

# RETURNING TO THE TRADITION OF FELLOWSHIP

Peter Hay, prepared for The Apostles Fellowship series, 17 January 2021

Transcription of recording, slightly edited

Today in our Bible study, we will continue in our series, drawing from the letter that we have received concerning our fellowship. We will consider how we *participate in fellowship*, particularly in relation to the communion.

Our subject today is really picking up what we have been learning in recent weeks to do with our *agape* meal, but we will focus on how we have deviated from that, and on what the Lord is calling us back to.

I have titled this Bible study, 'Returning to the tradition of fellowship'.

## **The basis of the fellowship of the communion meal**

In our last session, we understood that 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, whose fellowship is with the Father and His Son, Jesus.

Having received this anointing of the Holy Spirit, we know how to participate in the four dimensions of grace that are foundational to the communion - the apostles' doctrine, the apostles' fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayers.

Our participation in these *four dimensions of grace* is the basis for our fellowship in the *agape* meal.

It is important to note that the *agape* meal is not only the breaking of bread. *We are* to have a meal together, but all four foundations comprise the *agape* meal in which we are participating.

## **Turning from sacramentalism and being restored to the true *agape* meal**

Across this season of restrictions that have been imposed upon us as a consequence of the coronavirus pandemic, the Lord has been addressing the presbytery, and our fellowship of church congregations, regarding our fellowship and the sacramental nature of our communion practices.

To understand what we are *turning from*, so that we can demonstrate faith in relation to walking in what the Lord is *restoring to us*, it is important to remind ourselves of the tradition that Christ and the apostles established, because our repentance

is that we have fallen from that through our traditions; and that is what we are being restored to in this season.

## **The *agape* meal – house to house and church contexts**

We will begin with a passage for the context of our study today.

'And with many other words he testified [the apostle Peter on the Day of Pentecost, giving his sermon] and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation."

'Then those who gladly received his word were baptised; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.' Act 2:40-42.

'So continuing *daily* with one accord in the temple.' Act 2:46. Remember that 'one accord' is the capacity of being in *one Spirit*, which is only possible by the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

So 'one Spirit' is foundational to this culture of 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, 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.

The important point to note is that the breaking of bread, which Jesus had established with the disciples, was a *daily house to house* practice.

It was not formalised as a rite or as a church-specific practice; it was a *daily reality* for those who were in *one accord*.

The apostle Paul, who identified himself as the apostle to the Gentiles, and had been set apart by the Holy Spirit to do the that work, received instructions directly from Jesus regarding the breaking of bread in a *church* context.

So, there is a house to house context, and a church *agape* meal reality that had been revealed

to Paul, and which he taught to the Gentile churches.

**Key - our participation in eating and drinking**

‘For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, “Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this I remembrance of Me.”

‘In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the New Covenant in My blood.’

‘This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.’ 1Co 11:23-26.

In reading this, we think, ‘Oh, well, we must need to eat a piece of bread and drink some wine to be eating Christ’s body and drinking His blood.’

But, remember, Paul gave this instruction after he had earlier taught the Corinthians what the bread and the cup were.

Now let us read what He said before that, which is what we should have in our mind when we read that passage.

‘The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the fellowship [or communion, or participation] of the blood of Christ?’ 1Co 10:16.

Now, we can only *participate* in something if we are *part* of it. Would you not agree that that is inherent in *participation*?

‘The bread which we break, is it not the communion [the fellowship, the participation, the sharing] of the body of Christ?’

‘For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.’ 1Co 10:16-17.

Paul was explicit that the focus of these elements is *participation*.

So, then, when we look at these other statements, which are called the ‘realistic’ statements, to do with the communion, that is our orientation.

Our focus is on the *participation* in eating and drinking.

**Eating a meal in fellowship together**

Now, the meals that the apostles in Jerusalem instituted, and that the apostle Paul established in the Gentile churches, were not called ‘communion’ at all. They were actually called ‘love feasts’, or ‘*agape* meals’.

Jude wrote about these love feasts in the negative, saying, ‘These [people who come in among you speaking other things] are “spots on your love feasts while they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves”’. Jud 1:10,12.

Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, also highlighted the Lord’s supper, saying, ‘I received instructions directly from Jesus about this’, and he admonished them because they were becoming inordinate, and people were getting drunk. 1Co 11:20,21,23. That hardly sounds like eating a little piece of bread and drinking from a little cup, does it?

Paul also addressed their feasting as having become inordinate, so that the way they were doing it was no longer *a participation in fellowship*. There were divisions among them. 1Co 11:19.

In fact, these are the verses that precede the one where he said, ‘I received these instructions directly from Christ.’

He said, ‘For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognised among you. Therefore when *you* come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord’s supper.’ 1Co 11:19-20. He was saying, ‘You are *supposed* to be coming to eat the Lord’s supper, but the way that you are behaving and interacting with one another, and the way that you are eating and drinking, is contrary to the fellowship that that supper should be.

‘For in eating, one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk.’ 1Co 11:21.

**Accepting an alternative tradition, or gospel**

Today, we are not looking at the principle of getting drunk or eating too much.

The point is that the communion that was the tradition laid down by the apostles, both in Jerusalem, and then in the Gentile church through Paul, was *a meal together*.

It was not a sacrament, and the Scriptures plainly bear that out. How, then, did we end up with a practice that became a different tradition?

This is what we will consider today, because this is part of our repentance. We are also looking at what is within us that remains loyal to a tradition that was other than the tradition laid down by the apostles to the Jews and to the Gentiles.

Paul warned the Gentile churches against receiving doctrines that were alternatives to the message that he had been sent to preach to them.

That is amazing, because we read in first Corinthians, in effect, 'These are the only instructions that you need to hear about the communion meal. For I received them directly from the Lord, that which I also delivered to you.'

And he said, in other words, 'Beware of receiving *any other doctrine* that is alternative, or in addition to, what I have spoken to you, because I have received it directly from Christ.'

We also note his exhortation, in this regard, to the Galatians where, interestingly, he warned them against receiving doctrines that were alternatives to what he had been teaching them.

He spoke this in the context of recounting to the Galatians Paul's confrontation with Peter, which was specifically to do with how Peter was eating and drinking an *agape* meal.

The important thing is that Paul said that the word was directly connected to *the nature of the fellowship* at the *agape* meal.

He said, 'Even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach *any other gospel* to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.' Gal 1:8.

It is interesting to note that he was not saying that the people who received it *were* being accursed. Although they 'go in the excess of it', they are obviously partakers of it.

Rather, he was saying that the ones who proclaimed 'any other gospel' were the ones who were accursed.

'As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.' Gal 1:9.

Now, obviously, there was plenty of this going on. The fact that Paul had to say to the Gentile churches, to whom he had been sent, that there were these other things being taught, and that those who were teaching them were not coming from the fellowship of which he was part, demonstrates how prolific it was.

### **The Didache – an alternative tradition**

An example of these alternative messages that had begun to circulate within the church, even while Paul was still alive, and certainly when John was alive – remember that he was the last of the apostles to pass away – was a document called 'the Didache'. That Greek word simply means 'teaching.'

The Didache is the earliest known church text to describe the formalisation of the communion meal as 'the Eucharist'.

We have just spent time looking at the words of Paul and Luke, from Acts, outlining the nature of their *agape* feast. At the same time as these men were ministering, another document was circulating throughout the churches, where that meal was formalised and identified as 'the Eucharist'.

The Didache used the term, 'the Eucharist', and the word 'Eucharist' is derived from the Greek '*eucharista*', which means 'thanksgiving', or 'thankfulness'.

The authors of this document are unknown, but it is unlikely that it was just one person. Most scholars think that it was written by a group of people, but they also note the absence of the influence of the apostle Paul in its content.

This is the key. Paul was saying, 'Don't listen to anything other than what I have proclaimed to you.'

The Didache (did-a-khe) was making its way around the churches, and it was not consistent with what Paul was saying about this meal - about a number of things, actually.

It is dated to the first century, prior to John's writing of the book of Revelation, and numerous scholars have suggested that it was written by Jewish Christian leaders of Antioch in the region of Syria, or modern-day Turkey, to instruct the emerging Gentile church regarding the ordinances of the church.

## **The sacraments established in the primitive church**

Now, in the primitive church, the Judaisers also influenced others by saying that the practices under the Old Covenant had a New Covenant expression, or reality.

They instituted new ordinances in the church, and taught the Gentile churches that they had to engage in these ordinances to keep faith with the Covenant. Many of the Judaisers taught that the Gentiles actually had to become like Jews - to be circumcised etc.

However, that was probably not the most influential effect. Rather, it was the implementation of ordinances, or practices, within the church, that were reflective of Old Covenant practices.

Jewish customs were having a New Testament expression, and these were being written to the Gentile churches, who obviously had no history or understanding of the Old Covenant.

As we have just noted, the Didache referred to the communion meal as 'the Eucharist', and outlined prayers that were to accompany the ministry of the bread and cup to the members of the church.

There is nothing problematic about giving a practice a title but, in doing so, they had assigned specific prayers to go with the consumption of the bread and the consumption of the cup. Immediately, those elements *became sacraments*.

Now, the Didache demonstrates that during Paul's ministry there were *already* alternative influences in the church, promoting doctrines and practices that were an addition to the sound doctrine that Paul had established, both in word and example, as a culture in the Gentile church.

These were alternatives to the gospel and culture of sonship in the body of Christ, and had begun to influence the beliefs and practices of the primitive church, even while Paul was still ministering.

## **Alternative gospels continued to be taught in the early church**

Now, it is helpful to make a distinction between the 'primitive' church and the 'early' church, in church history.

The 'primitive' church is generally considered to be the church in the apostolic age, which goes to about AD 100. Then, following the deaths of the

apostles, it was the 'early' church, which is several hundred years in length.

The early church fathers were the ones who formalised church practice.

So, the primitive church was the church that was under the authority of the apostles. The early church was the church functioning after the death of the apostles.

## **Believers drawn away from the truth regarding communion; drawn away from fellowship**

Towards the end of his ministry, the apostle Paul was making his way back to Jerusalem, and he called the presbytery of Ephesus to meet him at Miletus. He warned the Ephesian presbytery, prophesying that after his departure, *savage wolves* would come up among them, not sparing the flock.

Furthermore, men *from among themselves* would rise up - so, this is leaven - and begin to speak perverse things, and would draw disciples after themselves.

Now, by 'perverse things', he did not mean that they were going to speak 'naughty' things.

He was saying that they would begin - and they couldn't help but do it, because they were being *drawn away from fellowship* - to speak and teach that which would diverge or become perverted *from the truth*.

The point is that, in this way, they would *draw disciples to themselves*, and that is completely the opposite to *love*.

We have spent time speaking about love being demonstrated *through offering*, where one person lays down their life to reveal another. So, when someone is speaking something that draws disciples to themselves, it means that they are falling from that love.

The drawing of disciples to themselves at that time was specifically connected to the *communion*. This is because, according to the Didache, those elements needed to be blessed by someone who had authority in the church, in order to *make* those elements the communion for those who were eating and drinking it.

So, those communicants became dependent upon the one who had the 'authority' to bless the elements.

### **Falling from first love, the *agape* meal**

The focal point, then, is that ones rising up, speaking perverse things and drawing disciples away to themselves, means that they fell from *first love*, which is an *agape* meal. That is exactly what we read about in the book of Revelation.

It is important to also note that, at the conclusion of his life and ministry, Paul stated to Timothy that all those in Asia had turned away from him – *all the churches*.

Now, we have thought that those churches had traditional and historical connection to what Paul established. But Paul said that *not one* of those churches was keeping faith with the doctrine that he had instructed them.

Do you see that this is quite a point made by Paul that that early church, in formalising all these practices, had *already* deviated? It had *already* been perverted. There had already been a shift *away from fellowship*, to something different.

So, evidently the word and culture that Paul had proclaimed to the Gentile churches was no longer their custom and practice. New customs had become entrenched in the understanding and practices of the Gentile church.

Now, Paul warned the Ephesian presbyteries that men would rise up and speak perverse things and would draw men away, that they would fall from first love.

That obviously happened because, when Jesus wrote His letters – the seven letters to the seven churches, in the book of Revelation under the pen of John – the very first church that He addressed was the angel of the Ephesian church, the presbytery of the Ephesian church.

They were rebuked for leaving their first love, or for having 'fallen from first love'.

### **Access lost to the fellowship of the tree of life**

Now, significantly, Jesus said to them that, by leaving the fellowship of first love, they had *lost their access to the tree of life*. He said, 'If you overcome this issue that I'm raising with you, I will give to you to eat from the tree of life.'

Obviously, they were not eating from the tree of life. That is staggering, isn't it? Why is that?

It is because the tree of life is *the communion of the body and blood of Jesus*.

Now, they were commended for all their activities in which they were very engaged. But their issue, of having fallen from first love, meant that what they were doing was something alternative to love, to *agape*. Moreover, they did not have access to the tree of life.

In other words, their communion meals were *not* fellowship at the tree of life with Yahweh. They had fallen from first love, and no longer had access to the tree of life, which is the body and blood of Jesus, which means that their communion meals were not at the tree of life.

It was a different 'food'. They had become a different table that was not spiritual because they were not hearing what the Spirit was saying.

### **The communion meal moved away from participation**

Church historians record that, by the end of the first century AD, and into the second century, many who claimed to be the leaders of the early church had formalised the Lord's supper into the Eucharist. We have shown that through some of the documents such as the Didache.

There were numerous early church fathers who began to promote this understanding of the communion and the elements.

The point is that they shifted it from the communion meal being *participation*, to the focus being on *what a person received* when they ate and drank the elements.

The shift is not only in what you *think* the elements *represent*. The shift is in *why* you eat and drink them.

As Paul said, is it not a *participation*?

The arguments around the Eucharist became arguments regarding what a person was *receiving*, and what needed to *happen to* those elements for those people to receive the blessing of the body and blood of Christ.

### **Ministers of the synagogue of Satan; assuming authority to speak**

There were numerous leaders who had risen up in the church, both while the apostles were alive,

but certainly by the time only John was alive. Jesus described these men who assumed leadership positions in the church, and misconstrued the word of God for their benefits, as ‘ministers of the synagogue of Satan’.

We have been confronted with this in the past, that there is a synagogue, or teaching organisation, or teaching school, in the midst of the church - and that school belongs to Satan. Something else is being taught.

‘I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are of a synagogue of Satan.’ Rev 2:9. They say that they are Jews, but they are not really Jews; they are really of the synagogue of Satan.

Now, by describing these men as those who ‘say they are Jews, and are not’, Jesus was not addressing them for making false claims about their biological or cultural history, because we know that many of those who were teaching these false doctrines *were* biological Jews. Jesus was not making a comment about people who did not have Jewish DNA, pretending to be Jews.

Rather, He was indicating that these ones were not of ‘the true circumcision’.

We know this because of the teaching of Paul. He said, ‘Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers [‘evil workers’ sounds like those who are part of the synagogue of Satan], beware of the mutilation!’ Php 3:2. The ‘mutilation’ is what Paul strongly described as being circumcision *in the flesh*.

‘For we *are the circumcision* [or, ‘we are the true Jews’], because we *worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh*, though I also might have confidence in the flesh.’ Php 3:3-4.

Then he listed the things that people identify as marking them as ones who have an authority to speak, or ‘claim to be Jews’, but do not.

So, the false circumcision – people who claim to be Jews, but are not – referred to people whether they were Jews or not. Jesus was not addressing biological Jewish culture, because we know that some of them were Jews, and some were not.

‘The false circumcision’ referred to people whose confidence was in the flesh, be it their biological Jewish history, be it their Jewish traditions, be it philosophy or education.

Philosophy became a massive stumbling stone for the church, giving rise to scholarship based in philosophy, which actually is the basis of many of the commentaries. These are the confidence of the flesh, or something that is natural - Jewish tradition, philosophy and education, social prominence.

Some people have a ‘standing’ in the community, and they presume to speak in the church because of their standing. This is the basis for their ‘right’ to speak in the church, which Jesus called ‘blasphemy’.

### **Standing in grace and rejoicing in Christ Jesus**

Now, these people did not worship God ‘in Spirit and truth’. That means that they were not in ‘one Spirit’, and they did not speak according to their sanctification; the ‘truth’.

Neither did they ‘rejoice in Christ Jesus’. If you said that to them, they would say, ‘Of course I rejoice that I am in Christ Jesus.’

We need to understand what it means to ‘rejoice in Christ Jesus’, because this is part of being ‘the true circumcision’.

Not rejoicing in Christ Jesus meant that they were not standing in grace, for we have our ‘introduction to stand in grace’, *by faith!*

They did not hear the word and were not *obedient* to it. They were not found in the context of grace, which is *fellowship*. They did not stand in grace, nor rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

So, to ‘stand in grace’ is to *be in Christ Jesus*, and to ‘rejoice in the hope of the glory of God’ is to rejoice in *sonship*.

This ‘ground’ of grace is the fellowship of His offering and sufferings.

In other words, to be of the true circumcision means that we are hearing the word and, by faith, have our introduction into grace. That ‘grace’ is the fellowship of the body of Christ, where we are participating as sons of God, rejoicing in our sonship.

The very next verse refers to rejoicing in tribulation. Rom 5:3. Tribulation is joining us to the fellowship of Christ’s offering and sufferings.

### **The tradition of God's covenant people – being of the true circumcision**

Those self-proclaimed leaders purported to hold to the traditions of God's covenant people. In other words, they believed that they were 'keeping the feast'. Remember that Paul said we are to 'keep the feast'.

They were saying, 'We are keeping the feast', for example, 'by eating a piece of bread and drinking a cup'. But they were not actually fellowshiping, because, as he said, they did not worship God in Spirit and truth, and they did not rejoice in Christ Jesus.

There was a form, an appearance, of being a covenant person, of being a Jew, but their *practice* was not consistent with what it means to be a covenant person.

*To be a covenant person is to live by faith; to stand in grace; to grow as a son of God; and to live in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings.*

That is the 'true circumcision', where there is no confidence in the flesh. The flesh is actually coming to an end. This is what it means to be *spiritual*.

### **The bread and wine became sacraments, instead of an expression of fellowship**

Now, the meal that Christ had instituted was indeed a *thanksgiving* (so there is really no problem with the term 'Eucharist,' because it is a thanksgiving). The problem is with what it *became*.

The leaders who arose in the midst of the church, even while the apostles were alive, replaced the *fellowship* of the *agape* meal with 'the Eucharist', rendering the bread and wine 'sacraments'.

So, in the *agape* meal, there was *eucharistia*, or thanksgiving.

However, when they called that practice 'the Eucharist', and said that it required 'this' element and 'that' element to receive a blessing, they were then *rendering those elements sacraments*.

### **Sacramentalism**

A sacrament is a Christian rite, or practice, that is said to endow a participant with divine grace. This means that if you 'do this' or you 'eat this' or you 'receive this', it will grant to you 'this blessing'.

It is an outward, visible sign or activity that supposedly conveys, or bestows, an inward spiritual grace from God.

For example, early church leaders, such as Justin Martyr, taught that when the bread and wine are consecrated and ministered by a person who is ordained, these elements are *transformed* into the *actual body and blood of Jesus*.

Therefore, an outward sign *becomes* the body and blood of Jesus, to the communicant.

### **Philosophy changes the understanding of the Eucharist**

Justin Martyr was a philosopher, and it is interesting that, even after his conversion, he remained clothed in his philosopher's cloak, and so he was marked as a philosopher.

As a philosopher, he basically taught that the word of the Scriptures is a 'better' philosophy – the *best* philosophy of all philosophies. This was his way of engaging with the Scriptures.

His teaching, particularly on the Eucharist, was the basis for transubstantiation, in the movements that still hold to that.

Interestingly, that principle of transubstantiation – where the substance of the bread and the cup is 'transformed' into the body and blood of Christ – has its basis in the philosophy of Aristotle, to do with substance and accidents.

The point to note is that the principle of transubstantiation did not come from the *Scriptures*. It came from a concept of Aristotle, a philosophical concept, not even from a Jewish background.

Of course, beyond transubstantiation, which we have never held to, there are many theological views that interpret what it means to eat the bread and to drink wine.

So, while we do not hold to transubstantiation, and the whole Reformation movement doesn't hold to transubstantiation, we *have all held to the emblems* of bread and wine.

Irrespective of these views, they render the elements, or emblems of the communion, sacraments.

This has been an entrenched feature of communion services, including our own, maintained throughout history as an institution

by those who have claimed to lead the church, whether Catholic or Protestant.

Now, we are not saying that one theology is any better than another. We are saying that we need to return to the apostles' tradition of the *agape* meal, which still requires us to *break bread*.

We actually have to *have a meal together*, but we do not do so on the basis that those elements are *changed* into something else.

### **Three features of sacramentalism**

There are three common features that mark the sacramentalism of these communion practices, irrespective of what is believed to 'happen' to the bread and wine.

The first feature is the requirement for the elements of the communion to be ministered by an 'appointed' or 'anointed' clergy-style leader. Every denomination has varying descriptions, or nominations, for those people.

Their 'blessing' of the elements is said to make the eating and drinking of them, 'communion'.

The idea is that anyone can have a piece of bread and a cup of wine, and you might even have that for dinner. But what *makes* it 'the communion' is that someone who represents the church 'blesses it', and it *becomes* something *other* than just a piece of bread and a cup of wine. In this way, it makes it, or it *becomes*, 'the communion'.

Otherwise, every person who has a piece of bread and a cup of wine would be having communion.

What, then, is the breakpoint between these substances becoming something else?

So the first aspect is the requirement for blessing by someone who has the 'authority' to do so.

The second element is the ritual itself of eating and drinking the elements.

And the third common feature is a congregant's presumed connection to the church, and the 'benefits' of those emblems through the person's participation in the communion.

They are the three common features that mark sacramentalism.

### **Examining our tradition regarding communion - receptionism**

We will now consider ourselves more personally, as a fellowship of churches. What has been our tradition?

What has the Lord now highlighted concerning the inadequacy of this understanding and practice, which we are to *turn from* and to *forget*?

In addition, what is He saying concerning the way in which we are now to walk by faith, in relation to what He is illuminating to us?

The legacy of the early church fathers' teaching, both in Catholic and Protestant traditions, has been the prevailing focus on *what* the communicant *receives* when they partake of the bread and wine.

This shifted the focus away from the communion as being our *participation in the fellowship* of Christ's once and for all offering.

All of the arguments about what the bread and the wine 'represent' have been problematic, because they were all about what we *receive*. That is the point that I have been making since the beginning of this session.

Paul began by saying, in effect, 'The primary focus of these elements is, "Are they not a *participation*?"'

Our former communion practice as a fellowship of churches was most consistent with the Reformation theology of receptionism, whether we have understood that or not. I had never heard of receptionism before we began to look at this.

However, when you look at it, you will think, 'Yes, receptionism is most closely descriptive of what we thought about as we partook of the elements.'

Now, receptionism - a reformed theology, a Reformation theology - is the view that the elements of the communion are *not turned into Christ's body and blood*.

We have never believed in transubstantiation. That was a fundamental point of distinction in relation to the Reformation - the rejection of the principle of transubstantiation!

Receptionism holds that the elements of communion are *not* turned into Christ's body and blood. Rather, it is that Christ's body and blood



are *received* by the devout communicant as they, by *their* faith, partake of the sacraments.

The practice of eating and drinking the consecrated elements of bread and wine is considered to be *fellowship*.

Now, no one denies that it is fellowship. However, the thinking of receptionism is that the action of eating these elements is inherently fellowship *because I believe* in them, and because I am actually coming with other people who also believe in them.

Further, there is someone who invokes a 'blessing' on those elements so that, as I, by faith, eat them, that becomes *substance* in me.

The supposed 'fellowship' is an implication of having eaten and having drunk the elements, because there is an interaction between a minister and a congregant, who is with other congregants.

Do you see that the 'fellowship' claimed here is the implication of having engaged in the *sacraments*?

### **Fellowship – participation by faith**

The question with which we have been challenged in this season is why, in relation to our receptionist practices, is the *action* of eating and drinking the emblems of communion, *not* fellowship?

We are saying that that sacramental practice is *not* fellowship, and that we do not participate in fellowship by implication or accident.

Fellowship is something that we *participate* in by *faith*.

There is *obedience* and a *work* associated with fellowship – there is an activity.

### **Receptionism is faith in the rite of communion**

Communion based on the principle of receptionism is not fellowship, because it is the expression of a person's *own faith* in the *rite* of the communion.

A 'rite' is 'a religious practice predicated on a defined system of beliefs'. In this regard, we believe certain things about the body and blood of Christ, and 'faith' is in what a person will *receive* in relation to the body and blood when they eat and drink it.

According to receptionism, the symbols, or sacraments, of the communion are made a reality in the communicant's life through an action of faith which is expressed as a 'confession'.

So, because a person *confesses it*, it is becoming *substance* in them. They confess that, as they are eating these elements, they are eating the body and blood of Jesus Christ in line with their understanding of what that *represents* for them.

The communion is made a reality in the communicant's life through an action of faith, expressed as a confession of what they believe the symbols to represent.

On the basis that, as they eat these emblems, they confess that they believe that they are receiving what the emblems represent, and then an invocation is pronounced by an ordained minister, invoking a blessing on those who believe this, stating this belief to be the reality for them.

So, in the end, they *believe* that what the minister *says* those communion elements are *becoming* to them, is true. So, it is mystical, isn't it? That is the invocation by an ordained minister.

Then the emblems are received by the action of eating and drinking as a means of *receiving the grace*. So, there is a *belief* in those *emblems*.

There is a *confession* – 'this is why I am here; to eat and drink'. Then someone *proclaims* that to be the reality and substance in others, and that they are receiving the presence of the Lord.

They are said to be in the presence of the Lord, and are obtaining the 'benefits' of those elements as they eat and drink. Something has been *received because* they ate and drank those *elements*.

### **The error of receptionism**

Now, you will be thinking, 'Are we not to *believe*, as we hear what the minister says?' Yes, of course we are to believe!

What, then, is the error of receptionism?

It is that the *focal* point of the communion meal is *what the communicant receives* on the basis of what they *believe they are receiving*, on the basis of their own faith, as they partake of the elements. It is on the basis of their *own* faith; whatever they think those emblems represent.

It is an action through which a person *appropriates life to themselves*.

Their confession is, 'I believe that these emblems represent the body and blood of Christ and, as I eat and drink them, I am obtaining what that body and blood represent for me.'

That is *very* different from the understanding that, as I eat and drink, I am *joining the fellowship* of Christ's offering and sufferings, and that I am *committed* to the fellowship of His offering and sufferings. That is where His *life* is.

Do you see that a 'sacramental' view purports that we can have His life *apart from* the reality of that fellowship? So, it is an action through which a person appropriates life to themselves.

Although they may maintain relationships with others in the church – they come along to church and have many friends there – their appropriation of the life that is promised to those who partake of the elements is *not* contingent upon *relational connection with others*.

You may have many friends at church, but there also may be some people with whom you are not very happy to communicate. It may even be the person who is ministering the word. However, you can get past that because, as long as you eat and drink those elements, you are obtaining the blessing.

In this case, a person can be completely fractured in relation to *fellowship* in the body of Christ, and yet believe that they are obtaining the blessing by eating those symbols. *That* is the error of receptionism!

Again, although they may maintain relationships with others in the church, their appropriation of the life promised to those who partake of the elements is *not* contingent upon *relational connection with others*. Rather, it is dependent upon their eating the elements *in their own faith*.

And we, in the past, *have* said, 'Let us now eat these elements, by faith.'

### **The faith of Christ, demonstrated by offering – our participation**

Now, we *are* to have faith, but our faith is *demonstrated through offering*, because faith works by *love*.

Faith is not the *turning of* that substance into something or the *obtaining of a blessing* through that rite. Do you see the difference?

Faith is actually an *activity*, or an *expression*, or a capacity, for *participation*.

In practice, sacramentalism denies, and even wars against, fellowship, because it promises that a person will receive blessing from God *apart from participation in offering* as a member of the body of Christ. It is all to do with *how* a person eats and drinks.

### **The communion meal – connection to the fellowship of Yahweh**

The *communion meal* should be a person's *practical connection to fellowship* in which they have an ongoing participation. In coming weeks, we will reiterate why we actually have a meal together.

This fellowship belongs to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The activity of Yahweh's fellowship is not a symbol of something, is it? It is an actual, *substantial* fellowship.

It is not a symbol or a shadow or a type, or any other representation. *His fellowship is actual*, and it has a context for expression. 1Jn 1:3.

### **A context for the demonstration of the faith of the Son**

This context is a 'love feast', which is an '*agape meal*', where the members of the body of Christ are able to express, through fellowship, the faith of the Son of God which they have received by hearing the word.

Christ did not demonstrate His faith in emblems or signs. How did He demonstrate His faith? 'He loved us and gave Himself for us.' Gal 2:20.

We are to live by the faith of the Son of God 'who loved us and gave Himself for us'. If you have the faith of the Son of God, your faith will be demonstrated by *loving and giving yourself* for one another.

In this regard, Jesus said, 'Greater love has no-one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.' Joh 15:13-14.

Likewise, as members of the body, we live by *His faith* through fellowship, or participation, in His offering and sufferings.

In this fellowship, Christ's life is becoming our life, and we are able to minister this life to others in the body of Christ.

This is the nature of the fellowship to which we are joined as we continue in the apostles' doctrine, the apostles' fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayers.

### **Repentance and faith in this season**

I will conclude on a statement about our *repentance and faith* in this season.

In response to the word, we are returning to the 'tradition' that was laid down by the twelve apostles as they established the Jewish church. This is the same tradition that Paul proclaimed to the Gentile churches, which is us, to which we are to return.

Now, *every* person's recovery to this tradition requires their *repentance and faith*.

There *has* been repentance from the leaders and the presbytery in the church. When we come to the communion, to the *agape* meal, we *all* have the opportunity to repent, in the light of what the Spirit is saying to us.

Remember that Christ said, 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.' Rev 2:7.

All of us have an opportunity to *accountably turn* from our former religious communion practices, whether they were observed in ignorance, according to receptionism or on some other basis, and to *demonstrate faith for participation* in the *agape* meal.

We actually have to do that. There is no faith to demonstrate, without repentance. Repentance is the foundation that precedes the expression of faith.

### **Forgetting those things that are behind and laying hold of that which He is illuminating**

We know that this means being able to *articulate* what we are *to forget*; and then to *lay hold* of what the Lord is *illuminating* to us.

'One thing I do, *forgetting* those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I *press toward the goal* for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.' Php 3:13-14.

Now, to 'forget' something, we first have to acknowledge that that is the way in which we actually thought. We have to acknowledge the practices that we are to forget, in order to reach

forward in faith to that which the Spirit is illuminating to us through the word.

This includes acknowledging the fleshly propensity within us that was *loyal* to sacramentalism.

You might not have had any understanding about receptionism or consubstantiation or transubstantiation, or have had any view about it, but we were all engaged in a communion practice that had its tradition based in those things.

Our loyalty to them was not only out of ignorance; it was that we actually delighted in the 'benefit' that we were receiving.

That is as much what the Lord is addressing in us, as is the error of our particular theological heritage.

So I encourage you, along with myself - because I did not know about our alignment to these theologies either - to accept that He is dealing with our traditional heritage and our understanding of communion.

As the Lord reveals that to us, we need to recognise that our loyalty to a certain practice was the belief in what we were *receiving*.

I have been really struck that I can *forget* that and *rejoice* as I press on to what the Lord has illuminated to us.

### **Receiving His chastening**

However, *the light of illumination that we have received in this season does not negate the faith or the life in which we walked previously*.

So, we are not all 'going to hell' because we ate a little wafer and drank from a little cup.

Importantly, we *are* to acknowledge that there has been a chastening of the Lord, which has been a 'few stripes' among us, because of our ignorance. We did not know what we know now, and we have been under the chastening hand of the Lord as it has come across the whole world.

For the whole world, it is part of their judgement. For us, it is *chastening* in the Lord.

So, what is He chastening us for? It is to deal with our understanding of the *agape* meal.

However, this chastening because of our ignorance indicates that we *do belong to the Lord*;

and that we *did* belong to the Lord *in* our ignorance.

Now that the light has shone, and the darkness associated with our ignorance is passing away, we *must walk in that light*.

What did John say would happen as we walk in the light of illumination that the Spirit is revealing to us through the word?

He said that we would have *fellowship*, or *communion*, with one another, and that the blood of Jesus would be effective in our lives, both to cleanse us from sin, and to become our life. Praise the Lord! 1Jo 1:7.

So, let us rejoice in what the Lord is illuminating to us in this season. And let us continue to let go of, or to forget, those things which lie behind, and to *lay hold* of what the Lord is establishing among us as this *agape* fellowship, which is the tradition of the apostles that Christ delivered to them.