbyteries* in relation to these corruptions within the presbytery, and then within the church more broadly.

His focus was on *their* restoration to *His* hand as stars.

Those who bring illumination must be born of God, and joined to His fellowship in one Spirit

As we noted earlier, the foundational condition for ministry as part of an illuminating lamp presbytery is that a person is born of God, and is joined to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings as a member of His body.

They are receiving the *blessing* that Christ came to give through His offering on the cross. These are the blessings outlined in the Beatitudes, which we have looked at in other studies.

The point is that a person is able to bring illumination as part of a lamp *because* they are obtaining that blessing which is found only by *receiving and walking in the word of the cross*.

That is what Jesus said in listing the blessings as a 'pathway to fruitfulness'. That is the first condition of one who is being joined to a lamp, and has the capacity to bring illumination.

They born of God; and they are joined to the fellowship of the offering and sufferings of Christ as a member of His body.

Now, inherent in this particular foundation of blessing is the reality of being *one Spirit* with the Lord and with their brethren in Christ.

Joined in one Spirit with the Lord and with one another

These are the passages that are helpful for us in understanding what it means to be in one Spirit.

‘But he who is joined to the Lord is one Spirit [or of the same Spirit] *with Him*.’ 1Co 6:17.

That is a beautiful thought, isn’t it? If we are to be in one Spirit, we are firstly in one Spirit with the Lord.

‘I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called [Paul was speaking as one of these illuminating messengers, exhorting every person to walk worthy of their calling; that is, to see each person established in their sonship.], with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering [that sounds a little like the beatitude blessings, doesn’t it? Being poor in spirit, mourning and being meek and then suffering with Christ. ‘Blessed are those who are persecuted.’], bearing with one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.’ Eph 4:1-3.

Not only are we to be of *one Spirit with the Lord* but, also, we are to be in *one Spirit with one another*.

That is necessary in order for us to obtain and walk in our calling, but it is also foundational to those who are proclaiming that word.

One Spirit - seven Spirits of God - Eternal Spirit

‘For through Him we both have access *by one Spirit* to the Father.’ Eph 2:18.

Now, the capacity to be in one Spirit is possible only *by the Holy Spirit*.

‘One Spirit’ is the seven Spirits of God with which Christ was anointed as the Branch of the almond tree, by the Holy Spirit.

Last week, we established the point that Jesus is in fact the almond tree. He is the Branch. We identified Him as being not only the almond branch but, also, in the passage in the book of Isaiah, He is described as being ‘anointed with the Spirit of God’; the seven Spirits. Isa 11:1-2.

The first point to note is that ‘one Spirit’ is the same as seven Spirits.

This means that for those who are joined to the illuminating work of being stars in His hand, and

then lamps of a lampstand, it depends on them receiving the same anointing of one Spirit, which is seven Spirits that Jesus received.

Seven Spirits is also described in the Scriptures as Eternal Spirit.

In *The Steps of Salvation* Part 6, we have taken some time to highlight that one Spirit, seven Spirits, and Eternal Spirit speak about the same thing.

However, they have different inflections, depending on application. That is not our subject today.

I want to highlight the reality that they refer to *the same anointing*.

We have to be ‘in one Spirit’, and this is only possible by our receiving the anointing of seven Spirits with which Jesus was anointed for His work as the almond branch; and that is also called Eternal Spirit.

This is the *one Spirit* of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

As Christ’s blood was shed, the lamps of the lampstand were lit

Jesus was strengthened with Eternal Spirit to offer Himself in obedience to the will of the Father.

It was the means by which His blood was shed for our cleansing, and by which the lamp-light of the lampstand was lit.

Jesus was anointed with seven Spirits, which was also receiving the capacity of Eternal Spirit.

The writer of Hebrews noted that, by Eternal Spirit, He offered Himself; and, through that, there was blood for the cleansing of our conscience. Heb 9:14.

Now, we learnt last week that when His blood was shed, that blood contained *His life*, and that life was a *light*.

Do you see that Jesus was being lit up like a lampstand with lamps because, by Eternal Spirit, He was offering Himself and His blood was being shed?

If we are to be joined to that light expression, it is only as we obtain Eternal Spirit and are *joined to the same fellowship of offering*.

That blood is being sprinkled on our conscience, cleansing us from the darkness of our own way.

Do you see that if we are operating from the basis of our own fleshly initiatives and self-definition, we are not ministering life?

In this case, we are not ministering light; rather, we are ministering the darkness of our own theology.

The word is the light of the *aggelos* lamp

So, we are to be one Spirit with the Lord and with one another, which is only possible as we receive the capacity of Eternal Spirit from the Holy Spirit, and are joined to the same fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings.

That is where the *light* is.

There is no lamplight for any lamp unless it is joined by one Spirit to *that very same offering*. This is how light is coming.

Light is coming, but not because people have strong theology or are scholarly or well educated, or any of those human definitions of what it means to be able to articulate something.

The word is not articulated by the skill of a person.

The word is a light.

The *capacity* to proclaim the light does not come from the person. It comes from the Lord Himself.

This is the *lamp* that we are wanting to see restored to the churches. I will reiterate that point.

The light of the *aggelos* lamp can only be a light, as in being lit up, if those who function within it do so by one Spirit as *companions* together in the sufferings of Christ.

I use that word 'companions' in the sufferings of Christ because that is how the apostle John introduced himself in the book of Revelation. 'I, John, your companion and brother in the sufferings of Christ.' Rev 1:9.

That is beautiful, isn't it? He was saying, 'I am part of a presbytery that functions according to this way.'

A lamp may remain in darkness - not lit

The fact that that is the way in which a lamp is to function, as one that is lit, highlights the reality that a lamp can also be *unlit*.

Do you see that there may be a group of leaders in a church, and they may well be appointed by the

Father to that work, but that lamp may be in darkness?

It will be in darkness if each of those ones are motivated and ministering from the basis of their *own capacity*.

Those who are ministering, as part of a lamp, are not part of that lamp because of what they themselves bring in terms of capacity, in terms of gift, in terms of drive, in terms of enthusiasm.

Any condition other than *sanctification in one Spirit* does not produce light.

That is a confronting thought, is it not? It is possible that there is a lamp that is not lit. So, the light is not inherent in the lamp; the lamp *has* to be lit.

The lamp is lit through fellowship in one Spirit

It will be lit by Eternal Spirit, through fellowship in the offering and sufferings of Christ.

Many have thought that to be one Spirit together is to have a shared goal to which their individual capacities, gifts and enthusiasm etc. are directed.

This means that there is one goal that everyone agrees is good, and then each person brings what they have to contribute to that goal. Everyone is one in their motivation to achieve this good, and in what they can contribute to it.

Sadly, that is the *absolute opposite* to, not only what a functional lamp is, but also to how Yahweh Himself lives.

The beginning point is one Spirit; not a 'shared' endpoint

The *beginning* point is 'one Spirit'.

From the capacity of one Spirit, each one is revealed, and given to a particular *expression* of that one-Spirit *light*.

In one Spirit, our name can be expressed

Paul recorded that, through Christ, we have access *by* one Spirit to the *Father*. Eph 2:18.

Why is this important? It is because, when we are committed to 'one Spirit' being the basis of our fellowship and connection, that is our access to the *expression* of every person's name.

It's not that everyone's name and capacity is added together towards a shared goal.

I hope that I've made that point strong enough, because the *true* basis of being of one Spirit is not what we previously considered it to be.

The *truth* is that we are to be in one Spirit together.

Then, through Christ (because we are part of His body), we have access *by one Spirit* to the Father, in whom every person has their name and work.

Can you see that 'name' and 'work' doesn't come *before* being in one Spirit?

Rather, it is *because* we are in one Spirit that we are able to be equipped and enabled to see every person's name expressed.

Our calling is our works of sonship

Paul made this point in terms of the name that he received from his Father (his sanctification) when he said, 'But it pleased God [the Father], who *separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace.*' Gal 1:15.

Now, 'calling' is almost always speaking about a person's *sonship*, and we note that Paul wasn't *connected* to his sonship when he killed Christians through the motivation of his own sense of what was 'good.'

So, he said that his *calling*, as one who was set apart, through grace, to *reveal* the Son (which means to express, or to communicate, the Son to others), was *inherent in his name as a son of God*, which was known and named even before time.

'When it pleased God [the Father], who separated me from my mother's womb and *called* me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles.' Gal 1:15-16.

So, being in one Spirit gives us access to the Father. Moreover, when we meet the Father, we understand our sanctification, or what we are separated to, in terms of our particular function as a member of the body of Christ.

That is according to our calling, or the works prepared for us to do, as a son of God in Christ.

Our name is found, sanctified and expressed in fellowship

Now, while we obtain that name, it is the Holy Spirit, within the context of *fellowship*, who *sets us apart* to that work.

There is a beautiful passage in the book of Acts; an account that helpfully demonstrates this principle.

'Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.' Act 13:1.

Can you see, immediately, that there was *fellowship*?

This was a fellowship of teachers and prophets. They had the capacity to articulate the word. They were already *in one Spirit together*.

'As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them".' Act 13:2.

This was the work, prepared by the Father, that Paul was going to show forth, revealing the Son in him to those to whom he was sent.

And it was the *Holy Spirit*, in the context of this fellowship, where they were ministering to the Lord, who said, 'Separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the *work* to which I have called them.'

'Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.' Act 13:3.

The laying on of hands is the mark and action of fellowship

I want to make a quick point on the laying on of hands.

The laying on of hands within this context of a presbytery fellowship is not the impartation of 'power' for ministry' It is *not* the impartation of power.

Why is this? It is because the power is actually *from the blood*. It is through Eternal Spirit, by the resurrection life of God. We've just established that point.

In this regard, there has been confusion in the past because of the notion that when someone has hands laid on a person, some power and definition is imparted to them from the one who lays hands on them.

That's not what the laying on of hands is at all.

The laying on of hands is *the mark and action of fellowship*.

The Holy Spirit sets ones apart for a particular work, and the laying on of hands is the acknowledgment within that presbytery context of what the Holy Spirit is saying.

And it is the extension of fellowship to those ones so that, as they go, *they carry that fellowship with them.*

Can you see that they are taking the lamp-light with them, having been set apart by the laying on of hands.

There have been many people who have had hands laid on them in the past, where much of it has been mystical nonsense.

We have to let go of some of the definition that people have maintained and assumed because someone laid hands on them and prophesied to them.

There is always a jarring effect between this point of definition, and the *fellowship* to which they should actually be connected.

I encourage you to let it go if you have had the laying on of hands in a manner that was other than a connection to fellowship, and a setting apart to a work to carry that fellowship so that others can be connected to it.

If it is other than according to that fellowship connection, then it is a definition that needs to go into the sea of God's forgetfulness.

The key point is that the laying on of hands is actually the mark of fellowship.

Our sanctification is the will of God

It was the same when Ananias laid hands on Paul and said, 'Brother Saul.' He laid hands on him - and what happened? Saul's eyes were opened. Act 9:17-18.

This is the evidence of *the work of light*, and then Paul immediately began to *preach*.

The Holy Spirit had *separated* Barnabas and Saul for this work, and this work was according to their calling - according to the will of God.

A person's sanctification is the will of God.

Sanctification is proven through offering

There are people who are firstfruits disciples whom the Holy Spirit, according to the will of the Father, is setting apart for a particular work - and that work is proven by *offering*.

It is not proven because people have great capacity or historical standing or because of family connections. Any of those things are other than being of one Spirit.

A person's sanctification, or the reality of the will of God for their life, is *demonstrated, or revealed, through offering*.

Do not be conformed to the way that the world functions regarding power

This is what Paul taught us when he said, 'Do not be conformed to this world.' Rom 12:2.

I have often read this passage and thought that he was telling us to not be 'worldly'.

That's not what he was saying at all. He was writing to Christians about the way in which we interact with one another, and to understand our participation in the fellowship of Christ's body.

He was saying that it is not a hierarchy, where a person is assigned a particular place that has a degree of power or authority over others. That's how the world functions.

He exhorted us to not be conformed to *that* way of thinking about oneself or about others. That's the spirit of the world, isn't it?

The spirit of the world is the spirit of Satan, who said, 'I will ascend.'

Offering - laying down our life, by Eternal Spirit, to reveal another

'Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind [so, there has to be a *new* way of thinking], that you may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.' Rom 12:2.

Remember that this is in the context of 'by the mercies of God, present your bodies a living sacrifice'. Rom 12:1.

It is not, 'I have a whole lot of good ideas about what can be done'.

The mode of offering of one who presents themselves as a living sacrifice is to lay down their life to reveal someone else.

So, when, by the capacity of Eternal Spirit, we are laying down our lives in the same manner as Christ to reveal one another, what happens? The will of God is proven.

What is the will of God?

‘For this is the will of God [that’s helpful, isn’t it?], your sanctification [your works as a son of God according to your name].’ 1Th 4:3.

Can you see that it comes out of a *fellowship of offering*, not through self-definition?

In the same way that Christ offered Himself by Eternal Spirit to reveal the Father, we reveal Christ and one another as we lay down our lives by the capacity of Eternal Spirit.

Life laid down - God’s grace multiplied

This is how the grace of God’s life, which is light, is multiplied.

This is the principle of the seed, isn’t it? Life is laid down and, when it comes up, it is *multiplied*.

If we are to be part of *this* lamp fellowship, that is to be the mode of our ministry.

Graces given to equip us for the work of our ministry

As we noted earlier, among the presbytery there are men to whom Christ has given ascension gift grace for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry - and not everyone has this ascension gift grace.

He *does* give to *everyone* a measure of grace; that is absolutely true.

But, to *some*, He gave to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists and some to be pastor-teachers.

These are unique graces from Christ, given to certain people - but *not for the sake of their own ministry*.

What did Paul say? He said that those graces have been given for the equipping of the saints for the work of *their* ministry.

Something is being *laid down* by those who have grace, so that those who are receiving it will be revealed through this ministry.

The word of grace laid down in a presbytery, revealing Christ

Can you see that this is ‘offering’ in operation?

This shepherding work of apostles, prophets, evangelists and teachers involves the *laying down* of the *word of grace*, by *offering*, within the presbytery and the church.

So, not everyone in the presbytery has this ascension gift grace.

The presbytery is not merely a place where everyone brings their ideas about what they are thinking or meditating on or about which they have something of a scriptural ‘itch’.

This is a place where ascension gift grace is being laid down within the presbytery, for the equipping of every person for the work of their ministry.

‘The word of grace’ that is being laid down is *the word of present truth*.

These people are laying down their lives to reveal Christ, because they are exercising this gift which is *from* Christ.

They are laying down the word of grace that is coming from the Messenger of the Covenant (Christ), who is revealing the Father.

Everyone is revealing someone else.

They are laying down their lives to reveal Christ, but they are also laying down their lives to reveal those who will *receive* this word; because it is the work of *their* ministry that will be manifest through this word being laid down.

The word laid down and met in offering

Because we are speaking about ‘lamps’ at the moment, let’s focus on the presbytery, where the word is being laid down.

A helpful point to note is that, when the word is being laid down by those who have this kind of grace, it is not a case of the word being ‘vetted’ by everyone.

If it were a vetting process, that would be a completely carnal activity, wouldn’t it? It would be on the basis of everyone hearing it and deciding whether it is good or evil. That is not *fellowship*. That is not of the tree of life.

The tree of life is a *light*, and this light is being laid down and, if it is to be effective, it will be *met* in *offering*.

It has been *laid down* in offering, so it needs to be *met* in offering.

The hearing, seeing, repentance and faith of a presbytery

Presbyters who hear the word and receive illumination respond in *repentance and faith*. *Everyone* is responding in this way to the word.

This is not the foundation of activity in the *church*. It's the foundation of activity in the *presbytery first*; and it is also to be the response of us all.

It's not that one 'attains' a presbytery position and no longer needs to repent or to receive, as though they have achieved a certain 'level' that marks them as being already commensurate with the word.

That's not the way, and that's not even the way that the apostle John described it. Remember that John, when writing his first letter, opened by proclaiming the dynamics of a presbytery.

He said, 'That which we have heard and that which we have seen, and looked on [that is, looking on Him whom we have pierced], and that which we have handled.' 1Jo 1:1.

Isn't that the outcome of the word being laid down and everyone responding to it?

Presbyters who hear the word and receive illumination respond in repentance and faith, and *apply themselves to understanding*.

These ones are equipped to *proclaim the word* according to their sanctification.

Grace is multiplied through offering fellowship

Everyone makes offering by Eternal Spirit.

A word is proclaimed by those who have received ascension gift grace for this.

Then, as those who are hearing the word and receiving it respond as being poor in spirit (the blessed), they are, by offering, receiving grace and capacity to then lay down *their* lives, and to *express* that word according to *their* sanctification.

Can you see that *grace is multiplying*?

By this means, they are revealing Christ, as well as those who have laid down the word to them in the presbytery.

Through this offering fellowship, grace is being multiplied and can spread to many.

One fellowship in the present truth word of God

I want to make the point that that dynamic within the presbytery is actually the very same dynamic that should be happening at the communion table. It is the same word and the same response.

That's what John said. He said that this is *the nature of fellowship* in a presbytery.

And then the presbytery proclaims the word so that others might have the same fellowship with the presbytery.

Can you see that there is no distinction between those who are fellowshiping in the word, and those who are 'eating' the word that comes forth from that fellowship.

It is one fellowship, with each person participating according to their name, by Eternal Spirit.

Ongoing fellowship in the offering and sufferings of Christ

Let's look at the final characteristic of one who is participating in a lamp fellowship.

This final characteristic, which is actually a condition, is their *ongoing fellowship in the offering and sufferings of Christ*.

This fellowship, in the sufferings in particular, is foundational to the ministry of the word of the cross.

Why is that the case? It is because Christ can be publicly proclaimed and revealed as crucified among those who hear us, *only* if the way of the cross is *the testimony of the way of our life*.

The fellowship of Christ's sufferings is absolutely fundamental to the capacity to minister the light of life.

Carrying 'the greater condemnation' in themselves is portraying Christ crucified

The apostle James wrote, 'My brethren, do not be many masters [or teachers], knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation'. Jas 3:1.

Many people, including myself, have looked at that passage and thought it best not to be a leader or teacher in the church - or whatever designation people give to those who are supposed to care for the church - because, if a leader sins, they will receive double the punishment, and hell will be twice as hot!

That is not what this passage means. We need to understand what the 'greater condemnation' is, and *why* we should not aspire to be what we are not.

How do we know that this passage is not saying, 'Don't become a minister because, if you fail, you will have twice as bad a time'?

It is because the outcome of carnality, or sin, is *the same for everyone*. You can't be more 'dead' than *dead*, can you?

Jesus made this point when He addressed those who had been set as masters, or stewards, over His household as those who were to administrate and feed it, in time.

He came 'as a thief in the night' and found them beating His slaves and eating and drinking with drunkards and, basically, being disobedient.

'The master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him [this is obviously a person who has no illumination], and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two [that's fairly bad; that sounds like a greater condemnation] and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.' Luk 12:46.

Do you see that that person does not receive anything worse than what *all unbelievers* receive - because it is *all* bad in the sea of God's forgetfulness.

It is not that a teacher who doesn't do their work gets greater condemnation. They are simply getting the condemnation that belongs to the *disobedient*.

What, then, did James mean?

When we consider the life and testimony of the apostle Paul, we see that the greater condemnation that he received *was part of his ministry*.

Do you see that it is completely the opposite to what we had thought?

It's not that you don't want to become a leader because you might get a worse punishment.

It's that, *when you are set apart* for that work, *part of that work is to carry in yourself the greater condemnation*.

Joining the condemnation and salvation that Christ bore in His body

This was Paul's testimony through his ministry because, remember, the condemnation is *what Jesus bore in His body*.

This is the amazing point that we have been learning about the word of the cross. When Jesus

finished His journey and was lifted up on the cross, He was the full revelation of *all condemnation*.

But, He was also the full revelation of everyone's *salvation*.

That 'greater condemnation' for a minister who is sent to bring the light of life is that they are to *bear that in their body* so that, as *they* proclaim it, Christ is being publicly portrayed.

Do you see that you have to carry in your body the condemnation and the salvation that Christ wrought for every person?

This is actually what it means to have the word 'written on your heart' for your hearers.

Through Paul's ministry, Christ was publicly portrayed among his hearers as crucified. By this means, the *judgement* of God and the *salvation* of God were being made known to them.

Carrying the greater condemnation – the suffering of death for the ministry of life

Paul was not merely 'explaining' the judgement and salvation of God through the cross.

When he said that through his ministry Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified, he wasn't saying that he taught merely the 'theology' of the cross.

He was saying that *he bore in his body the marks* of the Lord Jesus! Gal 6:17.

Do you see that this is 'the greater condemnation'? He was *carrying* it in himself.

These were the marks that were caused by *the suffering of death* that Jesus tasted for every man.

Paul's ministry, as a messenger of God in Christ, involved a quotient of suffering under the condemnation of death that belonged to, or was *caused by, his hearers*.

This is amazing! The hearers caused injury to *him* which, remember, was a *reproach* that was laid on Christ.

Through this means, there is *a ministry of life* to them which can cause them to turn from their rebellion and to come back from the death of their own way.

Filling up, living out, Christ's suffering for the sake of His body

'I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church.' Col 1:24.

We have taught on this before. It's not that there was anything 'lacking' in the offering.

It's that Paul was now *living out* what Christ had already suffered for him.

Paul said that he was now *filling up* this suffering.

It was not just because he needed his other law removed - although we know that was true, because he testified to that in the book of Romans.

Rather, he said that he was enduring this suffering *for the sake of His body*, which is the church.

'Of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God.' Col 1:25.

He had been sent by the Father to do this *work*, and to *feed* those to whom he had been sent.

How was he 'feeding' them? It was by filling up what was lacking in the sufferings of Christ.

Being joined to the mystery of the cross

'The *mystery* which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.' Col 1:26.

Suffering is a fundamental reality of the *stewardship* that a presbyter receives from God the Father.

It is foundational to understanding and proclaiming the mystery of the cross that has been hidden from ages past and from generations.

If you want to know the mystery, you have to be *joined* to it, don't you?

Paul called the cross a great mystery that had been hidden from ages past. He was able to *proclaim* it.

This is the mystery of a 'star', because that star is joined to the mystery of the cross and is able to bear that light.

Speaking in Christ – a message birthed within

Paul testified of this ministry among the Corinthians. He said that he and his fellow presbyters spoke 'before God in Christ'.

Paul wasn't just using semantics there. The point to note is that he was saying that he wasn't speaking *on behalf of* Christ.

He said, 'I, Paul, who has been set apart for this work am proclaiming the word to you *in Christ Jesus* [one who is joined to His suffering, offering body].'

The mode of his ministry was not 'on behalf of', as though he were merely a 'conduit' to a message.

Rather, he was proclaiming that message because it was *birthed in him*.

An effective ministry – participating in the dying and living of Christ, for another's deliverance

Paul's ministry was effective towards the Corinthians as he was humbled among them and mistreated by them. Not all of them mistreated him in this way, but some of them were quite contrary to him.

This was *the suffering of condemnation* that Christ had suffered for them, and that Paul was 'filling up for their sake'. That's amazing!

As they were injuring Paul, Paul experienced the sufferings that Christ had *already* suffered as a result of that injury!

And he was 'filling it up for their sake' to proclaim something to them, so that Christ was publicly portrayed to them.

As Paul suffered because of their mistreatment, he was *dying with Christ* for those who were struggling in *their* sin and rebellion.

And where were they? They were 'dead'! So he was joined with Christ, who was joined to *their* death.

To those who received Paul's ministry as he spoke to them in the weakness of Christ, the power of God became mighty in them and brought *deliverance* to them!

Paul also personally received the life of Christ in this fellowship, and it sustained him as he

participated in the dying and the living of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I am so excited about this! This is the way in which a *ministry works*.

This is how *the light of life is communicated*.

It is through *this* fellowship.

The knowledge of Christ in a person can be the aroma of death to another

Paul said that, through the ministry of the cross, 'the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ' was diffused in every place and in every interaction.

This is how you know that this ministry is working. It gives off a particular 'fragrance', a 'smell'.

This means that this ministry has a particular 'smell' that is registered by the senses of those who are hearing the word.

I'm dwelling on this point of 'senses' because we are to *come* to our senses, aren't we?

There is a particular aroma associated with the word, which we identify in a particular way depending on the condition of our senses.

As Paul conversed with those who were rebellious, the sufferings of condemnation that he was experiencing in Christ, as a result of *their* sin and mistreatment of *him*, was *the aroma of death* to them.

It was signalling the judgement of death that was their 'reward' if they did not receive the word, find repentance and come into Christ.

The aroma of death is one's own death – the death of judgement; of condemnation

As Paul ministered, there were some sitting there who could not bear the smell of that ministered word. It was the smell of death. They didn't understand that they were smelling *their own death*.

Paul was proclaiming the word of the cross, and they were smelling *their dead, condemned body* as a result of Christ suffering *their* condemnation.

However, as Paul's hearers humbled themselves, they 'came to their senses.' Their 'noses started to smell' in a different way, and they realised they were not smelling the messenger but, rather, the stink of the 'pig muck' that they were in.

By the ministry of the cross, the aroma of death can become the aroma of resurrection life

However, they came to their senses - and their smell began to *change*.

Paul's ministry became to them the *aroma of life*, which is the aroma of *consolation*.

This is the aroma of *exanastasis* life, which is resurrection life out of that death!

It became the aroma of life, or consolation, to them so that, in Christ, the judgement that they were under was turned to chastisement, and was then leading to *life*.

Receiving and ministering comfort and consolation by obedience to God's calling

Because Paul was in Christ and was walking in obedience to the call of God upon his life, he was dying *this greater condemnation* by *exanastasis* resurrection life in Christ's blood.

This was the 'comfort and consolation' that *he* received.

But it was also the comfort and consolation that he *ministered* to those whose senses were being changed, so that they were able to receive what he was saying, and to rejoice in the resurrection life that comes through *repentance*.

A work of ministry consistent with God's calling – identity and naming

A person will be able to endure greater condemnation (this work of ministry) only when this ministry is consistent with their name in Christ.

This is why James said, 'Let not many of you become teachers.'

If overseership is not consistent with a person's *name* and *identity*, they will not cope with this ministry.

Either they will become exhausted, or the growth of the church will be limited by their capacity to cope with the relational pressures that are brought to bear upon them.

The foundation of the fellowship of Christ's sufferings

The fellowship of Christ's sufferings is fundamental to overseership in the church.

Paul commended Timothy, who was a man of proven character, to *this* faith.

'For if we *died* with Him, we shall also *live* with Him.

'If we endure [if we continue to walk in this way of the fellowship of Christ's death and resurrection], we shall also reign with Him [sounding like those who are given overseership in the house]. If we deny Him, He also will deny us.

'If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.' 2Ti 2:11-13.