

THE BREAKING OF BREAD

Peter Hay, prepared for word ministry, 13 September 2020

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The breaking of bread - our participation in the communion meal

Today we are looking at the third foundation of fellowship, which is 'the breaking of bread'. We will return to the passage that we have quoted over the last couple of sessions.

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

This foundation, the breaking of bread, specifically refers to *our participation in the communion meal*.

We know this from the writings of the apostle Paul and, in his first letter to the Corinthians, he actually addressed this particular foundation in detail.

'The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The *bread which we break*, is it not the *communion* of the body of Christ?' 1Co 10:16.

The reference in the book of Acts to the breaking of bread is the same reference that Paul draws our attention to in his letter to the Corinthians – that is, the communion.

The communion is fundamental to our lives as Christians in the New Covenant.

We are writing much more on the subject of the bread and the cup, and our participation in them, and will speak on that in further detail in the future.

Christ invites us to His table, the communion

Today, our focus is on the *administration* of the communion, and how it should be when we gather together for this meal.

The communion meal provides us with the *spiritual food* that is necessary for our life as sons of God in the fellowship of the body of Christ. The *bread* is this *food*.

Jesus said that this bread, which is His body, and the cup, which is the blood of the New Covenant, belong to the table of the Lord. As members of His body, we are invited by Christ to His table to eat and drink of these elements.

Christ has set stewards over His house to provide spiritual food in due season

Previously, we have noted that Christ, our Lord and Master, has set stewards over His house, and their responsibility is to feed those who are in God's house, in due season. Luk 12:42.

You will remember that we talked about the word of present truth, and that it is 'the food in due season'.

So, we see that there is *a table of the Lord*. On that table is the bread and the cup, which is spiritual food for us.

And it is fed to us by those stewards whom He has set over His house. These stewards are men who have received ascension gift grace from Christ.

That 'ascension gift grace' is referred to in the book of Ephesians, where Paul wrote about apostles, prophets, evangelists and teacher-pastors. Eph 4:8-11.

They have received ascension gift grace from Christ to oversee the church as part of a presbytery, which includes elders and deacons.

Receiving the word of grace connects us to the context of fellowship

It is the word, 'the word of grace', which establishes the context of our *fellowship*. This is the word of grace that is proclaimed by those who have these ascension gift graces.

The apostle John wrote, 'This word, which we proclaim to you, we do so, so that you may have fellowship with us'. 1Jn 1:1-3.

There is a declaration of the word which, if we receive it, *connects* us to the ground of fellowship from which the word is proceeding. This word establishes the context of our fellowship, or communion.

Fellowship, communion and participation

It is important to note that the Greek word for 'communion' is the very same word for 'fellowship'. It is also the same word for 'participation'.

So, 'fellowship', 'communion' and 'participation' mean the same thing.

This means that the *word*, which is establishing the context of *fellowship*, actually defines the *communion meal* where we are being fed with the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Overseers initiate, and deacons facilitate, the agape meal and the breaking of bread

It is initiated by overseers, and then facilitated as an event by deacons.

When we were talking about ‘public’ and ‘house to house’, we understood that the deacons were ‘serving tables’. Act 6:2.

This means that they were administrating both the *agape* meal and the breaking of bread, for the sake of every person’s connection to the four dimensions of grace, which are the four foundations of fellowship in the church.

The communion is determined by what is being stewarded from the fellowship of the presbytery

As households who are part of God’s house - and I am believing that that’s you and it is me - we are fed with the bread and the wine of the communion when we come, by faith, to participate in the fellowship meal that is stewarded, or administrated, from the presbytery.

Now, this makes an important point. We are *unable* to partake of Christ’s flesh and blood apart from participation in the table that the Lord has set, and ministers to us through His messengers.

We will establish this point a little further; it is an important point to understand.

There is *no* communion *outside* of that fellowship.

And, as it is being stewarded to us, we have the opportunity, by faith, to participate in that fellowship, where we receive further faith so that we have an *ongoing participation*, from faith to faith.

This is the reality of being *established* in the gospel of sonship.

The communion meal is a house to house fellowship

Let us remind ourselves of the key point that we have made in previous sessions.

That is that *the communion meal is a house to house fellowship*.

‘So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from *house to house*, they ate

their food with gladness and simplicity of heart.’ Act 2:46.

The communion is a gathering of believing households to eat the bread as a participation in the offering body of Christ, and to drink as a participation in the life of Christ, who is the Vine. Joh 15:1-5.

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

The point that we need to take hold of is that the communion is not determined by *where* we eat and drink it.

The communion is determined by *what is being stewarded* from the fellowship of the presbytery, which is the fellowship of the Father and His Son.

We have the communion in a point of gathering, like a church, which we should do if we can.

But, if we *can’t* meet together in the church, we can meet and have the communion in houses, as long as what is being ministered in those houses is coming from the presbytery, and is not being *sourced* from those houses.

We will explain why that is important.

Eating and drinking the communion is essential to keeping the true Passover

The principle of the Passover helps us to understand this point.

It is important to note that the communion is *not* a New Covenant ritual to replace the Old Covenant Passover.

There is a *true* Passover, and eating and drinking the elements of communion is an essential, but not total, participation in that true Passover.

However, the principle of the Passover is helpful in understanding *how* we are to eat and drink the elements of the communion.

Eating the true Passover connects us to God’s household and protects us from judgement

During the last Passover, under the Old Covenant, Jesus established the communion meal.

And, as I have said, eating and drinking the communion is essential to keeping the true Passover, which identifies us as *part of the house of God the Father*.

In the Father's house, we are becoming the sons and daughters whom He predestined us to be, and our households are *protected* from His judgement on the world.

I want to 'lean' on this reality that eating and drinking the elements of communion connects us to the true Passover.

This is because it *connects us to the household of God*. And, in that household, we are protected from the judgement that is coming on the world. That is a source of great confidence for us.

Christ's blood; resurrection life - our protection

Don't confuse protection from *judgement* and condemnation with protection from *suffering*.

This is because, by eating and drinking the elements of the communion, we actually have our participation in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings, by which His blood was being shed – the very blood that was put on the doorposts and lintels of God the Father's own house.

We have access to that house as we remain connected to the Door, who is Christ.

That means that His blood is availing for us, or is our protection, as we journey *with Christ* in the fellowship of His *sufferings*.

Protection is not deliverance *from* sufferings. His protection is deliverance *through* suffering, where we obtain the blood, or we are *sprinkled* with the blood, that was shed on His body as He suffered.

That blood contained *the resurrection life* of the Father; and that resurrecting life of the Father is our *protection*.

If you are a recipient of that *exanastasis* life, you are not being condemned with the world.

We are protected in the Father's house from the condemnation and judgement which are coming on the whole world.

Our provision for life - participation in the offering and sufferings of Christ

We are being *delivered to* eternal life, or to an inheritance, which is an eternal inheritance of our sonship, through *fellowship in the offering and sufferings of Christ*.

Importantly, we eat the bread and drink the cup of communion *in faith* for keeping the Passover *by participation* in the offering and sufferings of Christ.

We do not keep the offering and sufferings of Christ by maintaining the sacrament – as though merely eating the bread and drinking the cup does something mystical that provides us with provision for life.

The provision for life, because we have eaten of that table, is that we are joined to the fellowship of His offering and sufferings, where the life is becoming ours.

We can only eat the true Passover in the place where the Lord makes His name abide

It is helpful to note that the Lord gave some very clear instructions about how the Passover was to be eaten.

Let us remember that we are eating a meal, the body and blood of Jesus, which connects us to that keeping of the true Passover. So, when we come together to eat the communion, the principles of the Passover are helpful for us to understand how it should be.

Regarding the Passover, the Lord gave the children of Israel some instructions.

'You may not sacrifice the Passover within any of your gates which the Lord your God gives you.' Deu 16:5.

'Within the gates' means 'within the cities' that He gave to them in the promised land. But it also encompasses the *individual* gates of individual households.

The Lord is saying that we cannot eat the Passover on our own, in our own house.

'You may not sacrifice the Passover within any of your gates which the Lord your God gives you; but at the place where the Lord your God chooses to make His name abide.' Deu 16:5-6.

So, 'two or three' gathering wherever we like, in our houses, is *not* where His name abides, even though He has given us these houses and these relational contexts.

Where His name *abides* is where *His name is being proclaimed by His word*.

He said that we are not to sacrifice the Passover in our own 'cities' - in our own households - but in

the place where the Lord our God chooses to *make His name abide*.

Now, eating and drinking the communion is the reality - eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Christ - so that we abide in Christ, who has the name above every name; and *He abides in us*.

This 'abiding' principle is fundamental to the breaking of bread.

'At the place where the Lord your God chooses to make His name *abide*, there you shall sacrifice the Passover at twilight, at the going down of the sun, at the time you came out of Egypt. And you shall roast and eat it in the place which the Lord your God chooses, and in the morning you shall turn and go to your tents.' Deu 16:6-7.

Practically, for the whole nation, every household's Passover lamb was sacrificed at the temple.

You can imagine that that would have been quite an enterprise - thousands, tens of thousands, of lambs were slaughtered in the temple, in an *ordered* fashion.

And then the elements that were part of the burnt offering were removed from the lamb, at the temple, and burned on the brasen altar.

Once that had happened - once the lamb had been slaughtered and those elements that had been removed from the lamb were burned on the altar - the people took those lambs away, and they were eaten in and around Jerusalem.

They couldn't eat them in any other city; it had to be in Jerusalem. This was the city where the Lord had placed His *name*.

The Passover was a house to house fellowship on the holy ground of Yahweh's own name.

It was not the initiative of an individual house; nor could it be eaten in one's own house outside of where the Lord had placed His name.

The consequence of blood guiltiness

In fact, if a person presumed to offer any sacrifice in his house - not only the Passover, but also *any* sacrifice - he was considered to be 'blood guilty'.

'Whatever man of the house of Israel who kills an ox or lamb or goat in the camp, or who kills it outside the camp, and does not bring it to the door of the tabernacle of meeting to offer an offering to the Lord before the tabernacle of the Lord, *the guilt*

of bloodshed shall be imputed to that man. He has shed blood; and that man shall be *cut off* from among his people.' Lev 17:3-4.

'Also you shall say to them: 'Whatever man of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell among you, who offers a burnt offering or sacrifice, and does not bring it to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, to offer it to the Lord, that man shall be cut off from among his people.' Lev 17:8-9.

The *consequence* of blood guiltiness, then, was to be *cut off* from among the people.

The people were considered to be blood guilty by the Lord if they killed an ox, or lamb, or goat - specifically referring to the offerings that belonged to the covenant - outside the camp, not bringing it to make offering in the place where the Lord had *placed His name*.

This was blood guiltiness, and they were cut off from the people. That means that they were *not part of the covenant nation of Israel*.

Also, if they presumed to participate in an offering that was outside the context of the tabernacle, they were likewise cut off from the nation, because they were guilty of the blood.

So, what does 'blood guilty' mean?

Blood guiltiness simply means 'unlawful killing', or 'murder'. That is quite amazing, isn't it!

If someone would kill a beast or presume to make offering outside the context of offering in the tabernacle where the Lord placed His name, the Lord said that that was the equivalent of killing a person.

That was blood guiltiness, unlawful killing, or murder.

We are blood guilty if we eat and drink the communion in an unworthy manner

Now, it is somewhat confronting, but important for us all to understand, that Paul highlighted this same principle, applying it to the communion.

'Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an *unworthy manner* will be *guilty* of the body and blood of the Lord.' 1Co 11:27. Isn't that amazing!

In the Old Covenant, anyone who presumed to participate in the Passover outside of Jerusalem, or who presumed to make offering apart from the

altar in the temple in Jerusalem, was guilty of blood.

And Paul said that if we eat and drink the communion in an unworthy manner, we are blood guilty, as though murderers.

Then he said, 'But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgement to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep.' 1Co 11:28-30.

Eating and drinking in an unworthy manner makes us guilty of assaulting Christ's body, and spilling His blood.

Now, I don't know about you, but that makes me very keen to know what it *does* mean to *eat in a worthy manner*, so that the way in which I am eating and drinking is not causing me to be blood guilty because I am damaging Christ.

I am keen to know what it does mean to partake in a worthy manner, and to not partake in an unworthy manner.

As I am teaching, I'm imaging and presuming that many of you are hearing this and thinking, 'Praise the Lord! I am eating and drinking in a worthy manner.' We should be; and most of us will be doing so.

Examining ourselves in order to discern the Lord's body

In this regard, Paul wrote that *every* time we eat and drink, we are to *examine ourselves*.

We have to understand *how* we examine ourselves, without it being an exercise of the flesh.

We partake of the communion in an unworthy manner *when we do not discern the Lord's body*. We remember that partaking in an unworthy manner makes us guilty of the body and blood.

Unworthiness is because we are *not discerning the Lord's body*.

Paul wrote that whoever eats and drinks in an unworthy manner does so *because* they are not discerning the Lord's body. 1Co 11:29.

So, as we come to the communion, we are to examine ourselves in order to discern the Lord's body. If we don't discern the Lord's body, we will

be eating and drinking in an unworthy manner. We have to examine ourselves in order to discern the Lord's body.

This means that if we don't examine ourselves, we are *unable* to discern the Lord's body, and we eat and drink in an unworthy manner.

I'm saying it in a few ways, but it is an important point to catch.

Examining ourselves is not our assessment of our worthiness

'Examining ourselves' – what does that mean, and what does it *not* mean?

Let's start with what it doesn't mean. Examining ourselves does *not* mean assessing how 'good' or 'evil' we have been during the week in order to determine whether or not we are worthy to partake of Christ's body and blood.

Now, we *have* thought that! And there have been many people who have declined to take the communion because they have had a particularly sinful week.

That is not what it means to examine yourself – assessing whether you have done well enough or too poorly to partake of the Lord's table in a worthy manner.

Why is that?

It is because this is an exercise of the flesh, based on our knowledge of good and evil. It is a judgement that we are making on the basis of our fallen heart. So, that can't be the examining that we are to do when we come to eat and drink the communion.

In fact, if we do assess ourselves in that way, we *are* drinking and eating in an unworthy manner. Examining yourself is not assessing whether you are worthy enough to eat and drink because you've been 'good enough' this week. That is wickedness.

By His mercies, we present ourselves and prove the will of God – our sanctification

Let's look now at what it *does* mean to examine ourselves. As you hear this, you'll be able to say, 'Amen. I have faith. I have received faith to examine myself this way.'

The Greek word for 'examine' that Paul used in this passage is the very same Greek word that he used for 'prove' in the book of Romans. Rom 12:2.

He wrote, 'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by *the mercies of God*.' Rom 12:1.

Our engagement in any dimension of life in God is by *His mercies*. It has nothing to do with whether you or I have been good enough to do it. We certainly haven't!

By His mercies, we are able to present ourselves as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, which is our reasonable service. Rom 12:1.

Examining ourselves - presenting ourselves as a living sacrifice

'And do not be conformed to this world [the way that the world lives], but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may *prove* what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.' Rom 12:2.

The term, 'that you may prove', literally means 'that you may examine yourself concerning what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God'.

This means that to examine ourselves, which we need to do so that we discern the body and eat and drink in a worthy manner, is to prove the will of God, which is our sanctification as a son of God.

Your 'sanctification' is simply who the Lord God has named you to be in Christ. So, to examine yourself is to *prove the will of God* - which is your *sanctification as a son of God*.

How do you prove your sonship?

We do this by *presenting ourselves*, or priesting ourselves, *as a living sacrifice*.

This means *speaking by faith* as one who is a *receiver of the word*.

We *receive faith*, and we say, 'I am here to *participate*. I am here to *fellowship*, not on the ground of my own determination, but on the ground from which that word has proceeded.'

That is how you present yourself - that is examining yourself.

Examining ourselves - our participation in the four dimensions of grace

To examine yourself, then, is actually to say, 'I am here by faith to participate on *this ground* - *the ground of fellowship with the Father and His Son* - because Their presbytery is proclaiming Their word to me.'

Practically, examining ourselves means that we make offering by participating in the apostles' doctrine, the apostles' fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayers. How easy is that!

Also, we make offering through our daily participation in the offering and sufferings of Christ.

Our participation in both of these aspects - *the apostles' fellowship*, and our daily and *personal participation*, and also our participation as families, in discipleship - in the *fellowship* of Christ's offering and sufferings is the implication of eating and drinking in a worthy manner.

So, if you believe that you have a participation in the four dimensions of grace that belong to Christ and are stewarded by His overseers, and you believe that you have a participation in the offering and sufferings of Christ, and that eating and drinking connects you to that fellowship, you are eating and drinking in a *worthy* manner.

That is straightforward, isn't it? That can be *all of us*.

Gladness, simplicity and godly sincerity

We can see that it has nothing to do with whether we have had a 'good' week or a 'bad' week, because we are being *delivered* from assessing 'the goodness and the badness', in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings.

For a person who is eating and drinking in a worthy manner, there will be some *fruit*, or demonstrable evidence, that this is their demeanour, because they are doing so with gladness, simplicity and godly sincerity.

Are you happy to come to communion and to eat and drink with your brethren?

If you are, it is probably because you know that that is where your *life* is found.

And you have not come because you are trying to 'find yourself'. Rather, you are *laying down your life to reveal another*.

This is a person who eats their food with gladness, simplicity and godly sincerity.

It is not a performance, or a show. There is no deceit in our participation. This is the mark of belonging, isn't it?

Examining oneself in a carnal way

But, if you are discontented or agitated about the communion, it means that you have an expectation about what it means for you or what the communion should be - or should be for *you* - and this expectation is not being met.

Isn't that the reason why there is discontent?

It is because you have a thought about what communion should be like, and how it should operate, and 'who' should be doing 'what'; and that expectation is not being met.

I implore you to cease from examining yourself in this way, and to cease from examining everything else from the basis of *your* right and wrong.

That only causes you to eat and drink 'in an unworthy manner', because you feel fatigued, agitated and disgruntled.

That's not what the Lord wants at His table. It is supposed to be a celebration. It is His table, and He is saying, 'Come and *rejoice* with Me, eating the food which is from heaven for you.'

Eating and drinking in an unworthy manner

To 'eat and drink in an unworthy manner' is to engage in the communion meal in any way other than *participation by faith*.

And there are a myriad of ways that we can eat in an unworthy manner. I've listed a few, simply for illustration, but I'm sure you'll be able to understand that there are many other different ways of examining this principle of *eating and drinking in an unworthy manner*.

An unworthy manner - viewing the communion elements as mystical sacraments

The first way is to *view the communion elements as mystical sacraments* that endow a person with capacity to live their 'own' Christian life.

Alternatively, a person can view them as a mystical sacrament which, as they partake of it, delivers them from difficulty and distress. That is an absolute abomination. The bread and the wine are *not* mystical elements.

When you eat and drink them, they don't turn into Christ's body and His blood in your body. That is an absolute heresy. To believe that is to believe that you can 'take' from Christ, so that you 'get' provision to *live your own life apart from His body*.

The principle of the bread and the wine turning into the actual flesh and blood of Christ, in your body, is called 'trans-substantiation' - that is an absolute abomination.

I implore you, if you have viewed the communion that way, make that a point of *repentance and turning*. That is *not* our participation in the Lord's table.

We *do* need to eat the bread and drink the cup because it's our connection to the Lord's table. It is an action of faith, but our *participation* is actually our *willingness to make offering*.

It's our connection to the actual body of Christ and the fellowship of His offering and sufferings as a daily reality.

An unworthy manner - rejecting our participation in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings

The second way of unworthy eating and drinking is to *reject participation in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings as the way that leads to life*.

Do you see the contradiction?

In this case, we eat and drink the communion elements which join us to His offering, suffering body; yet we resent and hate the sufferings that the Lord is giving us an opportunity to join. That is eating and drinking in an unworthy manner.

A person who is eating and drinking in this way is unwilling to ask, in the context of their sufferings, 'What are You saying to me, Lord?'

If this is so, immediately a *judgement* is made that the circumstances are 'wrong'. You believe that, somehow, your connection to Christ and to His body should deliver you from suffering.

Actually, *in* the sufferings, we should be saying, 'What are You saying to me, Lord, through Your blood, which is being sprinkled in the context of suffering?'

An unworthy manner - treating the word as a resource which we can take or leave

The third way of eating and drinking in an unworthy manner is to *treat the word as a resource which we can take or leave*, depending on our assessment of its relevance or correctness.

We remain *objective* to the word and to the fellowship from which the word is proceeding - *the fellowship of Yahweh* - through the presbytery.

We remain objective to it, and we treat it merely as a 'resource' for our benefit; we agree with some things, and we appropriate them. Other things are contrary to what we believe or they simply seem a little inordinate; or a bit harsh; or simply don't make sense to us, and so we leave them.

Do you see that then you are not joined to the body and blood of Jesus? This is because the body and blood of Jesus is for *participation*; it's not for assessment.

Anything that draws us away from that participation means that our engagement with the communion is unworthy. We are actually guilty of the body and blood of Jesus.

The classic example of this is Judas, the betrayer. A few months ago, we talked about the distinction between Peter and Judas in relation to iniquity.

We understood that Judas wasn't a malevolent betrayer. He betrayed Christ by doing what he thought was a better way to go. It was a denial of the need to *participate* with Christ in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings, and he had a 'better' way.

The outcome of him taking the initiative of his better way was the death of Christ. You can be no more blood guilty than that, can you? Yet he was surprised when it happened.

We need to let go of *the right to be the judge* of what is the right way or the wrong way to proceed.

Rather, we are to simply be those who *receive* and then *participate*.

An unworthy manner - maintaining the right to contribute, or not, according to our own definition

The fourth way is to *maintain the right to contribute*, or not, to the church *according to our own self-definition*.

We say, 'This is what we will do, or where and how we will serve.' This is obviously connected to being *a judge of the word*. How we receive it and how we respond is completely according to *our own* faith, which is merely *our own* understanding.

An unworthy manner - promoting conversation in opposition to the apostles' fellowship

The final example of unworthy eating is to *promote a conversation*, or fellowship, with others in the church that is in *opposition to the apostles' fellowship*.

The apostles' fellowship is established by the word of present truth, and this word is the word that we 'eat and drink'.

It is possible, then, even in the context of the church, to have another conversation based on a different word that gathers up people to that conversation. This is over and against the fellowship to which everyone is invited to participate, which is the fellowship of the Father and His Son.

If we are not careful, that conversation becomes anti-Christ, because we are all joined to Christ if we eat His body and drink His blood.

Jesus said, in this regard, 'You abide in Me and I abide in you.'

Promoting a conversation, or fellowship, with others in the church that is in opposition to the apostles' fellowship causes those who are vulnerable to stumble, or to be drawn away and enticed by their own desires.

Do you see that it promotes a way, or a culture, within the church that is literally teaching people to be 'stony ground' or 'thorny ground'?

In the end, you become blood guilty if you do this, because you are causing the 'death' of that person who should be part of Christ's body. These ones - the lips of these ones - are *full of deceit*.

We will talk in the future around this point more, because it actually changes the 'table' that we're partaking of.

The impact of eating and drinking in an unworthy manner is weakness, sickness and death

'For this reason many are weak and sick among you and many sleep.' 1Co 11:30.

Paul was saying that if you eat and drink in an unworthy manner, you are guilty of assaulting Christ and spilling His blood. As a result, you come under condemnation.

You are not protected from that condemnation, or judgement, because you are not in the house. You are not in the Father's house, nor being protected by the *exanastasis* life in Christ's blood.

The impact of eating and drinking in an unworthy manner is weakness, sickness and death. This can be physical weakness, sickness and death. These

sufferings are the condemnation of sin; they do not lead to life.

We can suffer outside of the will of God

Now, this is an important point to note.

We *can* suffer 'outside of the will of God'; that means not in fellowship with Christ.

Those sufferings are the foretaste of our judgement; and that is becoming weak and sick, and some people die before their time. That can be very literal; you can become increasingly weak and infirmed, and some people do die before their time.

But it also can mean that we are becoming *weak in faith*, and *die spiritually*.

These are the implications of not being delivered from the unfruitful grounds of our heart because of our rejection of fellowship with Christ.

Do you see that weakness and sickness and dying spiritually is what Jesus described as *wayside, stony and thorny ground*?

If we won't examine ourselves so that we come to present ourselves for participation in offering – remembering that this is the culture of firstfruits on good ground – then those grounds will overwhelm us.

We won't bear the fruit of the life that we've received, and we will begin to wilt because we are stumbling or are easily offended.

Alternatively, we will begin to be 'strangled' by the cares of the world or by the deceitfulness of riches or the desires for other things. They will begin to choke our life because we are not presenting ourselves by faith for participation.

That's what it means *to be weak and sick, and to die before our time*. Accordingly, we can be spiritually dead and yet be an adherent to a church.

Our sufferings are the mercy of the Lord toward us so we will turn in repentance

The sufferings that we do experience – if we are literally becoming weak and sick – even though they are under condemnation, they are still part of the *mercy* of the Lord.

Do you know that the Lord Himself is causing you to experience those sufferings as you eat and drink, so that you will repent; so that you will turn?

That's why, if you are suffering, I'm exhorting you to ask the question, 'What are You saying to Me, Lord?'

What He is saying is *the word of life*, which should bring *illumination* to see.

The sufferings that we experience because of eating and drinking in an unworthy manner are the chastening of the Lord by the Spirit to cause us to *turn* and *receive illumination* from His word.

When we turn in repentance, we are illuminated to discern our participation in the body

Why is illumination important? It is so that we can 'discern His body'.

The point is that we need illumination, which comes through repentance, so that we can *discern*, can *see*, our participation in His body?

As we begin to turn, and the Holy Spirit pours the love of God into our heart, the 'judgements' that we make are no longer judgements based in right or wrong, good or evil; no longer assessments of ourself or assessments of others.

This is because the love of God compels us to judge only one way; and it is *rightly examining ourself* for participation.

'For the love of Christ compels us.' 2Co 5:14.

That, literally, doesn't merely 'drive' us. It controls us, narrows us, confines us, because 'we judge thus, that if one died for all then all died, and He died for all that those who live should no longer live for themselves, *but for Him* who died for them and rose again'.

That is not only dying and living for Jesus. That's recognising that *we* are now dying and living *for the corporate body of Jesus*.

The love of God compels us to participate in communion in a worthy manner

So, the love of God compels us to examine ourself properly so that, when we partake of the communion, we do so in a worthy manner.

Thank the Lord for the Holy Spirit – for the conviction of the Holy Spirit – because He is compelling us to that judgement and to forsake every other way of approaching the Lord's table.

How should it be when we come to the communion?

The communion service is the highpoint of our fellowship as a community of believers. We must not forsake this gathering together, and even more so 'as we see the day approaching' - and it is approaching.

So, it is so important that we are clear on how we participate in the communion.

At the communion gathering, all four dimensions of grace will be operative

It is the highpoint of our fellowship as a community of believers. At this gathering, all four dimensions of grace that are foundational to the fellowship of the body of Christ will be operative.

There will be a proclamation of *the apostles' doctrine*, or the word of present truth.

There will be a context for *offering*. There are practical ways of offering to care for the saints; for everyone's opportunity to gather. There is financial offering; offering to facilitate practical needs in the church.

There will be the actual *breaking of bread* - the meal itself.

And, of course, there will be *prayer*, which is our worship and body ministry.

All four foundations are operative when we come together to break bread from house to house.

Our conduct at the communion table - pursuing love and laying down our life for one another

Concerning the conduct of the communion service, the apostle Paul asked the Corinthians, 'How is it, brethren, when you come together?' 1Co 14:26.

I love this because he asked the question, 'How is it?', but he had already given them the answer. 'This is what it should be when you come together.' 1Co 14:1-25.

This should be the outcome of each of us examining ourselves and coming for participation.

What is the very first thing? It is to *pursue love* - to *lay down your life* for one another as the foundation of gathering to the Lord's table.

Prophecy is the testimony of Jesus; the ministry of His life and grace

'Pursue love and *desire spiritual gifts*, but especially that you may prophesy.' 1Co 14:1.

Prophecy is an important element to understand. Paul exhorted *all* of us to pursue love, and *all* to desire spiritual gifts. He said, 'Especially desire to prophesy.'

All of us should be able to prophesy.

It's important that we understand that prophecy is not simply a narrow foretelling of something.

Rather, prophecy has a diverse and broad implication for every one of us, both for *participating* in its articulation and for *receiving* it.

The book of Revelation teaches us that prophecy is 'the testimony of Jesus'. That is the foundation of prophecy. If you are joined to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings, you have the testimony of Jesus.

And what is that testimony of Jesus?

It is the *life* that by which He lives, which is the *resurrection life* of the Father.

To 'prophesy', then, means to minister to another the *life* that you have received in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings.

That is a very broad implication for prophecy, isn't it?

This is the testimony that springs from the resurrection life obtained in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. This is the foundation of prophecy.

It has many *expressions*, and it is for the *purpose* of edification - to build up one another; for exhortation.

It is the expression of the word, calling us forward, by faith, to what the Lord is calling us to walk in *now*. This is the word which becomes 'a lamp to our feet', and 'a light to our path'.

And it's also for *comfort*. So, this is a ministry of *grace*.

Comfort is not simply 'a pat on the back'. Comfort is *the ministry of grace* for our participation in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings; that is true comfort.

Comfort does not mean alleviation from the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings.

Rather, it means equipping everyone for it.

The exercise of spiritual gifts is foundational to our participation in the communion

The exercise of spiritual gifts is foundational to our participation in the communion. It is actually part of the pursuing of love which is the foundation of the communion.

Paul stated, 'This is how it should be: pursue love and spiritual gifts.'

Why is that? It is because it is *the Holy Spirit* who pours the love of God into your heart, who gives you those gifts to *minister by love*.

If you want to know what love 'looks like', it looks like the ministry of these gifts at the communion.

This highlights a major point.

As those who are participating, which means eating and drinking in a worthy manner, *we must not be spectators*.

Every one of us has a ministry *participation* at the table. It is a unique participation by the Holy Spirit in the ministry of spiritual gifts, which are diverse.

We minister according to our name and grace by the faith we receive in the word

We see this diversity described in the book of Romans.

'For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function.' Rom 12:4.

So, we will not all prophesy in the same way. However, we should all have the testimony of Jesus, which we minister according to our own name and grace.

'For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith.' Rom 12:5-6.

This is an important point. It is *in proportion to faith*.

From where do we receive faith? We receive it by *hearing the word*.

Thus, prophecy is actually an *expression*, a unique and directed expression, *by the Spirit*, in relation to *the word of present truth* that is among us.

The word of prophecy is not separate from, or other than, that word that is being proclaimed among us.

So then, do you see how valuable it is to actually get the notes for the communion word before we come to communion? It is because that is the word of present truth granting to us faith, or a proportion of faith, through which we prophesy.

Prophecy outside of that is actually only noisy, clanging words, because it is not *faith working by love*.

'If prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality.' 1Co 14:7-8.

That's amazing, isn't it? Listed as a spiritual gift is the gift of *giving* - with *liberality*.

'He who leads, with diligence; he who *shows mercy* with cheerfulness.' 1Co 14:8. What a beautiful gift is 'showing mercy'.

When we participate in the fellowship of Christ we are submitting ourselves to reveal another

Importantly, as a participation *in the fellowship of Christ*, our expression is in submission to those who are leading the meeting.

This means that if we, by the Spirit, have an initiative, it is not that we are 'taking over the church' or demanding that everyone be submitted to 'our' word.

Rather, we are *submitting ourselves to reveal another*.

That is the principle of a spiritual gift. It cannot be a spiritual gift if it is not based in *love*.

It is in submission to those who are leading the meeting. The fellowship of offering between those who lead, and everyone, including the leaders, who exercises a spiritual gift as a member of the body of Christ, ensures that the ministry of the Spirit is clear.

It does not bring *confusion*. Confusion comes because of *division*. Confusion comes because of *alternative* words that are other than what the Spirit is saying.

So, we are submitted to the leading of the Spirit as it is being crafted and deaconed by leaders in the

meeting itself. This ensures that the ministry of the Spirit is clear, and that the whole church is edified.

Let all things be done decently and in order

This is what Paul meant when he said, 'Let all things be done *decently* and *in order*.' 1Co 14:40.

The word 'decently' here means 'honestly'. That is a beautiful point, isn't it?

'Done decently' means that what is being proclaimed is actually consistent with your name; it is *true*.

To be dishonest, or 'indecent', would be to participate from the basis of a *projection*. That would be saying, 'I believe that I'm "this", and everyone needs to accept me in the way that I am presenting.'

Dishonesty would be saying, 'I'm part of the communion, but reserving the right to facilitate an alternative conversation that is critical of the apostles' fellowship, doctrine, breaking of bread and prayers.'

Do you see that that is dishonest? Paul said, 'Don't do that. You are doing yourself harm.'

'Let everything be done decently and in order.'

'In order' means that it is being *steward*ed.

It means that our expression is submitted to the grace of Christ according to His appointment, and with every person functioning in their place.

'In order' means that the meeting is under the leadership of those whose work is to steward the house so that every person is 'fed' the word of present truth by the Holy Spirit.

Rejoicing in our participation in the communion table; grace to us to stand with those of the same Spirit of faith

I hope that you, with me, are rejoicing in the understanding of these foundations.

As I said, we have a lot more to say about the communion elements and their significance as a daily participation for us.

But we are rejoicing that we *do* have a table that we're being called to.

We *do* have a *participation* in this table.

And the Lord is *ministering grace to us* as we, by faith, stand in that grace with those who are also of the same Spirit of faith.

So, let's rejoice together as we continue in our communion, and we look forward to being together next week.