

GOOD GROUND – PART 2

Peter Hay, prepared for word ministry, 13 August 2020
Transcription of recording, slightly edited

Introduction

Today I will speak again regarding 'Good ground', and I hope and predict that this will resonate for us as our testimony.

I also hope that it gives us *understanding* in relation to what is already true for us, and that this is a point of affirmation for us.

Also, I hope it causes us to have great *confidence* as we continue to walk in the way that the Lord has prepared for us.

Firstfruits are the first expression of the harvest

We begin by reiterating one of the key points from the last session – the fruit that is brought forth on good ground, in this age, is called 'firstfruits'.

Firstfruits is not the full harvest; rather, it is the first expression, or indication, of a complete harvest.

For us, that harvest refers to a perfection, or a finished work, that we will attain in Christ.

Under the Old Covenant, the firstfruits of what was sown in the field were given to the Lord as an 'earnest'. That is simply an olden days' word for a *pledge*, or a *small part in lieu, of the entire harvest* given to the Lord.

The whole harvest belongs to God and He brings the increase

It was offered in the recognition that the *whole harvest* belonged to God.

But, not only that, it recognised that that whole harvest was *brought to increase* by God.

Firstfruits is a pledge, or an earnest, in view of the whole harvest belonging to God, recognising that it is He who brings the increase.

The corporate body of Christ is the firstfruits that belongs to good ground

The next key point that we understood last week in relation to firstfruits is that *the corporate body of Christ is the firstfruits that belongs to good ground*.

We are firstfruits when we are *born of God* by receiving the *Seed*, who is Christ, into our heart, and

then *come into Christ* as part of *the corporate Sheaf of firstfruits*.

This is an important point, and it may be a re-orientation for many of us, that firstfruits is not, first, *me*.

Firstfruits is first Christ, and then *me in Christ*.

In fact, we have no expression as firstfruits, nor as a reality to a finished work, unless *we are in Christ*.

We have no expression as firstfruits *apart from abiding in Christ*.

As we consider this today, to be 'in Christ' is not simply a position, a station, some sort of self-nominated connection, or an 'identification', with Christ.

It is a tangible and active participation in the body of Christ, which is the church, in the place where the Father has placed or established us.

This is a key point for us to understand in relation to firstfruits.

The Holy Spirit enables us to be in one Spirit as part of the Sheaf of firstfruits

We have been learning over this season about the work of the Holy Spirit; and the Holy Spirit is absolutely fundamental to this principle of firstfruits.

It is the Holy Spirit who *enables us* to be in one Spirit as part of the Sheaf of firstfruits.

He is the expression of our name, and the One who enables us to be in one Spirit as part of the Sheaf of firstfruits.

We will discuss this point to try to understand and recognise that we cannot have one without the other.

The Holy Spirit makes the realisation of our name in Christ possible

God the Father is the source of our life and works as a son of God. Jas 1:17.

Jesus taught that all things that belong to the Father had been given to Him.

This means that our name, our life and works as sons of God, are *in Him*. They are *from Him*, but they only have their realisation *in Him*.

We receive them from the Father when Christ abides in us, and we abide in Christ.

It is important to understand how the Spirit works in relation to this reality.

Jesus said that the Holy Spirit will take of what belongs to Christ and will declare it, or make it known, to you. Joh 16:14.

'All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you.' Joh 16:15.

But it is only possible by the work of the Holy Spirit.

It is from the Father; it has been given to the Son; and it is available only as we receive it from the Son and are established in Him.

And Jesus said that it is possible *only* by the work of the Holy Spirit. He is the One who makes it known to us and establishes us in Christ.

The four dimensions of God's grace are all in Christ - made known to us by the Spirit

The apostle John said that when Jesus Christ came in the flesh, He was *full* of grace and truth. Joh 1:14.

We understand that everything that belonged to the Father had been given to the Son.

Grace is the fullness of the life of God in the Son.

In Part 2 of *The Steps of Salvation*, we explained the nature of grace and the nature of this life. We made the point that grace is the fullness of who God is as Yahweh, or as *One*.

The Holy Spirit makes God's dimensions known to us.

When the Scriptures reveal that God is *word*, is *life*, is *Spirit* and is *love*, they are describing the dimensions of God's grace that are revealed, multiplied, and given by offering.

There are four dimensions of the one grace of God, and that grace was *all* in Christ; and that is being made *known* to us *by the Spirit*.

Through God's grace we are able to worship and fellowship in Spirit and truth

The 'in-Spirit' dimension that belongs to Yahweh is an attribute of the divine nature that is also given to us by the Holy Spirit.

This capacity of being in-Spirit is a fundamental dimension of God's grace.

Through this capacity of grace – remember that this is one of the dimensions of grace that is God – we are able to worship and fellowship with God, and with one another, in Spirit and truth.

This particular dimension of grace is fundamental to our ability to worship and fellowship with God and with one another in Spirit and truth.

The Father seeks for all who are born again as His children to worship Him in this way. Joh 4:23.

If we are looking to see what God's predestination for us is, it is to live in a manner called 'worship in Spirit and truth'. Joh 4:23-24.

The Spirit enables us to have relationship with God and with one another in first love

This reality of being in-Spirit – worshipping in Spirit and truth – is a fundamental element of the New Covenant.

The New Covenant is the expression of relationship, through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us so that we can live on earth and can fellowship with God and with one another in first love.

It is the Spirit who is enabling us to have relationship with God and with one another in first love.

The implication, of course, is that if there is a disconnection in our relationship with one another, there will be a disconnection in our relationship with Yahweh Himself.

When we are born of God, love is given to us to become our life and nature as sons of God

The Holy Spirit pours the love of God into our heart. The love of God is the life and expression of Yahweh. It is the divine nature.

We know from the apostle John's first letter that God is love. 1Jn 4:8.

It is not that He is 'a loving Person' – *love describes the nature of His life*, who He is and how He lives.

When we are born of God, *love is given to us to become our life and nature as a son of God*.

'Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is *born* of God and knows God.' 1Jn 4:7.

This is the in-Spirit' dimension; it is the ability to know God and to know one another.

'He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.' 1Jn 4:8. That is quite straightforward, isn't it?

The Holy Spirit gives us the capacity to be in one Spirit, joined to the body of Christ

It is the Holy Spirit who enables us to be *joined* to the fellowship of Christ's body.

This is a fundamental reality of being born of God. In other words, there is *no* sonship expression apart from a tangible connection to the body of Christ.

You cannot be a son of God outside of Christ!

In fact, Paul was quite clear about that. He wrote that we were predestined to be sons of God *in Christ*. Eph 1:10. Eph 3:11.

The Holy Spirit gives us the *capacity* to be in one Spirit.

Picking up this point on the work of the Spirit, we have learned that the Spirit, who enables us to be in one Spirit, is pouring the love of God into our heart, which then becomes the expression and nature of the life that we live as sons of God.

This capacity to be in one Spirit, by the Holy Spirit, is fundamental to our membership in the body of Christ.

'But he who is joined to the Lord is one Spirit with Him.' 1Co 6:17.

This capacity for being in one Spirit is by the Holy Spirit; and to be joined to the Lord is to be one Spirit.

One Spirit is enabling us to be baptised into one body and to continue in one Spirit

But we cannot be joined to the Lord in one Spirit unless we are joined to one another in one Spirit.

'For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ [or, is the Lord].

'For by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body [By the capacity of one Spirit, we were baptised into Christ's body.] – whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free – and have all been made to *drink* into one Spirit.' 1Co 12:12-13.

One Spirit is enabling us to be baptised into one body. Remember that this is baptism into the

death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ as a member of His body.

And, as we are *in Christ's body*, He is enabling us to *drink* of one Spirit, or to *continue* in one Spirit.

The water of the word enables us to be in one Spirit by the Holy Spirit

Paul used the phrase, 'and have all been made to drink into one Spirit', because that connects to what Jesus accounted in the Gospel of John concerning Spirit and truth.

Jesus said to the Samaritan woman that we are to drink the water that He gave. Joh 4:14.

We see that the water is this one Spirit, or the word, which is enabling us to be in one Spirit together, by the Holy Spirit.

The fruit of being in one Spirit is eternal life

That water will become, in Him, a fountain of water springing up to everlasting life, to *eternal life*; that is the *fruit*.

The point is that we have to *drink* that water, which is the capacity to be in one Spirit by the Holy Spirit. And the fruit *in Christ*, or in one Spirit with the Lord and with our fellow members of the body of Christ, is eternal life.

Another way of saying it, in the negative, is that, if there is some disconnection or some inability for us to connect in one Spirit, we are *not* obtaining eternal life.

To be in one Spirit is to accept where the Father has placed us

We read, in relation to the body, 'But now God [God the Father] has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.' 1Co 12:18.

This is an important point. It is not that being in-Spirit' as a member of the body is simply a mystical connection.

If you are in one Spirit in the body, it means that you are *participating* as a member of the body *in the place where the Father Himself has placed you*.

We didn't choose what our relational connections in one Spirit would be in the body of Christ. This is actually the appointment of the Father; and, to be in one Spirit is to accept where the Father has placed us.

If we have a problem with that, and we don't want to be connected with this or that person, or

in this place, and we look for other places that are more amenable to our sense of reality, then we are not in one Spirit; and we are not firstfruits.

This is an amazing point. It is very easy to see how we are one Spirit and are obtaining life, eternal life, even now.

But, on the other hand, we can see that we can easily reject life that when we reject the connections or the place where the Lord has established us in His body.

We cannot be firstfruits without the Holy Spirit

Having come into Christ, we are *sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise*.

The Spirit is enabling us to be one Spirit with the Lord and with one another, so that we can have relationship with the Lord and with one another, worshipping in Spirit and truth together.

When we are in Him, we receive the Holy Spirit as a *seal and a guarantee* of our inheritance as sons of God.

We cannot be firstfruits without the Holy Spirit.

'In Him [in Christ] you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed.' Eph 1:13.

There is a progression here. We are *in* Him and, as those who are in Him, we are *trusting*. We trust the Lord and we trust those through whom He proclaims His word.

So, after we *heard* the word of truth, we came into Him.

Then, in Him, 'having believed, you were *sealed* with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.' Eph 1:13-14.

The Greek word translated as 'guarantee' in this passage literally means 'a pledge'. A pledge is a down payment that is given in *lieu* of a total amount that will be fully paid at a later time.

This is exactly the same principle as firstfruits.

We said at the beginning of this session that firstfruits is an earnest, or pledge, of the whole harvest.

Now, we understand that Paul taught that the Holy Spirit is given to us *as that very pledge*.

In fact, Paul wrote that the Holy Spirit, whom we received as a pledge, is called 'the firstfruits of the Spirit'. Rom 8:23.

That means that we cannot be firstfruits without the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit expresses our sonship life and connects us to Christ, the Firstfruits

Why is that?

It is because He is the One who expresses our name, but He is also the One who connects us to Christ, the Firstfruits.

The Holy Spirit is the expression of our sonship life when, as sons of God [These are the seeds who have germinated in the ground and grown up.], we who are sons of God, having been born, are to *die again in Christ*.

When that happens - when we die with Christ - we are hidden with Christ in God, *no longer seeking to reveal our own sonship*.

So, the Holy Spirit is the expression of our sonship life when we are hidden with Christ in God. And when we forsake the revealing of ourselves, so that *the Holy Spirit* is the expression of our sonship, that is when we are *guaranteed* to obtain *eternal life*.

That is where we are *guaranteed* to receive our *inheritance*.

The Holy Spirit enables us to obtain our inheritance by the capacity of Eternal Spirit

He enables us.

This is how He enables us to be firstfruits, or to obtain our inheritance. He enables us *with the capacity of Eternal Spirit* [It is the same principle as one Spirit.] to participate in the offering and sufferings of Christ.

This is the capacity with which Jesus Himself was strengthened by the Holy Spirit for His offering.

'How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the Eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God.' Heb 9:14.

Jesus did not offer by His own capacity either. Rather, He offered by the capacity of Eternal Spirit and, when we are hidden with Christ in God, that capacity of Eternal Spirit becomes our

means of offering and of joining the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings.

The Spirit enables us to be joined to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings

There are two aspects to this participation.

The first is our fellowship in the travail, or sufferings, of Christ.

The Holy Spirit *connects* every individual to the pathway of offering and sufferings that Christ pioneered for us uniquely, and that we are to walk in daily as we take up our cross.

Eternal Spirit enables us to *participate*.

This is the first element of Eternal Spirit enabling us to remain connected to Christ in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings, and to walk on the pathway that He pioneered for us.

The Holy Spirit joins us to the travail of Christ and enables us, with Eternal Spirit, to participate in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings.

In this fellowship, Christ's life is becoming our life as we are being made alive from the death of sin with Christ.

Christ was the Seed that went into the ground and died, and He came up as the Sheaf of firstfruits through the offering journey that He undertook.

When we are *joined to the fellowship of that offering*, then we are *being made alive* by that life with Him.

But it is *the Spirit who enables us* to be joined to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings.

Eternal Spirit gives us the capacity to *lay down our life*.

Eternal Spirit enables us to lay down our life through the obedience of Christ

The second element of receiving the capacity of Eternal Spirit, as a guarantee, is that Eternal Spirit is the capacity to lay down our life for another.

We do this, amazingly, through *obedience*, by *having the mind of Christ*.

We do not lay down our life to reveal another through our own sense of what that should entail.

Rather, we hear the *word*, which is granting us *faith* and, by that faith, we are being *obedient* and

are *revealing the One from whom we have received that word*.

Faith is demonstrated through obedience, and *that is the expression of love through offering*.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul described this as 'having the mind of Christ'.

'Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God.' Php 2:5-6.

He did not maintain His right to be equal with God.

But what did He do?

'[He] made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant [or slave], and coming in the likeness of men.

'And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became *obedient* to the point of death, even the death of the cross.' Php 2:7-8.

To take up your cross daily is actually to be *obedient* in the *same* way that Christ was.

We are to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling

Paul said that we are to have the same mind as Christ. Then he explained what the mind of Christ is and what it looks like.

'Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.' Php 2:12-13.

This is an amazing statement. Paul said that, as part of a presbytery, and by proclaiming the word to them, whether by letter or by direct conversation, they were to be *obedient to that word*, whether he was there or not.

As they did that [Paul was not there surveying the Philippians to see whether they did it or not.], he said, '[You] work out [your] own salvation with fear and trembling.'

He said that we are to have the same fear of the Lord that Christ Himself had.

Do you see that this is a person who is joined to the very travail of Christ Himself?

Do all things without complaining and disputing

He continued, 'Do all things without complaining and disputing.' Php 2:14.

He said that this work of fulfilling the obedience, which is the will of God for us in Christ Jesus, is contingent upon our *connection* to a fellowship in which we are to let go of, or to be delivered from, the propensity in us to complain and to be a disputer, because that would be our disconnection from the fellowship.

He said that we cannot work out our salvation with fear and trembling if we are complaining and disputing.

'Do all things without complaining and disputing.'

For what reason?

It is not because it is 'a pain in the neck'. Paul was not concerned about the impact of complaint and dispute.

The reason that he said, 'Don't do that,' was because, if you do, you are not blameless and harmless children of God.

'Do all things without complaining and disputing, [so] that you may *become* blameless and harmless, children of God [the sons of God] without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights.' Php 2:14-15.

A firstfruits believer reflects the light from a lampstand church

What does it mean to shine as a light?

It means to be *set on a lampstand*, doesn't it?

Paul said that a person who has the mind of Christ and is joined to the fellowship of His offering and sufferings by the Spirit is also the same person who is connected to a lampstand church.

They are part of a fellowship in which the lamplight is set as the focus – it is right at the centre-point of their sight – so that they can be those who *reflect that light by offering*.

This is what it means to be a firstfruits believer.

He said, 'Among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast [to] the word of life.' Php 2:15-16.

Isn't that the same sentiment as 'keep your heart with all diligence [by the enabling of the Holy Spirit]'? Pro 4:23.

'So that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or laboured in vain.' Php 2:16.

The expression of the love of God requires a context of fellowship

Of course, offering to lay down our life for another in this manner requires us to live in a context where there are other people whom we can reveal.

That is a somewhat obvious point, but it is an important point!

There is no reality to our expression of the love of God, which is offering, unless we are in fellowship with other believers, whom we are revealing.

Paul picked up this point in his second letter to the Corinthians.

It is an important point that the Spirit, who is the expression of our sonship so that we are fulfilling the will of God in Christ, is the *same* Spirit through whom we have fellowship in one Spirit with our brethren in Christ.

He is *enabling our expression* as a son of God; but He is also the One who *enables our connection* with one another.

There cannot be one without the other – so, expression without connection, or connection without expression – is not living by the Spirit as firstfruits in Christ.

Our connection to the fellowship of the presbytery

Paul connected these two points in his second letter to the Corinthians.

'Now He who establishes *us* [The 'us' that Paul speaks of here is Paul and his fellow presbyters, or his fellow messengers.] *with you* in Christ.' 2Co 1:21.

The point is that there is a fellowship already; this is the fellowship of the presbytery.

Members in particular

'He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God [the *Father*].' 2Co 1:21.

God the Father sets *every individual member* in the body as *He* so pleases.

Our fellowship is with the presbytery

He said, 'Now he who establishes us [the 'us' Paul speaks of here is Paul and his fellow presbyters, or his fellow messengers] *with you* in Christ.'

There is a fellowship *already*, which is the fellowship of the presbytery.

Paul said, 'He who establishes us with you in Christ [is who?] and has anointed us, is God [the Father].' 2Co 1:21.

God the *Father* sets every member in the body as He pleases.

'God, who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.' 2Co 1:22.

Who has sealed us? It was the *Father*.

This is the same point that Paul made in his letter to the Ephesians. 'You were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance.' Eph 1:13-14.

The word 'guarantee' is the same word as 'pledge'.

It is apparent, therefore, that to be sealed with the Holy Spirit as firstfruits in Christ is to be joined in fellowship with those whom God has set apart as presbyters, to minister the word of Christ.

Jesus said that His word is Spirit and life. Isn't it wonderful!

Presbytery establishes the ground of our fellowship

In fact, the word of Christ proclaimed from the presbytery establishes the very ground of fellowship upon which we have our expression as a firstfruits believer. This is an important point.

It is not that we have an expression sourced from our own motivation or according to how we might feel.

Rather, it is on the ground of fellowship established by the word of God that is proclaimed by the presbytery.

It is on the ground of that fellowship that we have expression as a firstfruits believer.

The fellowship of the presbytery

The apostle John established the same point. 'That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life.' 1Jn 1:1-4.

It is important to note that John spoke of a group called 'we'. He said, 'We have done this' or 'We have done that.' In so doing, he highlighted the nature of the fellowship of the presbytery as those who receive and declare a word *from outside themselves*.

That is, they declare a word from God for everyone within the body of Christ. *Illumination* occurs when that word is received and believed. A person is not in the presbytery because they are inherently illuminated.

They are part of a presbytery because they *participate in such a fellowship according to their name and sanctification*, and by their *appointment by God the Father Himself*.

In fact, it is the Holy Spirit who sets apart each to their function in the body.

Do you see that this fellowship functions by hearing, seeing and by looking upon? The term 'looking upon' means 'repentance.' Considering the word that we hear, we look into the face of Christ and turn from our fallen practices.

John then said, 'Our hands have handled concerning the word of life.' 1Jn 1:1.

This means rightly dividing the word of truth and then expressing it according to sanctification. That was a mouthful, but that is what John said. This is the nature of fellowship.

Fellowship with the presbytery

Furthermore, John declared that 'the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that *you also may have fellowship with us*.' 1Jn 1:2-3.

So, the nature of the fellowship of the presbytery is the fellowship to which we are being connected - 'you may *also* have fellowship with us'.

Here is the key point.

'And truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.' 1Jn 1:3.

Why is the Holy Spirit not included in this list? It is because He is the One who *enables* our fellowship with the Father and the Son.

Joy made full in fellowship

John then said, 'And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.' 1Jn 1:4.

Now, where have we heard about joy?

We have learned that joy was experienced when the seed of the word fell on *stony ground*.

There, joy indicated that the seed which had gone into the ground had *germinated*, but the joy fell away because that stony heart could not get over offence. A person with a stony heart will stumble at Christ, who is the stumbling stone and the rock of offence.

However, in contrast to having a heart of stony ground, our joy is being made full when the joy that indicates our 'germination' as a son of God comes to full maturity and expression as firstfruits.

The first indication of the germination of the word in our hearts is joy, but that is not *fullness* yet.

John said that following our initial birth, which indicates that we are 'good ground', that joy comes to fullness, full joy, or full expression as firstfruits when we join the fellowship of the presbytery, which is the fellowship of the Father and His Son.

How do we join that fellowship? We join it by *receiving the word of Christ* that is proclaimed by the presbytery.

John was saying, in effect, 'We are doing this so that you will not fall away. That is where you are rooted and grounded in love, and this is where you come to full maturity as a son of God.'

Christ our Firstfruits

We'll talk a little more about the activity of those who are part of the presbytery, so that we can be joined to that fellowship, and so that *our joy can be full*.

One of our key points is that Christ is the Firstfruits. 1Co 15:20,23.

'Christ, having risen from the dead, is the Firstfruits of those who have died in Him.'

The point is that He died; and this is the death that He died. And He rose again, or ascended. So, when He *ascended*, He was the Firstfruits.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul addressed this very same principle in relation to the activity of the body of Christ, which also is the sheaf of firstfruits.

Grace, the gift of Christ

However, Paul added an element to this sheaf, or this activity of the body; and the element that he added was *grace* - grace, as a gift of Christ for the body.

'But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men".'

Then, it is as though Paul stepped back to explain what it means for Christ to have ascended.

'Now this expression, "He ascended", what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth [this refers to His death]? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might *fill* all things.' Eph 4:7-8.

Jesus gave gifts to men

Now Christ is the Head of His body, the church. Last week we said that He was the first Seed in the sheaf of firstfruits.

What did He do when He became the first of the firstfruits? He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers for the equipping of the saints, for the work of their ministry for the edification or the building up of the body of Christ.'

'Until we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.' Eph 4: 11-13.

Therefore, among the presbytery are men to whom Christ has given ascension gift grace - some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastor teachers. Their work is to oversee the church and to equip every believer for their ministry as a member of the body of Christ.

The work of an overseer, a steward

The presbyters have been set as overseers of the church. And their work, through the declaration of the word - and Paul called it 'the word of His grace' - is to equip every person who receives that word, both in the presbytery and in the church, for the work of their ministry.

Jesus described these ones as 'stewards', and a steward is an administrator, who is 'over the house'. The work of their administration is to 'feed' all those who are in the house. These stewards are slaves who are set over the whole household to give everyone in the household their food at the right time.

Jesus said, 'Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household [an overseer, a shepherd], to give them their portion of food in due season?' Luk 14:42.

Overseers bring the word of present truth, in due season

The term 'due season' refers to the word that is proclaimed by the Spirit, *presently*. It is a portion of food at the right time - in due season.

It is the word that is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. It is the light that is *in front of our next step*. It is not the *full* statement. It is the word for our next step on the pathway that leads to life.

This is the work of those who have received ascension gift grace from Christ. Their work is to proclaim this word. It is a portion that is sufficient for our next step. It is called 'the word of present truth'.

An overseer must not draw back

Jesus then went on to declare, 'Blessed is that servant whom his master will find doing when he so comes.' Joh 12:43.

This is an amazing point. It means that, for a person who has been appointed to steward in the house of God in this manner, their sonship, which is their blessing, their inheritance, depends on this work.

They cannot draw back when they encounter the grumbling and complaining of those in the body of Christ. They must continue to faithfully steward the word and proclaim it in due season. If they cease, then they do not receive their sonship.

An overseer must not overrule the faith of another

On the other hand, they cannot beat the slaves to try to conform them to the word that is being proclaimed.

They have no right to take dominion over the faith of another. In fact, the Scripture declares that if they do, when Christ comes, He will cut

them in two and appoint them their place with the unbelievers.

So, the work of the steward is very important, and it is essential that they maintain a vital connection to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings.

It is within that fellowship that the capacity, the grace and the life that belongs to them is found. And it is this that they are to minister as food, or light, for the body.

Receiving the faith of the Son

Overseers fulfil the work of giving the household their portion of food in due season as they lay down, or share, the word of grace within the presbytery and the church.

In other words, this is 'equipping of the saints by the word'. As we noted earlier, the ministry of the word of God is through the ascension gift graces that belong to Christ, and this establishes the ground, or context, of fellowship.

Those who hear and receive the ministry of this word obtain the faith of the Son of God. 'Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.' Rom 10:17. Those who hear and receive the ministry of this word obtain the faith of the Son of God.

So, we receive the same spirit of faith that belonged to Christ.

In this regard, what did Paul say? He said, 'Having received the *same* spirit of faith, I *believed* and therefore I *spoke*.' It means, 'I *participated*'.

Speaking, remember, is *conversation* and *conduct*.

Faith and the initiative to participate

So, the word is being *proclaimed* to us, we're *hearing* it, and we are *receiving faith*.

And the *evidence* of our receiving faith is the *initiative* that we have, though the spirit of adoption, or the spirit of faith, to *participate*.

Do you see that no-one demands that of us?

The word is being proclaimed by faithful messengers and, as it is being received, we obtain the faith of the son of God to participate in the same way that Christ Himself participated when He heard the word from God the Father.

A person who has received this faith is able to *believe* the word, and is motivated to *participate* in

the fellowship of Yahweh, from which the word of God proceeds.

This is what it means to 'receive an introduction by faith into the grace in which we stand and rejoice in the hope of obtaining our sonship'.

As Paul declared, 'Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith [or, we have received an introduction by faith] into this grace in which we stand.' Rom 5: 1-2.

So, if we are in that grace, then we exult, or rejoice, in the hope of becoming a son of God.

Faith is by hearing, receiving and walking in the word of His grace

So, the word grants us faith, if we *accept* that faith.

And no-one is compelling, pushing, cajoling, demanding or assaulting a person to *make* them participate.

But, if you *receive* the word, that word contains, or grants to you, faith. And that faith grants you an 'introduction into grace', which is the very fellowship from which the word has come.

When you are established in that fellowship, you *rejoice* in your sonship. You do not only delight that you *are* a son of God, but you delight in the *attaining* of your sonship as you continue to walk in the grace of the word that is proclaimed.

This is actually where the throne of grace is. This is the point of *connection* with the fellowship of Yahweh Himself.

Faith is proclaimed, and becomes our accountability. We remember that Paul, having explained that it is the *Father* who establishes us together with the presbytery in Christ, then said that the presbytery must not take dominion over another person's faith. 2Co 1:24.

The point is that faith is *proclaimed*.

And faith is *exercised* by an individual.

No dominion is exercised over another's faith, and no-one loses the *accountability* to present themselves as a living sacrifice to God. Rom 12: 1.

The Holy Spirit as a guarantee

Earlier, we read, 'Now He who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed is God, who

sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.' 2Co 1:22-23.

'Not that we have dominion over your faith, but we are fellow workers for your *joy*, for by *faith* you stand.' 2Co 1:24.

How good is that! Paul was explaining, 'We're not taking dominion over your faith but, if you hear our word, which we are proclaiming to you, you will be a fellow worker with us, because you will be joined to the same fellowship from which we are speaking.'

And what will happen? You obtain *joy*. Isn't that exactly what the apostle John said? Paul and John said the same thing.

He was saying, 'A fellow worker is for your *joy*', and then, 'By what means are you standing? It is by your faith.'

The reality of firstfruits is found only on the ground of fellowship, established by the word of Christ, through the presbytery.

However, we have the expression of firstfruits because, by faith, we desire to participate.

It is not enforced; it is not demanded; it is not cajoled; it is not taken from us.

But, when we receive faith, the evidence that we have received it, and that it is working by the love of God poured into our heart, is our desire to *participate*. Love gives.

The proceeding word is given by offering

So, having received the word that is laid down by offering, we offer ourselves for participation in the very same fellowship.

This is what firstfruits looks like.

So, we can then see that the grounds of our heart, that are other than good ground, refer to those tendencies within us, prompted by Satan, that war against this expression of firstfruits.

Fundamentally, these grounds of our heart indicate our *disconnection* from the fellowship of Christ in which our sonship has its expression and multiplication.

Failing to keep our heart with all diligence

If we fail to keep our hearts with all diligence by the Holy Spirit, we may, for example, become inordinately dependent on leaders or on our *connection* to leaders for the assurance of our

sonship, expecting them to define how we are to live.

That would be like birds coming and plucking away the seed, wouldn't it? That is a heart of wayside ground. We might become disaffected or offended, resulting in our disconnection from fellowship. That is stony ground.

Or, we might become fatigued, disgruntled, judgemental or reactive, which is indicative of a thorny-ground heart. Do you see that these grounds not only point, in the first instance, to our individual loss of sonship, but they also explain the reason why we disconnect from fellowship?

It is because of our disconnection from fellowship that the life of our sonship dies away. We can have no expression as sons of God outside the fellowship of Christ where the Father has placed us.

We often blame others for these feelings, when, in fact, the issue is our own heart. We might think, 'I was unfairly treated' or 'that was not done properly' or 'I have a lot of reasons why my discontent or my offence was justifiable'.

In one Spirit, we express our name and sonship

But, the most fundamental and obvious point is that no-one was more unfairly treated than Jesus, and you have been given the Spirit to connect you to the fellowship of His offering and sufferings.

If you maintain the right to be a victim, you are saying that you do not want to be of one Spirit with Jesus Himself, and that you will not be in one Spirit with the one against whom you hold a grudge.

That means that you have no expression, by the Spirit, of your own name and sonship.

The evidence that a person has been established in Christ by the Spirit, and as part of the body of Christ, and is expressing their life as a son of God, is that they are happy.

They demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit, which is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, patience, goodness, kindness. This fruit is the evidence of the firstfruits of the Spirit. They are all expressions of *grace* to another.

Do you see that the expression of firstfruits has nothing to do with my own sense of validity and certainty?

It has everything to do with being *established and secure* in Christ, and with *ministering* His life to another.

Encourage one another through love

I want to emphasise the point that we can encourage one another *to abide in Christ*.

We all, at times, will have expressions that are of wayside (fallow ground), stony (offences) and thorny ground, but we must continue to love one another.

Sometimes we need to simply 'get alongside' a brother or a sister and say, 'We think better of you. You belong here. You are a son of God, and you have an expression in this fellowship. Let go of "that". That is not of God; that is discontent.'

Will we help one another in that way?

I love the way in which John expressed this in his first letter. He said, 'And now, little children [John was addressing all of us as little children], 'Abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be *ashamed* before Him at His coming.' 1Jn 2: 28.

The three other grounds - wayside, stony and thorny - are all the way of *shame*.

So, let's be those who are of good courage, because we *are* good ground, and are those who continue to walk by faith.

We do not draw back from Him who speaks, but we accept that, as Christ speaks, the Lord reveals where we need to put these issues off. This is how we *keep our heart* by the Holy Spirit with all diligence.

Grace and fellowship

Let us consider further the nature of the *grace* that we are 'introduced to' by receiving the word of faith. Grace is received by faith.

From the establishment of the New Testament church, following the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, there were four dimensions of grace that are foundational to fellowship in the body of Christ. The overseers, or stewards, declare this fellowship as they proclaim the word.

And the reality of the ground that is established by this word is *fellowship*.

This fellowship has aspects that are the four dimensions of the grace of God that were foundational from the beginning of the church. The following Scripture highlights this point.

Peter proclaimed his Pentecost sermon, and 'when they heard this, they were cut to the heart'. Recognising that Peter and the rest of the apostles were part of the fellowship of a presbytery, they said, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' They did not make Peter their 'guru', which would be wayside ground, wouldn't it?

'Men and brethren, what shall we do?'

Peter answered their question, saying, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'

That is the sequence that we have already discussed. Having heard the word, we have come into Christ and we are *sealed with the Holy Spirit*.

Peter then said, 'For the promise is to you and to your children.' This is the promise to them of an *eternal* inheritance.

And this is the *guarantee* that is the firstfruits of the Spirit.

'The promise is to you and all your children and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call. And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." Then those who gladly received his word were baptised.' Act 2: 9-41.

Receive the word gladly

I would like to exhort us all not to receive the word under compulsion or under obligation.

This is the word of life from heaven! We can give our ear to hear it. Then we are disciplined by it and gladly receive the word.

'Then those who *gladly received* this word were baptised, and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.'

The four dimensions of grace and fellowship in connection, relationship and expression

'And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.' Act 2: 41-42.

That is the apostles' *doctrine* and the apostles' *fellowship*.

Now, these are the four foundations that were established because of the word that was proclaimed. Those who gladly heard it obtained faith, and received their introduction into the grace in which they stood.

This is amazing, isn't it? This is what Paul wrote of in Romans, and what happened at the beginning of the church.

The four dimensions of grace are the apostles' doctrine, the apostles' fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayers.

These four describe our practical *connection* to the fellowship of Yahweh.

The program of the church, which has its expression in these four foundations, is how we find our practical connection to the fellowship of Yahweh.

Do you see that it is not mystical at all. This is 'in-Spirit', isn't it? It is *the capacity of Eternal Spirit* for relationship with God, and for relationship with one another.

These *relationships* are based upon the four foundations of the apostles' doctrine, the apostles' fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayers.

Each of these four dimensions of grace has both a *public expression* and a *house to house expression*. Importantly, the stewardship of these four dimensions of fellowship, both publicly and from house to house, belong to the *presbytery*.

In our next session we will consider these four foundations in more detail.