

THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE BODY OF CHRIST PART 2

Peter Hay, prepared for word ministry, 16 October 2020

Transcription of recording, slightly edited

Part One 24.06 mins

Introduction

Today we will continue in our theme on how we eat and drink the communion together. I thought that we would start by reminding ourselves of some of the key points from our previous session.

We participate in the communion meal from house to house *by giving thanks to God* through prayer.

You will remember we talked about grace at the table not just being the initiator of a meal but, being a *conversation* across the whole of our meal.

We express faith through confession and testimony in relation to the word of present truth.

The four dimensions of fellowship, including the word of present truth, the fellowship of offering, the breaking of bread and prayer, are foundational to the communion.

This is how it should be when we meet together for church, and also when we meet house to house during the week.

When we eat and drink in fellowship, we remember and remind one another, through our conversation, of our participation in the offering of Christ. In this way, the food and drink of the meal we are eating is not being 'changed' into the body and blood of Christ.

Nothing 'happens' to those elements, and neither do we need someone to bless those elements to *make* it the communion.

The key point is that *we who are eating and drinking in the name of Christ are being changed because of our participation in the offering and sufferings of Christ.*

We are becoming the *bread* and we are becoming the *cup* to one another.

Gathering in the name of the Lord

Gathering house to house in the name of the Lord is what makes our meal the communion.

We need to understand what it means to have communion 'in the name of the Lord'.

'For where two or three are gathered in My name, I am there in the midst of them.' Mat 18:20.

This passage is often quoted, and it is important that we understand what Jesus meant. It does not mean that Jesus is present every time that two or three Christians are together.

That is the way this Scripture is often used, but that is not what Jesus said.

For example, Jesus is not present when two or three Christians go to the movies or to a concert; or if they are at the football or at the beach - as if just because two or three people who identify as Christians are together, Jesus is there with them.

That is not true.

Neither is Jesus among Christians because of their ecumenical efforts. That simply means where Christians from different denominations gather together on the basis of points of commonality.

This type of gathering would simply be the fleshly initiative of people from different denominations seeking to cohere together, as though that is what the coming together of the body of Christ is.

Jesus is not among that either.

That does not mean that Christians from different denominations cannot be 'in the name' of Christ.

It merely means that it is not on the basis of their points of commonality. We need to understand what the name actually is so that we can meet together properly.

As I was thinking about this, I realised that Jesus is not even in the midst of every church.

You would think that would be the obvious place where Jesus is in the midst, but let us remember the words of Jesus to the presbytery and church of Laodicea.

'Behold I stand at the door and knock.

'If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come into him and dine with him and he with Me.' Rev 3:21.

That is an amazing statement. We have just read that where two or three are gathered in His name,

He is in the midst of them, and Jesus was speaking to a whole presbytery and church.

Remember that numerous congregations made up this lampstand church. And He said, 'I'm not in the midst of you; I'm standing outside of you.'

Jesus was outside of, rather than in the midst of this presbytery and fellowship of churches. He said that the reason that He was outside was because 'they were neither hot nor cold but lukewarm', in relation to their *culture*.

This applied to them as individuals, as families, and then as community of believers, which we know as churches. They were very presumptuous.

Selling all to receive the word of the Father

'Because you say, "I am rich, have become wealthy and have need of nothing," and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked, I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire that you may be rich.' Rev 3:17.

What was He saying there?

This gold refined in the fire is the divine nature which comes by the word of the Father. He is ministering this word to us.

How do we get that; how do we buy it?

We have to sell everything in order to buy the treasure that is in the field.

That is what the word is compelling us to.

Presenting ourselves for fellowship in the offering and sufferings of Christ

The next element is 'white garments that you may be clothed that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed.' Rev 3:18.

Now, the shame of our nakedness has to do with the projections that we manufacture, or fabricate, to cover the expression of our own name.

That is 'the shame of our nakedness'.

He is saying, 'You need to be delivered from that way. And you need the garments of your priesthood which are made white when they washed in the blood of the Lamb through your fellowship in the offering and sufferings of Christ.'

We can see that our presumption is that we have all these things without selling all to get the gospel or without being delivered from the shame of our nakedness by obtaining garments, which is

our mandate to present ourselves for fellowship in the offering and sufferings of Christ.

Receiving the oil of the Spirit to walk in the light together

The third element is, 'And anoint your eyes with eye salve that you may see'.

This eye salve is an oil, and it is *receiving* the anointing oil, which is the oil of the Spirit joining us in one Spirit with the presbytery and the Lord so that we are illuminated in the light of fellowship.

This oil is applied to our eyes so that we can *walk in the light together*.

We are presumptuous when that is not the *reality* for us, but we that believe it is.

Gathering together in Christ's name - our participation in communion

Jesus said that if we are not giving attention to these elements, He is *outside* of our fellowship, even though there is a functioning presbytery and church.

Gathering together in Christ's name specifically relates to our participation in *communion*.

It is the assembling of ourselves together.

He said, 'Where two or three are gathered [or assembled] in My name, I am there in the midst of them.' Mat 18:20.

'And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much more as you see the Day approaching.' Heb 10:24.

In the coming session, we will consider this passage further because it is a summary of what it means to *be the bread and the cup to one another*.

These are the elements that we need to consider in order to 'stir up love and good works'.

If the communion, or the gathering together, requires us to be 'in the name' - and that is where Jesus is - then that is how we are joined in the name of the Lord.

That's the key for us.

The name of the Lord is the ground of fellowship

What do the Scriptures teach us about being joined together in the name of the Lord?

We need to know this so that He is in the midst of us, and we are communing together as the body and blood of Jesus to one another.

The name of the Lord is the ground upon which we meet for fellowship.

It is established by the word of present truth, which is proclaimed by ascension gift ministers, or messengers, in the hands of Christ - or in the hand, the right hand of Christ.

The word proclaimed like gentle rain – present truth

Let's consider the words of Moses and the first couple of stanzas of the song of Moses. We are actually going to speak about the song of Moses in the coming weeks as well.

We will look at the principle that Moses established here with the song. These are the last words of Moses.

'Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth.

'Let my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distill as the dew, as raindrops on the tender herb, and as showers on the grass. For I proclaim the name of the Lord: ascribe greatness to our God.' Deu 32:1-3.

This is beautiful imagery.

Moses was not saying that the word comes to *overwhelm* us. It is not ministered through strong compulsion and obligation.

The word is being proclaimed like the gentle rain, and has a perpetual nature as it falls. It is like the dew every morning, and it is on the herbs.

This connects with Hebrews, which reads, 'For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God'. Heb 6:7.

This imagery describes the nature of the word of present truth that is being proclaimed to us.

The key point to get is that as this word, or the teaching and preaching of the word is coming like gentle rain and like the dew. Moses said, 'This is the proclamation of the name of the Lord.'

As we are receiving this word and it becomes the basis of our fellowship, we are *in the name of the Lord*.

Receiving and walking in the light of present truth

So, we understand that to meet in the name is to *receive* and *walk in* the light of present truth that proclaims the name of the Lord.

We have noted many times over these last couple of months that this is the word proclaimed from a presbytery.

Moses is the representation of all four faces of Christ's administration. Those four faces are found in a presbytery, and these are the four ascension gift ministries of Christ.

The word that is being proclaimed through these ministries within a presbytery to a church is the same ministry of word, which should be like the rain, or the dew, upon the grass.

Our conversation and conduct by the faith that we have received by hearing that word

Our fellowship from house to house is in His name when our conversation and conduct is by the faith that we have received by hearing the word of present truth ministered by the presbytery.

There are a couple of elements here.

A word is *proclaimed* from a presbytery, and that word grants to us *faith*. By that faith, we *believe* and *speak*. This 'speaking' is the nature of our conversation in our houses and our conduct together.

Where our conversation and conduct is by the faith that we have received by hearing that word, we are in the name when we commune together.

When our fellowship is in one Spirit on this ground, it is with the Father and the Son. Obviously, if it is with the Son, He is in the midst of us.

So, 'When you gather together [for communion], I will be in the midst with you.' Mat 18:20.

It happens because we are on the ground of that *word*, and Jesus said, 'I will be in the midst of you.'

It is notable that Moses likened his teaching and preaching to drops of rain, to the dew and showers on tender herbs and the grass. We note that the Lord Himself also spoke about the word in a very similar manner, through the prophet Isaiah.

Culture – our conversation and conduct

‘Whom will he teach knowledge? And whom will he make to understand the message? Isa 28:9.

This is beautiful isn't it? There are two elements here – ‘knowledge’ and ‘understanding’.

So, we are to cry out, or ask, and seek for the wisdom from above.

Then we are also to lift up our voice for understanding, which means how that word that is coming from above is becoming our culture.

Remember that culture is our conversation and conduct.

‘Whom will he teach knowledge? And whom will he make to understand the message? Those just weaned from milk? Those just drawn from the breasts?

‘For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little.’ Isa 28:9-10.

Now, doesn't that sound like the gentle rain coming down line on line, precept upon precept, here a little, there a little?

The song of Moses is that word which the Lord Himself is speaking. That is the way in which the word comes. Isa 28:11.

The amazing thing about this is that he went on to say, ‘This is the effect of this word which comes gently like the rain, line on line, precept upon precept, here a little, there a little.’ Isa 28:13.

It has one of two effects, depending on how we receive it.

‘For with stammering lips and another tongue He will speak to this people, to whom He said, “This is the rest with which you may cause the weary to rest,” and, “This is the refreshing”.’ Isa 28:11-12

In the first instance, as you can imagine, if the gentle rain and the dew are coming, they are bringing rest and refreshing to those who receive them.

‘Yet they would not hear.’ Hearing is necessary for being in the name.

‘But the word of the Lord was to them precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little, that they might go and fall backward and be broken and snared and caught.’ Isa 28:13.

Finding rest or falling backward

The same word to one person is rest and refreshing, and to another person it causes them to go and fall backward, be broken, snared and caught.

That's amazing isn't it?

This is two edges of one sword, isn't it?

Finding rest and refreshing in Christ's name

Now, the word that proclaims the name of the Lord, and establishes the ground of our communion from house to house, is taught and preached line on line, precept upon precept.

We know that we are communing in the name of the Lord because we are *finding rest and refreshing* as we consider this word and testify to one another as it is being made substantial in our lives by the Holy Spirit.

So, if you want to know whether you are hearing the word of present truth and are meeting in the name of the Lord, the measure is that you are *finding rest and refreshing* as you meet together in that word.

Many of us have this testimony that, as the word has access into our houses and we are breaking it open, irrespective of the circumstances of our life, we are knowing this rest and refreshing *in* those circumstances.

That is the evidence that we are *receiving* the word of present truth and *obtaining faith* so that the word is becoming the basis of our conduct and conversation.

This is because the bread that we are eating and the wine that we are drinking are joining each of us to the offering and sufferings of Christ as members of His body.

Why is that word which is coming like the gentle rain causing us to find rest?

That ‘rest’ refers to obtaining our eternal inheritance as a son of God.

And ‘refreshing’ is the *life* that comes step by step as we are walking with Christ in the fellowship of His offering.

That is our reality because, as we commune together, it joins us to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings.

Communing with and testifying to one another

This is what we are proclaiming and ministering to one another as we eat and drink together.

Last week we looked at the words of Jesus, who said, 'As often as you do this, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.'

When we commune together and testify to one another in the word of present truth, we are *proclaiming* that to one another. And we are *reminding* one another that the rest and refreshing, which is our inheritance, and is the life that is coming to us, is found in the Lord's death.

And we know that rest and refreshing comes as we *participate by faith* in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings, because that is what Jesus said.

He said, 'Come to Me all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'

We have just read in Isaiah that this word comes like the dew, line on line, precept upon precept, that we might find rest and refreshing.

And Jesus said, 'Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you that rest.' Mat 11:28.

There is a connection there between receiving that word and how that rest is obtained. It is obtained by coming to Christ.

'Take My yoke upon you and *learn* from Me.' So, we need instruction. This is knowledge and understanding'

'Learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.' Mat 11:29-30.

Discerning the Lord's body

When we eat and drink in this manner, we are discerning the Lord's body.

We recognise that the bread and wine join us to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings.

Refreshing and rest are not obtained in any other way.

The word, which is proclaiming the name of the Lord, is *granting us faith* to continue in the name of the Lord, which means to continue 'in Christ'.

We proclaim that to one another and exhort one another to that, in as much as we see the day approaching.

When we eat and drink in this manner, we are discerning the Lord's body.

Despising the word

It is sobering to consider that the very same word which brings rest associated with one's eternal sonship, and refreshing, each day, causes those who reject the word to go and fall backward, be broken, snared and caught.

As soon as we start to reject the word that comes in this way, as gentle rain, the volume of it becomes horrendous to us.

We cannot stand how much is coming, and it overwhelms us. We say that we can't understand the word, and we start to despise it.

Isn't that a person who has begun to 'draw back' because of our hardness of heart?

The word itself is coming and we have accountability for how we receive that word.

And, if we won't receive it as the treasure that it is, we will begin to despise it, which is the mark of going backwards.

We go backward. We begin to be broken, snared. And we become captive again to the spirit of Satan, the law of sin.

Now, that sounds very much like becoming 'weak and sick, and dying before our time' and, indeed, it is, because we don't discern the Lord's body. To discern the Lord's body requires us to receive the illumination that comes by the word proclaiming the name of the Lord. Without His body being illuminated, you can't discern it.

Instead of having the word on their lips - this word that comes, which is the water of the word - our conversation will be laced with complaints regarding the inability to understand the word, the promotion of old or alternative doctrines, and cynicism, more generally.

Instead of herbs growing up, which are useful for the Father, the root of a different type of plant begins to grow up. It is thorny. This is a root of bitterness.

Praise the Lord that we are able to turn and are able to be delivered from these responses. But the

key is to have an ear to hear and to 'give our ear' to that word. Moses began that passage with, 'Give ear, O heavens.' So let's be those who are 'heavenly', giving our ear to this word that is bringing rest and refreshing to us.

Implications of being in the name of the Lord

We will consider more about the implications of being in the name of the Lord, because this connects us to our communion meal together.

The name of the Lord is the context of our *protection*, and we note the words of King Solomon. 'The name of the Lord is a strong tower, and the righteous run to it and are safe.' Pro 18:10.

That's a beautiful thought. The word proclaims to us the name of the Lord. And Solomon said that this context of fellowship is like a strong tower, and that those who are righteous - the sons of God - *run* to it.

That's where their initiative is. They hear the word, and they go to where the word is calling them. He said, in effect, 'If you are there in that tower, you are safe.'

Not protection from suffering; rather, protection from the judgement of God

Now, when Paul said, 'Do not forsake the gathering together as you see the day approaching,' he was exhorting us all to participate in communion *so that we might not have any fear in the day of judgement*.

The point is that are we safe when we are in the name of the Lord.

The apostle John described what we are safe from. He said, 'Love has been perfected among us in this, that we may have boldness *in the day of judgement*, because as He is, so are we in this world.' 1Jn 4:17.

We're not being taken *out* of the world. Our safety is in relation to the day of judgement.

This is a key point for us in understanding the implications of partaking of the communion from house to house. The name of the Lord is our protection; however, it is not protection from suffering.

I'm sure we have moved past that concept of protection from suffering, but it can get right into our bones - we can want the name of the Lord to protect us from pain.

Protection because we are joined to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings

I am telling you that is not what the name of the Lord is protecting you from. It is not protection from suffering; rather, it is protection from the judgement of God - because *we have fellowship in the offering and sufferings of Christ*.

It's not protection from suffering. It's protection from the judgement of God. And we avail ourselves of that protection because we are joined to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings.

Why is that? It is because, *in this fellowship* - the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings - the blood that was sprinkled on Christ as He was being wounded is being sprinkled on our hearts as we are joined to Him.

The protection is actually the blood itself, but we don't get the blood without being joined to the body that was wounded.

This principle is fundamental to keeping the true Passover. Over the years we may have been a little confused on this point. The first Passover was the time when the children of Israel had to take 'a lamb for every house'. They had to kill the lamb and place the blood of that lamb on the doorpost and lintel of their house so that, as the Lord came, He would see the blood on the doorposts and lintel of the house and not allow the angel of death to kill the firstborn in that house. It passed over the house.

The true Passover - Christ, the Lamb for the Father's house

In contrast to the first Passover, in relation to the true Passover, there is only one Lamb. We don't have your own lamb for our *own* house.

There is only one Lamb and only one house. And who is that? It is Christ. Christ - the Lamb of God. He is the Lamb for the *Father's* house.

The blood of the Lamb was applied to 'the doorposts and lintel' of the Father's house when Christ's blood was shed on His body through the wounds that He received on the course of His offering journey.

The blood of the Lamb applied to the Door of the Father's house

How do we know that when Christ had blood on His body it was the blood being applied to the doorposts and lintel of the Father's house? It is because Jesus Himself said, 'I am the *Door* of the house.' Joh 10:9.

He said, 'I am the Door. If anyone enters by Me, he shall be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.' So, our salvation is not dependent on our obtaining the blood and placing it on our own house. Our salvation, and the salvation of our house, depends on us *going in through that Door*.

There is only *one house* that has the blood of Christ on it, and it belongs to the *Father*.

Your safety depends on being *connected* to that Door. We don't have a lamb for our own house. Our houses are protected by the blood of the Lamb.

Christ's blood contains His exanastasis life for us

Remember that the blood of the Lamb is the blood that contains the *exanastasis* life of Christ. Our protection is not deliverance *from* suffering. Our protection is that *exanastasis* brings us *up from the death* of sin so that is being removed.

That propensity within us to sin is being removed, and we are now living by that life, *in the midst* of our difficult circumstances. That is His protection. Nothing can assail that.

Our ears nailed to the Door – how we hear and receive His word

We don't have a lamb for our own houses. Our houses are protected by the blood of the Lamb when our 'ears are nailed to the Door'. To have our 'ear nailed to the Door' means that we are 'giving ear' to the word that is coming like gentle rain. We are being nailed to the Door, who is Christ.

So, our connection to this protection *begins* with how we *hear*. It is the demeanour of *faith* to present ourselves for this word.

Why? It is then that we are able to *hear* the word that is coming like gentle rain, which is establishing us in the fellowship of the name so that, as we break bread from house to house, we are enabled to continue in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings, availing ourself of the protection of His blood.

Our houses are protected by the blood of the Lamb when our ears are nailed to the Door of His house as those who *hear* and *receive* His word. The blood is sprinkling our hearts from an evil conscience in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings, so that we can *serve as priests in the Father's house*.

Confidence in the day of judgement; not desolation

Do you see that this is those who 'go in and are saved'? If that is true for us, we will have *confidence* in the day of judgement.

We won't have confidence in the day of judgement if we have presumed that we are adequate outside of that fellowship.

This is what Jesus said to the church in Laodicea. It is complete presumption, based in darkness. To believe that we have protection from the judgement of God outside of this fellowship is great presumption indeed. Unless we turn from this presumption, our houses will be left desolate.

And it is not that we will not be confident in the day of judgement; it's that our houses will increasingly be *desolated*.

Our protection is actually in the context of the 'mess' of the cross. However, we think that we need to be *delivered from* the mess, and that that is where blessing is found.

Rather, blessing is found *in* the mess. If we draw back from that, our houses will be bereft of life. That's what desolation is; life is devoured.

In this regard, we are reminded of the words of Jesus to the Jews. 'Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her.' Mat 23:37.

Now, that sounds like a person who doesn't like the messenger very much. 'The one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her. How often I wanted to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.'

We see that a person who has their ear nailed to the door has a *willing* ear. The word is being proclaimed by messengers, and this is how the Lord wants to gather us to His house; into the context of His *name*.

Joining the fellowship of the name of the Lord - communion

He is saying to us, 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets, stones those who are sent, how often I wanted to *gather your children*.' Doesn't that sound a little like 'where two or three are gathered together *in My name*'?

He wants to gather us *to His name*.

'How often I wanted to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Your house is left to you desolate, empty, bereft of life.'

'For I say to you, you shall see me no more until you say, "Blessed is He who comes *in the name of the Lord*".' Mat 23:39.

If your house is being desolated, you will not find relief until the confession of your mouth begins with, 'Blessed is the messenger who comes in the name of the Lord,' and until you accept that word which is proclaiming the name of the Lord, and until you *join* that fellowship.

Outside of that fellowship, you will *not* find relief. You will not find *grace* in the context of your life and in the season that is just in front of us.

This is our only protection, and we need to open our ears so that we are saying, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord,' accepting that that one who is coming in the name of the Lord is establishing the context in which we meet in the name of the Lord.

We put aside every other understanding of what it means to be in the name of the Lord to accept that that is where communion is, both as a church, and then during the week as we meet from house to house in the name.

Receiving the word proclaimed from the presbytery - joined by the anointing of the Holy Spirit to the fellowship of the presbytery

As we receive the word proclaimed from the presbytery, we are *joined by the anointing of the Holy Spirit* to the fellowship of the presbytery, which is the fellowship of the Father and the Son.

This is part of the work of the Holy Spirit as our Helper. He is joining us to the fellowship of the presbytery, and to the fellowship of the Father and the Son.

Having received this anointing, we know how to *participate* in the four dimensions of grace that are foundational to the communion. That means we do not need anyone to instruct us or to script our participation for us. This is a beautiful thought.

Practically, for example, we may have a family over on a Friday night for fellowship together, where we *pray* and *share* with one another, and we *care* for one another *because we have the Holy Spirit*. He enables us to be in one Spirit.

And we don't need a clergy figure to tell us what we have to do, in some specified sequence, in order to 'make' it communion.

We do need *a word of present truth* that is the basis of our *conversation and conduct*.

The fellowship of one Spirit

The Holy Spirit takes what belongs to Christ, the Word, and He makes that the foundation of our conversation.

So, as we meet together, no-one tells us how to do that; rather, we *know* how, because we are *of that one Spirit*.

It's the same Spirit as the fellowship of the presbytery, and it's also the same Spirit of Yahweh Himself. That's why the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, is called 'the fellowship of Yahweh'.

Anointing to know how to participate in the fellowship of His body

'But you have an anointing from the Holy One and you know all things.' 1Jn 2:20. That is a beautiful statement. Obviously, that does not mean knowing everything that there is possibly to know.

'All things' are 'all things that are working together for good'. This is an anointing from the Holy One, and you know how to *participate* in the body of Christ because you are a member of the body of Christ. This is actually what it means to be the 'bread' to one another.

'But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.' 1Jn 2:27.

The anointing of the Holy Spirit enables us to know how to fellowship with one another.

Remember, this is also the action of 'salt'; our speech is salted, and we have grace on our lips so that we may know how to answer one another. No-one is telling us how to answer one another. We *know*, because we have the Holy Spirit. And the word itself is enabling us, or is becoming the culture of our conversation with one another.

Abiding in Him, in His anointing

When that is the reality for us, we will *abide* in Christ.

Isn't that exactly what Jesus said about the communion? He said, 'If you eat My flesh and you drink My blood' - what will happen? - 'you will abide in Me and I will abide in you.'

So, this anointing in the name of Christ is foundational to communion from house to house when we are having our dinner together. To 'abide in Christ' is to eat His flesh and drink His blood. It is to have communion together, house to house, as members of Christ's body.

Meeting in the fellowship of the word proclaimed

The word, which is the 'ground' upon which we meet, is being proclaimed from the presbytery by those with grace from Christ. This word proclaims the name of the Lord, so that, as we meet *in that fellowship*, we are *in the name* of the Lord, gathering together; and He is in the midst of us.

That word doesn't come from us. It comes *from* Christ, *through* an administration.

We *receive faith* from that word. Faith comes by hearing. and hearing by the word of God.

Participating in faith

And that faith *enables us to participate*. It is faith for participation in the four dimensions of *grace*.

Remember that these are the dimensions that make our meal, communion; and they are obtained by hearing and receiving the word.

This means that the initiative of faith to participate belongs to *every believer*. Those who proclaim the word do not *compel* anyone to commune - but you cannot commune *without* receiving that word.

We have to *receive* the word, but the *evidence* of receiving is *the expression of faith*, which is the initiative to commune.

It is the desire to gather for fellowship in the church, at a communion gathering; and it's the desire to meet from house to house and to continue in that word, breaking bread from house to house.

Continuing steadfastly – the evidence of faith

We note this principle in the activities of the early church, and I want to emphasise a different part of the following verse. Luke wrote that the believers 'continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers'. Act 2:42,

We've focused over the last couple of weeks on those foundations. Today I want to make the point that the expression of faith, or the evidence of faith, is *steadfastness*. The believers continued steadfastly in those four foundations. The *initiative* was with them.

The believers were steadfast because, by the faith they had received as they heard the apostles teaching in the temple, they were standing in the grace of God, which are these four foundations of fellowship. Rom 5:2.

Household devotional life – an extension of communion

We will now consider family devotions. We are not having communion when we have our family devotions. However, our family devotions should be *an extension of the communion* in which we have participated.

Family devotions are essential to *our participation in communion*, from house to house.

The meals and devotions of individual households are not, themselves, communion, but they are an extension of our participation in the fellowship, or communion, of Christ. This is why we should give attention to the word as families throughout the week.

If our devotions are separate from the word that is being ministered to us, which is the words that Jesus speaks, which are Spirit and life to us, then we are *presuming* that we have an 'altar' apart from that one.

Where we presume to have an 'altar', a family devotional context, that is *other* than what is coming from Christ who is the Altar, then we are sacrificing *outside the temple* - and that makes us

blood guilty. That would be eating and drinking 'in an unworthy manner'.

So, when we are devotional in our household, around our table in our houses, the focus of our devotions should be the word that is proclaimed at the communion table. That's what we discuss. We talk about the implications of that word in terms of our daily lives, looking for the answers from that word for the dilemmas that we face from day to day - whether it's at school or at work - and that becomes our 'food'.

When that's the reality of our house, we are able to meet from house to house in that same word.

Do you see that it is very hard to meet from house to house if we don't have that as a foundation in our own house?

This has to be part of our culture as families.

We are devotional in our households *because* we treasure the word of God. And, as this word becomes our culture, we are able to meet and fellowship with other believing households.

In our next session we will consider how we are the 'bread' and the 'cup' to one another. We will also talk about some practical considerations regarding our joining together for meals, for the communion.

In the light of this word, we note that Paul had numerous instructions about how we speak with one another; who we allow in our houses; how we sanctify our culture so that it is of that one bread and of that one cup.