

THE APOSTLES' DOCTRINE

Peter Hay, prepared for communion word focus, Sunday 23 August, 2020

Transcription of recording, slightly edited

Introduction

Last session, we concluded by making the point that there are four dimensions of grace that are *foundational to fellowship* in the body of Christ.

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

Dimensions of grace stewarded by the presbytery

Each of these four dimensions of grace has a *public expression* and a *house to house expression*.

One of the key points that we made is that the *stewardship* of these four foundations of fellowship is 'the ground of fellowship' that is established by the word of Christ, which is proclaimed from the fellowship of the presbytery.

These four dimensions of grace have a public expression and a house to house expression, and they are stewarded both publicly, and house to house, by the presbytery.

A new understanding of public and house to house expression is needed

Although public and house to house expressions of fellowship are foundational to the church, many of us have been somewhat unclear about these two contexts.

We've generally considered the public expression of fellowship to be our program that is organised by the leaders of the church, such as our meetings or events.

Then we've considered house to house fellowship to be the initiative and expression that a house has toward others.

There is logic to that in that our public expression would be what is programmed as a meeting and all people can attend; and then house to house expression is the initiative that belongs to a house toward another household.

However, this is *not* what the Scriptures teach us about the ministry of the word, and its implications for us, both publicly and from house to house.

Neither of those two understandings is what the Scriptures reveal about ministry publicly and house to house.

What does it mean for these two contexts of ministry to be under the stewardship of the presbytery?

As we've already noted, both these contexts of ministry belong to the stewardship of the presbytery. We need to understand, firstly, what they are.

What is the public expression and what is the expression, house to house?

What does it mean for these two contexts of fellowship to be under the stewardship of the presbytery?

And what does that mean for us, in terms of our personal accountability, and the accountability of our households?

Hopefully, this will be quite straightforward, and will help to clarify some of our long-standing misunderstandings of public and house to house gatherings.

Paul's testimony regarding the two contexts of ministry

To begin, let's read Paul's testimony after he had spent a number of years in Ephesus, where he called the elders of Ephesus to him because he was leaving. Paul explained to them the nature of his ministry, and he specifically addressed the two contexts of public and house to house ministry.

'From Miletus he [Paul] sent to Ephesus and called for the elders [or presbytery] of the church. And when they had come to him, he said to them: "You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived

among you [the 'manner' is his demeanour; the way he engaged; the way he ministered], serving the Lord [there's a slavehood element here; a bondsman of Christ] with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews [this is Paul ministering in weakness, speaking in Christ and joined to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings]; how I kept back nothing that was *helpful*.'

The word 'helpful' here is the word 'profitable' and, in relation to the good ground and the sower and the seed, Paul was saying that his ministry of the word was to see *fruit* come forward from those who received his ministry.

He said, 'I kept back nothing that was going to be [profitable for good fruit]', but proclaimed it to you [this is both the word that is sowing the seed and the water of the word to bring the increase] and [in relation to this ministry of the word] taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.' Act 20:17-21.

These are the first foundations necessary for going on to perfection. '*Repentance* towards God and *faith* towards our Lord Jesus Christ.' Heb 6.

The point to note is that it was Paul, who was an apostle of Christ and also part of a presbytery, who taught the word of God publicly and from house to house.

The initiative for this ministry, both publicly and house to house, did not rest with the houses, did it? It rested with Paul, as one with a particular grace, and among a presbytery in Ephesus.

Due to this initiative, both public and house to house, Paul declared to the Ephesians and indeed all the churches of that whole region, 'the whole counsel of God'. It would have been amazing to have been in a context where you heard the full statement of God's Everlasting Covenant!

Public and house to house ministry established following the Day of Pentecost

These two contexts of ministry had their beginning when the church was first established in Jerusalem following the Day of Pentecost. This was the statement when three thousand people were saved.

'So continuing daily with *one accord* in the temple [this is one Spirit, but the point I'm leaning on is the 'temple' context], and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.' Act 2:46-47.

Another explanatory passage was after the apostles had been rounded up by the Jewish council, were put in jail and then addressed by the council and told not to proclaim the word. Of course, they said, 'We're under compulsion from God; sorry about that.'

'So they [the apostles] departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, *they* [the apostles] did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.' Act 5:41-42.

Communion is a house to house gathering

Before we consider house to house ministry, we will start with the public ministry to understand what that is, and what its relationship was with the temple.

Sometimes, we think that gathering together for communion in a big church, for example, is the equivalent of the temple, but that's not so.

When we gather for *communion*, it is actually a *house to house* initiative, and not a public expression.

PUBLIC MINISTRY

Let's consider what public expression is, and why the teaching in the temple was a public expression of these four foundations of fellowship of the church.

The public ministry of the apostles was *the proclamation of the word to the Jewish nation*.

Many people gathered to Solomon's portico, but the word was actually being proclaimed to the whole Jewish nation, not specifically to those who were already saved.

The orientation of a public ministry today is a little different.

The public ministry of the apostles was the proclamation of the word to the Jewish nation.

The relationship between public expression and the temple

In the early church, this public setting was the temple.

It is important to note that the temple wasn't *only* the 'church' of the Jewish nation.

The temple was *the hub of Jewish culture*.

The whole of the economy ran through, and because of, the practices and dynamics of the temple.

When they were speaking there, they were actually speaking to the whole Jewish nation. It was as though they were on a national platform in the space from which the whole culture of the Jews had its expression.

Do you see that the public expression was more to do with *proximity to the whole nation* than it was to the specific teaching of those who were already saved?

The hub of Jewish culture had been given to the apostles by the Lord, even though the Jewish council presumed to have authority over the building and the business that was conducted within it. The business was not necessarily economic; it was *all* the activities in the temple.

The Jewish council presumed that they were the ones with the authority over the temple and what happened in it. However, the Lord Himself had given that context to the apostles, to proclaim the gospel to the Jewish nation.

Amazingly, even though the Jewish council presumed this authority over that context, the apostles were completely *unhindered* in the proclamation of the gospel at that time, in that space. It had been given to them simply because God said, by His angel, 'That is yours.'

This next Scripture describes the context of *continuing daily in the temple and house to house*.

This was where the apostles had been rounded up and were standing before the Jewish council.

'Then the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation, and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison.

'But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, "Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life".' Act 5:17-20.

That's amazing, isn't it? Not even being bound in jail could stop them from this work of *publicly* proclaiming 'all the words of this life' because God had said, 'Go and do it' '

All the chains were undone, all the gates were opened and they literally went straight to the temple and started proclaiming again. It's amazing, isn't it?

This is the *public* proclamation and ministry of the word.

In this current age, the public ministry of the gospel has been constrained

In our current age of the church, true public ministry of the gospel has been constrained.

I'm sure you will have seen large gatherings and lots of religious activity, but the reality is that the gospel of sonship *has not been proclaimed to the whole earth*.

This public ministry is not having its full expression at this time. Why is that so?

It's because we have to give our *ear to hear* what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

His focus has been the call for presbyteries and churches to be established in the lampstand pattern that Paul set up through his ministry to the Gentiles.

Called to be restored to the administration from which we have fallen; restoration of the gospel of sonship

We don't have a public proclamation yet, because we are all being called *to be restored* to the administration from which we, as a whole church, have fallen.

There is no point in proclaiming a gospel in which we are not yet fully established.

Fundamental to this call has been *the restoration of the gospel of sonship* and its implications for us as presbyteries, as congregations, of lampstand churches, and as families and as individuals.

Do you see that this is where the focus of the Spirit has been? It has been on *us*, hasn't it?

It has been on us establishing the foundation of *repentance*, so that we are *turning* from dead works to the *light* of His word.

We are understanding what it means to forsake our *own* faith, and to forsake our *own* belief about how we are to live, and what it means to be a Christian and who God is.

This is so that we can obtain the faith that comes in His word, and to participate in a *culture of offering*.

This is *the culture of Yahweh* Himself.

The mandate to proclaim publically is the ministry of 'the morning star' to prepare the way of the Lord

The mandate of publicly proclaiming the coming Day of the Lord is symbolised in the book of Revelation as 'the morning star'. Rev 2:18-29.

This ministry of 'the morning star' is the ministry of the spirit and power of Elijah.

A few months ago, we took a great deal of time to talk about the ministry of Elijah in the church and also in our families.

This ministry is *to prepare the way of the Lord*, and it is given to those presbyteries who overcome the spirit of Jezebel, as well as the other leavens in the church.

These include the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, the doctrine of Balaam, and all the other leavens

that Paul addressed, particularly in his letter to the Corinthians.

We must give heed to what the Spirit is saying, in relation to the spirit of Jezebel, in our *own* families and in our *own* church. We must *turn* from our Nicolaitan ways (congregationalism), and our own Balaam expectations of the 'guru' who has a great gift that we can follow and benefit from.

Until that happens, and we overcome these expressions of the synagogue of Satan in the church, then that *morning star ministry will not be restored to us*, and we won't have a public expression.

Do you see that the public expression is the ministry of the morning star, preparing the way of the Lord, *for the whole world*?

Being established in repentance and faith - the word restored to us to proclaim publically

We are giving thanks to the Lord, even though it can be confronting at times. It can be confronting when the Lord comes and speaks to us about our marriages, and our families, about the spirit of Jezebel in the church, and about other leavens from which we are being called to turn away.

As we are established in *repentance*, and are *obtaining faith* in the word to participate in what is *true*, not only are we receiving the blessing of God, and being established as a firstfruits community, but that word is also being *restored to us* so that we can *proclaim it* more broadly.

Praise the Lord! He is restoring to us a public expression.

This ministry of Elijah is being fully restored to the 'angels'. Angels are *aggelos*, who are the 'stars' in Christ's hand; they are the presbyteries in Christ's hand.

And how is the ministry of Elijah fully restored?

It is occurring because the *aggelos* are responding to the ministry of Elijah by giving attention to the reformation of their marriages, their families and the church.

When this ministry of Elijah is fully restored, they will announce the coming Day of the Lord to the whole world.

In this season of restriction, we have begun to touch something of this ministry. This has happened as the Lord Himself has both prompted us, and enabled us, to minister the gospel of sonship that is being restored to us, through the global platform of the worldwide web.

The focus to feed those in the house has begun to have a broader, 'public', effect

Here's an important point.

We have not *set out* to proclaim the word to a worldwide audience because we think that everyone needs to hear it.

In fact, our focus has been completely the opposite.

The reason we have had to do this is to minister spiritual food to every house in our fellowship.

Do you see that that is the responsibility of overseers, stewards, a presbytery?

It's not the focus *out*, in the first instance; it's the focus *towards feeding*, in due season, *those who are in the house*.

As we, as presbyters and messengers, have given attention to our own houses, and have proclaimed the word as the food to sustain every household with whom we have fellowship, the word has begun to have a broader reach and effect, particularly to 'the lost sheep of the house of Israel'.

The lost sheep of the house of Israel are those whom the Lord identifies as belonging to Him because they have heard His word and have been born - but they are 'un-shepherded'.

They are lost and they are vulnerable because they are not being cared for.

But now, they are beginning to hear the word and, because they are sheep, they are hearing the voice of the Shepherd.

While we've given attention to what the Spirit is saying to us, *He Himself* has begun to *open up a more public expression*.

HOUSE TO HOUSE MINISTRY

Let's now consider house to house ministry.

We can see that the public expression has actually nothing to do with whether we meet in a big building or in small contexts.

It *has* to do with what the *focus of the message* is.

With that understanding, let's consider house to house ministry.

Communion – a house to house activity

'Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.' Act 6:1.

Remember that, on the Day of Pentecost, three thousand souls were saved and, from that point on, 'they continued daily with one accord breaking their bread, *from house to house*'.

That means they were having *communion* from house to house; and were eating their food.

The eating of that food is *not* the communion food; it is actually hospitality and simply enjoying fellowship together with gladness and simplicity of heart.

You can imagine that, as the church continued to grow daily, that was a massive company of people. As a public and a house to house ministry was being established, the number of disciples continued to grow massively.

Luke recounted, 'Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables.

'Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this *business* [the 'business' of serving tables]; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word".' Act 6:2-4.

Immediately, we see groups of twelve and seven.

The focus of the *twelve* is on the stewardship of the *word*.

And the focus of the *seven* is on the tables – ‘the serving of tables’.

It’s important to note that they did not appoint these seven deacons, who were full of the Holy Spirit and full of wisdom, to run a church café.

‘The serving of tables’ refers to *the administration of the communion from house to house*.

House to house ministry - the administration of the word in relation to communion

Do you see the point? These deacons were actually the ones who were given the responsibility to ensure that the *word* that was being laid down by these twelve apostles was being *administered as communion*.

When Paul established the lampstand church, the work of the twelve apostles was then represented by the order of five, which is the ascension gift graces of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor-teacher, as a shepherding company, or overseers of the church.

These twelve gave their attention to the word being laid down to others.

Then there was a *deaconing* administration that was ensuring a house to house administration of that word, as communion for all those people.

Do you see that ‘house to house’ was the administration of the word in relation to the communion, *in the houses in Jerusalem*?

There was a *public* proclamation that was out to the whole Jewish nation.

Then there was a *house to house* administration which included all those households who are already part of the company of the church. This ensured that no-one missed out on participating in the communion fellowship.

The seven deacons were appointed by the twelve apostles, represented by the apostolic administration of apostles, prophets, evangelists and teachers in the Ephesian pattern. These deacons were to administrate the tables. This was the *stewardship* of the church fellowship, house to house and, in particular, the breaking of bread.

Remember that the church in Jerusalem ‘broke bread from house to house’. That is, they participated in the communion meal from house to house, even though they gathered to Solomon’s portico to hear the preaching and teaching of the apostles.

The New Testament pattern for communion - house to house fellowship, irrespective of context

The point that I want to make is that the New Testament pattern for *communion* is a *house to house* reality, irrespective of whether we meet in someone’s house or whether we gather together as a larger congregation.

The principle is that we are gathering, *as houses*, to receive this ministry to a house. This is gathering ‘house to house’.

It’s not the building that we meet in that defines the nature of our fellowship.

It is actually *the initiative of the presbytery*, who call or who are stewarding the *communion fellowship*, that defines the nature of our fellowship.

In Jerusalem, the context was communion fellowship house to house.

In Corinth, the church that Paul established didn’t meet and have their communion house to house. They actually gathered together in one large context to have communion. Even though they were meeting all together in a large context, it was still a house to house initiative, because it was communion.

The New Testament pattern is that the communion is a house to house fellowship.

It is a gathering of believing households to eat the bread as a participation in the offering body of Christ, and to drink the cup as a participation in the life of Christ, the Vine. This is because they are part of the sheepfold of Christ.

It is not a public meeting, even though it may be held in a building that is open to the public.

For example, we might meet together for communion and anyone can come, but we are not meeting so that the word can be proclaimed to everyone. We are meeting so that we, as a

community of households who are part of Christ's sheepfold, can be fed or participate in the Lord's table, and then multiply that fellowship.

While the church in Jerusalem participated in the communion meal in houses, the households of Corinth gathered together in *one* place. The Scriptures clearly illustrate this.

Paul said, 'First of all, when you *come together* as a church.' 1 Co 11:18.

He was talking about everyone gathering, and was exhorting that this is a necessary and viable reality to fellowship.

'Therefore when you *come together* in one place.' 1Co 11:20.

'Therefore, my brethren, when you *come together to eat*, tarry for one another.' 1Co 11:33.

Paul was instructing us about out how we are to come together for communion.

The focus is on stewarding and teaching the word house to house

You can see the point that, currently, in our context, most of the elements of our program as a church are *house to house* realities that are stewarded, or administrated, by the presbytery.

Do you see that most of our gatherings are not a 'public' expression?

As I said, there are going to be some elements of public communication, but the focus is not on that public expression.

The *focus* is on *stewarding the word and teaching it*, house to house.

Gathering in our homes

The ministry of the word and the stewardship of the fellowship of the church, house to house, does not mean that individual households are not free to take initiative to meet with one another; or to pray with one another; or to study the word together; or to evangelise; or to simply enjoy one another's company.

Every household is completely free, is completely accountable, and has their own responsibility, to do all those things.

In fact, it is commendable if you gather together because you love speaking about the word, you want to pray, or you just enjoy being together.

It's simply that that is *not* house to house fellowship as the Scriptures define it.

Do you see that every household is completely free and has complete liberty to take whatever initiative they like?

But that is *not* house to house fellowship.

That is simply the initiative of an individual to get together with other Christian houses.

It is entirely commendable to do that. But we need to be clear that taking those initiatives as a household is not house to house fellowship.

House to house gathering - the stewardship of the presbytery

House to house gathering is under the *stewardship of the presbytery*.

When a household prioritises their own initiatives over and even against the stewardship of house to house fellowship by the presbytery, they *fall short* of the grace of God.

It is not that the presbytery is uneasy about people prioritising their own initiatives over the church program - as though the church program is the most important thing in the whole world.

Rather, it is because we know that *the word is ministered*, or the grace of the word is only available, in the context of *fellowship defined by the word*.

If we forsake that by pursuing another form of fellowship, we become a *faction*. It becomes an *expression of leaven* that is over and against Christ Himself.

Grace is the fellowship established by the word

The reason we need to be clear on this is not because it is troubling that someone would forsake the program; it is because, if you do, you are doing injury to yourself.

You are not able to obtain faith to stand in grace, because *grace is the fellowship* which is

defined or established by the word, and it is in that grace that you rejoice in obtaining your sonship.

Pursuing fellowship by offering

We note this exhortation by Paul. 'Pursue peace with all people, and holiness.' Heb 12:14.

Holiness is sanctification – that is you being the person whom the Lord made you to be.

We learned last week that you cannot be who the Lord named you to be outside of Christ.

When Paul said, 'Pursue peace with all people', he was exhorting us to pursue the fellowship whereby *holiness* is expressed; that is, everyone *making offering by sanctification*.

We need to be in the context of offering to do that.

'Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no-one will see the Lord.' Heb 12:14.

There is no capacity for *illumination* if we are not pursuing holiness.

And how do we 'pursue holiness'?

We do so by *hearing the word* that defines our sanctification.

By receiving that word, we can participate. This is the expression of *faith*, isn't it?

'Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no-one will see the Lord.'

Repentance from our own understanding - looking into the face of Christ in our brethren

Now, where we see 'looking' in the Scriptures, it refers to the activity of *repentance*.

This means looking into the face of Christ - by doing what?

It is by *turning from our own understanding!*

Paul said that we need to be one who is turning and *looking* into the face of Christ.

And where do we see the face of Christ? It is seen in the face of our *brethren!*

This is the ministry of the body.

Falling short of grace

'Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God.'

So, if we are not in the context of *holiness*, where we are *looking* into the face of Christ and receiving the word as it is ministered as present truth to us, we will fall short of the grace of God.

That is because we are not standing in grace, and we are not *obtaining grace*.

If we are not obtaining grace, it means that we are not *growing as a son of God*.

'Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.' Heb 12:15.

Do you see that if we do that, then the seed of our sonship begins to die away, but something *thorny* grows up instead, and becomes *prickly*?

This type of expression will be agitated and contrary, particularly around the church program generally.

It is as though there is some expectation or thought that their own liberty has been curtailed. But that is a *deception*.

Paul said, 'You won't see the Lord. You are not being illuminated. You are not seeing that liberty is found in the fellowship of faith. That is where the grace is, so that you can *be* the son of God.'

So there is an administered and deaconed house to house fellowship, where, if we are giving ourselves to that, by faith – remember, no-one is taking dominion over our faith; we are, by faith, participating – we are recipients of the very blessing that the Lord is endeavouring or wanting us to obtain. And we are being relieved of all our other agitations.

The point is that that is the context in which the Lord is establishing us, and He is granting to us that participation so that we will not fall short.

The four foundations of the body of Christ

So, over the next little while, we are going to talk about these four foundations in detail. I am

sure you will agree that this is a large body of content.

These are the *foundations* of the body of Christ, the church, and there is a lot to say about this. Obviously, even if we spent weeks on each one, we would not cover them all. But we can highlight some key foundations, and as we talk about it further in our houses, an understanding will be able to multiply among us.

The apostles' doctrine is the word of present truth

The first foundation is the 'apostles' doctrine'.

I want to start by saying what the apostles' doctrine is *not*.

Now, even the term, 'apostles' doctrine', for some people, will generate a 'jarring' response because it appears as though there is a group of people called 'apostles', who are somehow defining a word that is other than what is written by the apostles.

That is *not* what it means at all. You will see that it is quite straightforward.

Let us begin by dispelling some misconceptions about the word of present truth that is preached in the church. And that is the first point, isn't it?

The *apostles' doctrine is the word of present truth* that is proclaimed in every generation of the church.

It is the word of present truth.

The apostles' doctrine is not an alternative to the Scriptures

The first thing the apostles' doctrine *is not*, is that it is *not* an *alternative to the Scriptures* that were written by the apostles.

It is not that our books, for example, and sets of notes are 'alternatives' to the Scriptures.

Rather, they are part of a *conversation* that helps us to *engage* with Scripture.

The apostles' doctrine is not found in catechisms and creeds

The second observation is that the apostles' doctrine is *not* the *catechisms and creeds* upon which denominations are built.

In these instances, these catechisms or creeds become a source of assurance of the truth, because the doctrine has a weight of history behind it.

Remember that when we were talking about wayside ground, we understood that putting our faith in a catechism or creed, as a sense of security or certainty for us, is *wayside ground*.

It is a 'vulture' that steals away the *truth*, which is our sonship by the Spirit.

And this is the key point!

Truth is not found in catechisms and creeds.

Truth is only found by the Spirit.

That is why the Scriptures call the Holy Spirit 'the Spirit of truth'.

We need to hear what the Spirit is saying; not place our security in a catechism and a creed.

The apostles' doctrine is not a commentary on the Scriptures; not theology

Thirdly, the apostles' doctrine is *not* a *commentary on the Scriptures*.

Nor is it the theological musings of scholars, be they ancient scholars or contemporary scholars. The apostles' doctrine is not merely theology, as though intellect and the application of academic process to the Scriptures establishes truth.

In fact - and the Scriptures are clear on this - if we engage with the Scriptures purely on the basis of some sort of scientific process or intellectual capacity, we will not *see* what comes from above. It is because our mode is fully what is natural.

Our natural ear and natural eye cannot see the things that have been promised by God. Even if our intentions are good, we are a nice person, and we are very diligent, it does not matter how hard we search them, those Scriptures will not *speak*. We will not arrive at *the truth*.

The apostles' doctrine is not the personal expression of a leader or a resource to service their ministry

The apostles' doctrine is *not* just the *personal expression* or motivational 'bent' of a leader.

Some leaders style themselves on being a particular type of messenger: 'I talk about this', or 'I talk about that'. That is not the word of present truth. That is just a *projection*, isn't it? It is just that person's bent and their comfort that is speaking that content.

It is not a *resource* to service the ministry endeavours of leaders.

The word that is laboured and toiled in, by the presbytery, is not then just given over to leaders to go and proclaim however they see fit, so that they can service their own congregations. It is not a 'resource'.

The word is to facilitate *fellowship*.

Where there is an expression outside of that fellowship, that person is 'peddling' the word. They are using the word to secure their own vocation. That is a peddler of the word. That is not what the apostles' doctrine is.

The apostles' doctrine is not a resource for the hearer

In the same way that it is not a resource for leaders to peddle the word, the apostles' doctrine is not a resource for the *hearers*, from which they can pick and choose.

This engagement with the word can become a *leaven* in the church, and it most certainly did in Corinth.

Paul addressed this, saying that some believers began to express a preference toward a particular messenger or a particular word. They were enamoured by the way some people spoke the word, and were a bit dismissive of others, not recognising that the word of present truth is *proclaimed from a fellowship*.

It is a *corporate* word that is ministered by *sanctification*.

Paul said that when this preference starts to happen, the people who engage with the word in this way become *puffed up*. The point is not that being puffed up is being contrary and difficult. The point is that being puffed up demonstrates a *leaven*.

And the leaven was to be taken *out* of the house, in relation to those who were supposed to be keeping the Passover.

That 'keeping of the Passover' is our identification as *part of the household of God*.

This alternative preference can lead to some becoming puffed up over and against messengers whom Christ sends. The messengers' words are resisted because the hearer says, 'I am of this person', or 'I am of that person, and I won't hear from you'.

Consequently, *the hearer falls short of the grace of God*, because this is *the messenger* whom Christ has sent.

We need to understand not only what the apostles' doctrine is, but how it is proclaimed, and how we are to interface with it, and to participate in it.

I think we have covered what the apostles' doctrine is *not*. Let us now look at what the apostles' doctrine is.

The apostles' doctrine is the word of present truth proclaimed in every generation of the church; the gospel of sonship

As I said before, the apostles' doctrine is the word of present truth that is proclaimed in every generation of the church.

This is the content of the gospel of sonship.

The apostle Peter introduced us to the term, 'the present truth'.

'Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble [How beautiful is that in relation to the grounds, particularly stony ground!]; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.' 2Pe 1:10-11.

'Be more diligent to make your call and election sure.'

Peter was clearly exhorting them to this point. He was saying, 'It is necessary to be diligent.'

Remember that keeping our heart with all diligence, making our call and election sure, granting an entrance into the kingdom, is *good ground* and *firstfruits*, isn't it?

And then Peter exhorted them, 'For this reason [or for the purpose of you becoming diligent to make your call and election sure] I was not negligent [I wasn't lazy] to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in *the present truth*.'

That is the *truth* that the Holy Spirit is revealing today.

Present truth - truth that the Holy Spirit is speaking today, laid down in presbytery fellowship

And Paul wrote in Hebrews, 'Today, if you *hear His voice*.' Heb 3:7.

This is what the Holy Spirit says. 'Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your heart.' That is addressing wayside ground; fallow ground.

Present truth is the word of God that the Spirit is speaking to the churches today.

It is first *laid down* in a *presbytery fellowship* by those who have *ascension gift grace* from Christ.

Remember that these are the gifts that Christ has given, having ascended into heaven. He is giving them to those who are part of the company of firstfruits.

And these gifts are 'some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastor-teachers.' They are the ones who lay down the word.

But, in relation to this ministry, there is a *priority*. In fact, *the order* is part of this priority.

The laying down of the word is initiated by those with *revelatory capacity* that is particular to the ascension gift grace of apostleship.

So, not everyone can do that. In fact, not many people have that grace.

But Christ Himself has *given* some this revelatory capacity, and they do lay down the word by offering.

That word is then *multiplied by offering*. We will speak further about this later.

So, present truth is the word of God that the Spirit is speaking to the churches.

The word of the *Father* – remember that the Father is the source of the word – which is given to *Christ* to minister, through the presbytery in His hand, has been illuminated *from the Scriptures* by the *Holy Spirit*.

This is a key point!

The word of present truth is *not* other than, nor in addition to, the Scriptures.

The Scriptures are understood and ministered only by the Spirit

However, the content of the Scriptures can be understood and ministered *only* by the capacity of the *Spirit*.

Can you see that the Scriptures are obviously the word of God, but they can be understood and ministered *only by the Spirit*?

The wisdom of God spoken in a mystery

Paul was unequivocal on this point. He said, 'However, we speak [remember, 'we' there is a presbytery] wisdom among those who are mature.' 1Co 2:6.

'Those who are mature' are firstfruits believers who have come onto the very fellowship of the presbytery itself. We were speaking about this last week.

'However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age.'

'The wisdom of this age' is the academics, the intellects.

'The rulers of this age' are the ones who define how society should live, and what is acceptable and what is not acceptable.

Paul said that the wisdom of God spoken is not that natural kind of wisdom. He said that that wisdom comes to nothing.

'But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery.' 1Co 2:7.

Do you see that it is a secret that is kept hidden?

Unless you have some way of understanding, or comprehending the mystery, it remains a mystery to you.

‘The hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory [this is the Everlasting Covenant], which none of the rulers of this age knew; for if they had known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

‘But as it is written: “[natural] Eye has not seen, nor [natural] ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man [it is not naturally there] the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”’ 1Co 2:7-9.

And how do you *love Him*? It is because you are *born of Him*.

So, the things of God are not *naturally* in a person, and we cannot attain it through natural engagement.

The Spirit reveals hidden mysteries

‘But God has revealed them to us *through His Spirit*. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him?

‘Even so no-one knows the things of God [contained in the Scriptures] except the *Spirit of God*. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things which have been freely given to us by God.’ 1Co 2:10-12.

The ministry of the Spirit does not mean that we don’t need to apply ourselves to study the Scriptures and to search out what the Spirit is saying.

So, on the one hand, the word of present truth is *not* coming through intellectual engagement. It is coming because of the Spirit of God. And it is in, and only in, a fellowship, isn’t it? Among those who are *mature* we preach what we have understood by the Spirit of God.

But, even though we have received the Spirit of God, and He is illuminating the word from the Scriptures, it does not mean there is no labour, or effort, involved in the ministry of the word.

The ministry of the word is labour and toil

I was thinking about the apostle Paul because he described his work, particularly to do with the ministry of the word, as ‘labour’ and ‘toil’. 1Th 2:9.

He called it labour and toil, and said he was labouring day and night studying the Scriptures and proclaiming the word. In his letter to Timothy, he said that his labour was accompanied with suffering. 1Ti 4:10. Do you see that this is quite a burden to carry?

It is interesting to think about Paul. He was full of grace to know all mysteries, full of the Holy Spirit, and he was the finest scholar of the Law in the whole of Judea. And yet, even so, he said ‘I labour and toil day and night.’

Those who are given to the word - the ascension gift grace brethren - are given to that because it is a labouring.

But there is *grace* for its ministry, and the capacity to understand is by the *Spirit*. It is an amazing provision, but it also requires *diligence*.

How the word of grace is multiplied

The word of grace is *multiplied*.

The word is *laid down* in a presbytery fellowship and, indeed, in a church fellowship, by those with ascension gift grace. That word has been *illuminated* from the Scriptures by the Spirit.

This word, then, is to be *received* by all of us in offering, as well.

Do you see that to receive the word in offering is, firstly, to let go of the view that the word that we are receiving is a *resource* to service us.

That would be trading, wouldn’t it? It would be to take something to then find ourselves.

No! What we do is to *receive* the word; and we receive it in *repentance*, because it is the foundation of our life.

We are turning from our own understanding and our own initiative for projection, and we are receiving that word, not because it then becomes something that we can express; rather, we are *receiving* it so it can *become our life*.

And by the faith that we are receiving in that word, we are then *speaking by our own sanctification*, or according to who the Lord named us to be.

The word of grace is multiplied when a person receives it *in offering*, and then ministers it *by offering* – that means they are laying their life down to reveal another, according to their sanctification.

In this regard, they are not revealing themselves; neither are they merely a conduit, a pipe, through which the word from one person can get to another, as though they are just a pipe through which that word can go. That is not it, either.

They are accountable, then, for what is in their heart and in their mouth, and to proclaim it.

As they do that, by grace, and according to the Spirit – remember, He is leading them into all truth; that is, their sanctification – the word that has been laid down *multiplies*. That is amazing, isn't it?

Grace comes from God, through gift, and the word that is laid down is amazing. But the more amazing thing is that, by offering, it *multiplies beyond* that fellowship.

The apostles' doctrine is ministered through deaconed ministry expressions

So ministry, by sanctification, occurs through the 'events' that are initiated by the presbytery as the word is taught publicly and from house to house.

Now, when I talk about 'events,' I mean *deaconed ministry expressions*.

We have the fellowship of the word, and then there are deacons who are full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, who have been given the accountability and capacity to administrate the proclamation of the apostles' doctrine.

Now, what are some of the ministry events through which the apostles' doctrine, which is the word of present truth, is proclaimed?

In our church program, this ministry of the apostles' doctrine, which is the word of present

truth, occurs through the communion word focus – that is somewhat obvious.

Then there are Sonseekers' lessons. So, Sonseekers' teachers, I hope you are aware that you are to receive the word that is laid down to you by offering, and to minister it *by offering* as one *in whose heart and mouth* is the apostles' doctrine.

You are a proclaimer of that word because that word is part of a *fellowship*, and you are joined to its expression in that event.

Do you see that Sonseekers is an event because it is a deaconed ministry expression? That is beautiful, isn't it?

So, we *all* have a participation in the ministry of the apostles' doctrine.

It is not just an elite group who minister the apostles' doctrine.

That word is laid down to us all, and we all have a participation in its expression, according to our sanctification. This is how it multiplies.

So, the apostles' doctrine is proclaimed through the communion word focus, Sonseekers' lessons, Bible School, body ministry, the teenagers program, the young adults program, seniors meetings, teens camps, youth seminars, Christian Women's Fellowship, major conventions.

These are all contexts in which this word is *proclaimed and multiplied by offering*, because it has been *received in offering*. We all have a participation in this very wonderful fellowship.

Communicating the apostles' doctrine - exemplifying the culture of offering

Now, for us, what does it mean to be part of the fellowship that is established by the apostles' doctrine; or, to be participating in the communication of the apostles' doctrine?

Keep in mind that this is not just a small group. There *are* a small number who have the grace to lay it down, but then its multiplication is among us *all*.

But those who are able to do this will have a particular demeanour, won't they?

They will be *exemplifying the culture of offering*.

Able to be easily adjusted to minister the word more effectively

As I was thinking about this, I was thinking about Apollos in the New Testament. The way that he is described by Luke, obviously under the instruction of Paul, is helpful in understanding how we are to interface with the word, and then to minister it *according to our sanctification*.

So, those who are part of this fellowship are able to be *adjusted* to more accurately and effectively minister the word.

This adjustment does not disqualify a person's ministry. If someone speaks the word, and it is not quite clear or does not quite 'hit the mark', the requirement for some adjustment does not disqualify a person.

The fact that they can *receive* the adjustment is the qualification.

We can be easily adjusted when we are not revealing ourself through ministry.

The people who becomes worked up or unsettled about themselves, when adjustment is needed, are obviously invested in the projection of themselves. And this was not the case for Apollos.

'Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus.

'This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord.'

This is beautiful, isn't it? This man received instruction. He was disciple. He had capacity to minister. He was eloquent, and he was mighty in the Scriptures. He was fervent in spirit. He was absolutely committed. He spoke and taught, accurately, the things of the Lord, although he only knew the baptism of John.

'So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

'And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace; for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.' Act 18:24-28.

Do you see that Apollos was a man who could be adjusted? He was not demeaned by that. It did not undermine his participation.

In fact, because he was able to be adjusted, he greatly helped those who believed through grace.

God brings the increase

And then, Paul himself wrote about Apollos. 'Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos?'

So, he addressed the church there because they started to prefer one or the other. 'Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one.' 1Co 3:5.

Now, Paul had a particular capacity, and that was to 'plant'. He had a revelatory capacity; that is, to bring the word as a seed. 'I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.' 1Co 3:6.

Do you see that each person here is engaged in the ministry according to their *obedience* and *sanctification*, by the grace that they have?

But Paul said that the increase that came was not because of either Paul's capacity or Apollos' capacity.

It is *God* who brings the increase.

'So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labour.' 1Co 3:7-8.

I love that Paul's testimony of his relationship with Apollos was that they were in *one Spirit* together.

Do you see that to be in one Spirit is to receive the capacity to *reveal another*?

That is what Paul meant. He said, 'I planted, but unless there was some *watering*, that plant was not going to grow.'

And if there had been no planting, Apollos could have given as much water as he wanted, but all that would have happened would have been that the soil would wash away. Do you see the point?

This is what one Spirit is!

This is the nature of the fellowship of the apostles' doctrine, through which God brings the increase.

The ministry of the word is by the Spirit

Now, in the same way in which the illumination of the light of present truth comes through the Spirit, the ministry of the word itself is *by the Spirit*.

It is not through the eloquence of a person's speech or through their capacity to minister.

The effectiveness of the ministry is *by the Spirit*.

And, of course, this is one of the reasons why we receive the Holy Spirit.

'But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.' Act 1:8.

When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, and we minister by the Spirit – this is *by truth*, isn't it? It is not by projection; it is by truth – the gospel, which comes down from heaven, is proclaimed by the Holy Spirit.

You are doing the speaking, but it is the Holy Spirit who is *preaching the gospel*, so that it is effective in the hearer, bringing conviction and change to the life of the hearer. 1Pe 1:10.

The word of present truth is ministered by testimony in weakness

Most importantly, the word of present truth is *ministered in weakness*.

'And I, brethren, when I [Paul] came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God.' 1Co 2:1.

He was saying, 'I am not coming because I am an expert in the Scriptures or because I have a strong history in it. And I am not particularly a good speaker or interesting to listen to.'

But how did he come? He came declaring the testimony of God. What he was speaking was *true* in him.

'For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.'

Paul was speaking in the fellowship of the offering and sufferings of Christ.

This was the focus of his life, and he was saying that, out of this reality, he had his expression as a messenger to the Corinthians.

'I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.' 1Co 2:3-5.

Fundamental to this weakness is *fellowship in the offering and sufferings of Christ*.

The Spirit who enables us to proclaim the word is the same Spirit who enables us to fellowship in the offering and sufferings of Christ.

Paul testified of this ministry among the Corinthians. He said that he and his fellow presbyters spoke before God *in Christ*. He was not speaking to them *on behalf of Christ*.

In our next session we will continue in these four foundations, and we will look specifically at the foundation of the apostles' fellowship.