

THE IMPORTANCE OF BREAKING BREAD TOGETHER

Peter Hay, prepared for Apostles' Fellowship series, 24 January 2021

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Introduction

Today we will continue to speak about the *agape* meal.

Last week we spoke about what we are *turning from*. In this Bible study session today, having understood the need to relinquish our loyalty to the emblems, I am going to talk about the reason why it is necessary to still have a meal together.

Sacramentalism wars against fellowship

In our last session, we considered the problem of *sacramentalism* with respect to the communion meal.

We noted that the partaking of the emblems of bread and wine as sacraments wars against fellowship. This is because 'sacramentalism' promises that a person will *receive blessing* from God through the consumption of consecrated food.

It does not matter whether it is the belief that:

- it will change into Christ's body and blood
- the presence of God is with the elements
- we are obtaining the blessing of the body and blood because we are eating elements that are 'blessed'

Sacramentalism is the notion that by eating and drinking we *obtain a blessing*; and that this blessing can be obtained *apart from* participating in offering as a member of the body of Christ.

We noted that the communion meal should be a person's practical connection to *fellowship*, in which they have an *ongoing participation*. This fellowship belongs to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The activity of Yahweh's fellowship is not symbolic. It is not mystical. It is not a type or shadow.

Rather, Their fellowship has a *context for expression*.

A love feast

This context is 'a love feast'. God is *love*, so the context for the expression of His love is a *meal* - a 'love meal'. This is why the apostle Paul called the *agape* meal 'the Lord's supper'.

In the context of this meal, 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.

We made the point that the expression of faith is not just 'my confession that I believe something'; speaking *by faith* is our *participation*. It is our conversation and conduct.

Breaking of bread is fundamental

Now, if eating and drinking the sacraments undermines our participation in this fellowship, the obvious questions are: 'Why do we need to eat and drink at all? Can we have fellowship without a meal?

In this session, we will consider why breaking bread is *absolutely fundamental* to God's covenant. The 'breaking of bread' is eating and drinking together. In other words, we will discuss how the *agape* meal, be it in the church or be it in our houses, is the *context* for our participation in the fellowship of Yahwe.

Before we consider the necessity of participating in an actual meal - remember, we are not talking emblems here; we are talking about an actual meal - let us remind ourselves of what Jesus said concerning 'eating His flesh and drinking His blood'.

As we have previously noted, physical 'bread', or food, is *not* turned into Christ's flesh or blood; neither is His body and blood mysteriously appropriated through the action of partaking of the consecrated elements.

Yet, we know that Jesus said that we are to *eat* His flesh and *drink* His blood.

'The realistic statements of Christ'

We will consider some passages which we know well, but we need to understand them in the light of the *illumination* that the Spirit is granting to us in this season.

'Most assuredly, I say to you, *unless* you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have *no life* in you.' Joh 6:53.

That is unequivocal, isn't it? We have to *eat* the flesh and *drink* the blood.

‘Whoever eats my flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.’
Joh 6:54.

With that in mind, we also that Jesus, at the last supper, which was the first *agape* meal, broke bread and gave it to His disciples, saying that it was His body. And He gave them the cup, saying that it was His blood.

So we know that we have to eat His flesh and drink His blood. And then, we recall Jesus saying at the last supper, ‘Here’s some bread’, and breaking it, ‘This is My body’. Here’s a cup; this is My blood.’ Luk 22:19-20.

‘And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me”.’

‘Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the New Covenant in My blood, which is shed for you”.’

These are called ‘the realistic statements of Christ’ concerning the communion, and we think, ‘Oh, well, obviously we need to have a piece of bread and a cup and, somehow, those elements get *made* into the body and blood of Jesus.’

These statements of Christ have been the *focal point* of arguments over the nature of communion for over 1900 years. As we noted last session, Christian adherents have endeavoured to make sense of Christ’s words, particularly these from the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, and the nature of the communion elements.

So, how did this piece of bread and this cup become ‘Christ’s body and blood’ to the communicant?

Many have sought to understand it through philosophy [remember that we talked about Justin Martyr last week], through intellectualism [the science of theology], and then through natural reasoning. Many who would not claim to be philosophers or intellectuals would say, ‘Well, it looks pretty obvious to me.’

However, this way of approaching the Scriptures has only given rise to mysticism and sacramentalism, and it has become a stumbling block for many.

John’s Gospel

So, what did Jesus mean when He said that the bread which He broke was His body, and the cup which He gave them to drink was His blood?

This is an important question for us to consider. To answer this, it is helpful to consider the experience of the apostle John *prior* to when he penned, or wrote, his Gospel.

This is the revelation that Jesus gave to John, and He asked him to write it down and to send it as the beginning, or the preface, to the book of Revelation - seven letters to the seven churches.

All of the churches received these seven letters, and Christ’s first letter was written to the presbytery of Ephesus. Christ admonished them for leaving their first love and, as we explained last week, we know that the *leaving of first love* was directly connected to the nature of their *communion*.

Their practice meant that they were not eating from the *tree of life*, which is Christ’s body and blood.

And the tradition quite broadly noted - obviously, not in the Scriptures, but certainly in church history - that John was part of the presbytery in Ephesus at the time he wrote his Gospel. Irrespective of whether this is true or not, we do recognise that his Gospel was written *after* he had received the revelation. He wrote his Gospel with the book of Revelation in mind.

And the command was to write what he had seen, to write what is, and what is to come. So these are his Gospel, his letters and the book of Revelation. After his experience of receiving the revelation, John wrote his Gospel.

Significantly, in the light of this very first admonition regarding the eucharistic practices of the Ephesian church, his Gospel is the *only one* that does not mention Jesus giving bread and wine to His disciples at the last supper. He obviously wrote about the last supper, but didn’t mention bread or wine at all, only that they had supper together, and that it was a Passover meal.

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke all refer to the meal, and give priority to the emblems of the bread (well, they did not refer to emblems at the point when Jesus spoke about the bread and

the cup), but their account of the meal is quite short, whereas John's is chapters long.

The conversation and conduct of Jesus at the last supper

In His detailed account of this meal - the first *agape* meal - John recounted the words and actions of Jesus. That sounds like the *conversation and conduct* of Jesus at this meal, as they ate and drank together.

Do you see that there was a focus on the meal, but John highlighted what was *said* and what was *done* at the meal, giving intricate detail about it? For example, John noted Jesus washing the disciples' feet and saying to them, 'If I do not wash you, you have no *part* with Me.' He was referring to *connection to His body*.

The new commandment to love one another as Christ loved us was where Jesus proclaimed the new commandment. He wrote about Jesus identifying Himself as the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Perhaps *most significantly*, he wrote about the promise of the Helper, the Holy Spirit, who would teach *all things* and *bring to our remembrance* the things that Christ said to us.

Now, this is important, because we learn that the bread and cup is the *word* of Christ, which is Spirit and life to us. And it is the Holy Spirit who makes it substance in us - the word! Not, the emblems - the word!

So, Jesus highlighted the promise of the Holy Spirit who would come and teach us of all things and would bring to our remembrance the things Christ said to us.

We remember that Paul called the New Covenant - 'This cup is the New Covenant in My blood' - the 'covenant of the Spirit'.

Do you see that John actually captured everything about the New Covenant *without* the emblems? The focus of his explanation of *the meal* is what is being *said* and what's being *done*.

The key point - 'fellowship in the word as we have a meal together'

This brings us to a key point, which John made having heard the admonition to the Ephesian presbytery for falling from that first love fellowship, which is the true *agape* meal, and their preferencing sacramentalism over that.

This point is that eating the bread, which is Christ's body, and drinking the cup, which is His blood, is not based in the consumption of the emblems.

Rather, it is in *the fellowship of the word* which we minister to one another *as we have a meal together*.

The ministry of the bread and wine is in the word and conduct of one another as we have a meal together.

How do we eat Christ's flesh and drink His blood?

From John's letter, we *know* that Jesus is the Living Bread. He is *living bread* - He is *alive* - that came down from heaven, and He said that His blood is *drink* indeed. Jesus said, 'I am the living bread which came down from heaven', and He called His blood '*drink indeed*'. Joh 6:51-55.

To eat is to come to Jesus

That still does not answer the question of how we eat and drink it, does it?

Helpfully, we read, 'And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life". He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.' Joh 6:35.

If you are never hungry, it means that you have *eaten*, doesn't it?

What did He say that you need to do to never hunger? He said that you have to *come* to Him. Thus, to *eat* so that we never hunger is to *come to Christ*.

To drink is to believe in Christ

It means that to never thirst, because we do drink, is to *believe* in Christ. 'He who *believes* in Me shall never thirst.'

So, eating Christ's flesh means to *come to Him*; drinking Christ's blood means to *believe in Him*.

It has nothing to do with the elements. It has to do with what He *said* - we are to come to Him so that we never hunger, and to believe in Him so that we never thirst.

Coming to Christ - joined to the fellowship of His body

We come to Christ so that we can be *joined* to the fellowship of *His body*. In this regard, Paul said, 'You are one bread, and one body.'

Once joined to the fellowship of Christ's body, we *abide* in Him and are *sustained* by His life. This is what Jesus called '*feeding on Him*'. It is straightforward when you look at what the Scriptures teach.

Those who feed on Him in this way will live eternally because of Him.

What does it mean to believe in Christ?

Believing in Christ is the action of *drinking His life*.

So, what does that mean?

The substance of the life that Christ had received from the Father –this is *zoe* life, and it is in His blood – was in His flesh and blood while He *lived* as a son of man on earth.

Believing gives us *access* to the *sonship life* that He received from God the Father.

This, too, requires us to *abide in Him* as fruitful branches of the Vine. Jesus said, 'I am the Vine, you are the branches'.

Where does the fruit come from? The fruit grows on the branches that are *abiding* in Christ. By this means, we can *receive* this drink as a ministry of one to another.

Repentance from sacramentalism

We have said many times, and it is important that we understand this, that our meal together is not turned into another substance, yet we do have to have a meal together.

Why is the eating and drinking of an *agape* meal necessary to come into Christ? Remember, it is *eating His flesh; and believing*, which means *drinking His blood*.

How do we do this without the *agape* meal becoming a new rite or sacramental practice?

It begins with *repentance*, because we have to be delivered from that drive within us towards sacramentalism. That is the beginning point; that is what we are turning from. As we do that, our practice will not be sacramentalism.

But it is important to understand how we can make this meal that we eat together to be just another sacrament, so that we do not go back to those things from which we have been delivered.

Why do we have a meal together?

Why do we need to have a meal together, and how do we do it in such a way that it is not a sacrament?

We begin by considering our natural households. I hope your households are like this, and if they are not, this is also a point of reformation for you. The regular meals that we have within our *natural* households are a key marker of our membership of that household.

When you have dinner together, it is not that some random people from the street come to your table to eat what is there, is it? Rather, your membership of that household is indicated by the fact that, every day or regularly, you sit at *that* table *with those people*.

Do you see that the eating of a meal marks you as *part of that household*?

The Scriptures teach us that the culture of the household has its *most fundamental expression* at the mealtime. This is quite amazing, and there are plenty of Scriptures to demonstrate this.

The culture at our meal table

We read in Proverbs, 'Better is a dinner of herbs [that is literally vegetables for all the children out there; imagine having a dinner of only vegetables] where love is, than a fatted calf with hatred.' Pro 15:17.

We see that Solomon indicated a cultural practice as being central to eating a meal. He did not say that the meal is the important thing; he said, 'What is occurring when you are having the meal?'

The *culture* is evident in the *way* that we eat and drink together. This would be the distinction between eating in a worthy manner - that is, where love is - or in an unworthy manner, not discerning the Lord's body, or 'with hatred'.

Do you see that Solomon picked up the principle of being worthy and unworthy regarding how we eat a meal in our house?

'Better is a dry morsel with quietness, than a house full of feasting with strife.' Pro 17:1. There is a meal, but the *way* that we eat the meal reveals our culture.

As an aside, it is important to note that we do not make every meal a gourmet experience. Now, it

doesn't mean that it cannot be gourmet - of course, we love food. But where the food becomes the *focus*, it can be a cover for both our own *shame* - as we use the food to 'present' in a particular way - and also a means of *covering over*, or offsetting, *relational disharmony* between people in a household.

There is no problem in having gourmet meals, but there is a problem where the initiative toward that is because of laziness in relation to the actual *culture of how* we eat and drink. So we see that the culture of a household is *expressed* when we eat and drink together. We have previously discussed how the culture of a household is revealed through the *conversation and conduct* within it.

So, we eat a meal together; it might be vegetables or a dry morsel or a beautiful 'fatted calf' that is delicious.

However, the aspect that expresses, or reveals, our culture, as we eat and drink together, is how we *speak* to one another, and the nature of our *conduct*, either deliberately or unconsciously (sometimes we think we are demonstrating hospitality but we are actually 'gritting our teeth'). In fact, perhaps that is not quite subconscious.

The Lord's table is the expression of His culture

It is not only our *practice* that reveals our culture at the table. It is the *motivation* of our practice.

This principle is fundamental to the Lord's own household.

We are not talking about only natural households, although it is fundamental to them; but the Lord's own household is where we see this principle in action.

The culture of His household is actually expressed at a meal called '*the Lord's supper*'. The *food* of the Lord's table is the expression of His culture.

We read Yahweh's own words. 'Now the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Command the children of Israel, and say to them, 'My offering, My food for My offerings made by fire as a sweet aroma to Me, you shall be careful to offer to Me at their appointed time.'" ' Num 28:1-2.

Obviously, Yahweh doesn't *need* to eat, and He certainly was not saying that He ate the burnt

offerings of the Israelites - that would be complete nonsense.

Rather, He was saying that offering, typified by a whole burnt offering, is the culture of His life.

So, the food of the Lord's table is the expression of His culture. The entire offering is consumed.

When He said that it is His 'food', He was explaining that it is the means of satisfying His desire, or appetite.

What is the desire, or appetite, of Yahweh? It is offering.

And the means of satisfying that appetite for offering is to *make offering!* This is one revealing the other, and then another revealing another, like an enfolding fire.

The point is that Yahweh's appetite, or desire, is to *live by offering*. And His appetite is sustained, or satisfied, by offering, or love.

So, the prophet Ezekiel saw a vision of the Lord's fellowship.

The agape meal - a participation in offering

Regarding the *agape* meal, then, there is fellowship, or a context of relationship. And there is a meal; and that meal is the expression of a culture.

So, what is *Yahweh's* culture?

It is offering, and that is His desire; and the meal is *participation* in that offering. It is the perpetual laying down of life to reveal another, over and over; being completely satisfied in revealing one another.

The fire of offering

This is what Ezekiel saw a vision of. He said that it was like a great fire engulfing itself, yet there was no fuel to feed it; it was self-sustaining. He saw a vision of the Lord's *fellowship*, describing it as a raging fire engulfing itself.

Now, we know that this fire, which requires no fuel to sustain it, describes the fervent love of Yahweh. Son 8:6. It is the flame of Yahweh.

This fire, not requiring fuel to sustain the burning bush, is what Moses marvelled at. Seeing the burning bush, he turned around and marvelled at it; not because the bush was on fire, but because the fire didn't depend upon the bush to be sustained. It was an absolutely raging fire - full of

'appetite' – but it did not draw from natural substances.

The 'food' of it is actually the perpetual nature of the offering.

Bring a burnt offering, so that you can participate in My house

The Lord, through His statement, 'This is My food, a burnt offering', was saying to the Israelites, 'I'm not eating your offerings. You bring a burnt offering, so that you can participate in My house.'

The point is, that meal, which is offering, or the food of Yahweh, is *the culture of His house*. He said to them, in effect, 'If you want to come and participate in My house, participate by offering; bring a burnt offering.'

The Lord invited the Israelites to join the fellowship of His life, which He identified as a meal, or food, *by making offering*.

Offering according to the context of His name

Where was the offering to be made? It was in the context, or the ground, of His *name*. This context is His 'house'.

So the expression of fellowship is a meal that is happening in His name, which is in the context of His house.

'An altar of earth you shall make for Me and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen. In every place where I record My name I will come to you, and I will bless you.' Exo 20:24.

This is where the point of participation is for us – in His name. And, when we come that way, He said that He will come to us and bless us.

'And it came to pass when Solomon had finished building the house of the Lord [the house of the Lord is the temple and the king's house] and all Solomon's desire which he wanted to do, that the Lord appeared to Solomon the second time as He had appeared to him at Gibeon, and the Lord said to him, "I have heard your prayer and your supplication that you have made before Me. I have consecrated this house [Remember, we are talking about *a meal in a house*].

"I have consecrated this house which you have built to put My name there forever, and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually". 1Ki 9:1-4.

So, that's what it was like under the Old Covenant.

Eating and drinking together – a context for fellowship

So, what is it like for us now, having received the command of Jesus Himself to have a meal together and to eat His flesh and drink His blood?

Eating and drinking the *agape* meal together is the practice of those who belong to the house of the Lord.

This is not *symbolically* eating and drinking and *symbolically* belonging. This means *actually* eating an *agape* meal together as the practice of those who *actually* belong to the household of the Lord.

Importantly, our eating and drinking together is *not* symbolic of our membership of His house. Rather, it is actual, or substantial, *participation*, as it would be eating in a natural house.

Our eating and drinking is our participation in His house

We are to have a meal, because the eating and drinking is actual participation in His house, where His name is.

How, then, is this different from our neighbours who don't know the Lord, when they have people in their house for a meal?

How is ours an *agape* meal, while theirs is merely satisfying their natural hunger?

Where two or three are gathered in My name

Our meals are Christ's table, or the Lord's supper, where He is in the midst of us as we eat and drink together. In this regard, we remember His words, 'For where two or three [two or three houses] are gathered in My name, there I am in the midst of them.' Mat 18:20.

Of course, the question then arises: 'What does it mean to gather in the name?'

I'll take some key snapshots from a previous session on this topic to highlight what it means to be 'in His name', which also means 'to participate in His house'.

The Lord said that He was going to put His name on His house – and that is where we are to make offering, or to participate in His meal.

The word establishes the ground of our fellowship

As we have considered previously, it is the *word* that proclaims the name of the Lord and establishes the ground of our fellowship.

As he was proclaiming this word, Moses said that his words, proclaiming the name of the Lord, were like drops of rain and the distillation of the dew.

I love Moses' connection of the word proclaiming the name (remember that this is the context in which we meet) to the water of the word because, right at the first *agape* meal, what did Jesus do?

He poured water into a basin and washed His disciples' feet. He said this was fundamental to them being *part of Him*.

The water of the word, dropping as the rain, distilling as the dew

We read from the Song of Moses, 'Let My teaching drop as the rain and My speech distil 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 32:2-3.

Moses declared that there is a way in which the word comes, and this way, this teaching or preaching of the word, is proclaiming the name of the Lord.

If we meet in His name - that is, if this word is the source of faith by which we speak - Jesus is *in the midst* of us and we are eating and drinking at *His table*.

The word washes and refreshes us

So, it is the word that washes and refreshes us as it is taught and preached, line upon line, precept upon precept.

There is a connection, then, between the word that is like rain and distilling as the dew, by which Moses proclaimed the name of the Lord, and the way in which Isaiah described it as the word coming, line upon line, precept upon precept, bringing rest and refreshing. Deu 32:2-3. Isa 28:10-12.

Rest and refreshing are found through fellowship

Remember that rest and refreshing are found through fellowship, or by being yoked to the offering of Christ.

Jesus said, 'All you who are weary and heavy laden, take My yoke upon you and you will find rest for your souls.' Mat 11:28-29.

He specifically said, 'You will *learn* from Me and find rest for your souls.'

Now, learning is the outcome of receiving teaching. This word, therefore, when it is received and believed, is resident *in our hearts and in our mouths*. Rom 10:8.

He said, 'Don't ask someone to go up on your behalf [that is what we might previously have done] or ask someone to bring up Christ from the dead [in order to sustain our natural mortality].'

The word is in your heart and on your lips – the basis of our speaking together

He instructed that this is *not* how our *agape* meal should work! Rather, He said that 'the word is in your heart and in your mouth, that word which we preach to you.'

This is becoming the foundation of our fellowship through our *agape* meal together. It becomes the basis of our speech with one another both at the table and as we continue each day in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings.

The reality is that, as we eat and drink together, and as we continue, every day, through all of the circumstances of life that we experience, all things are working together for good; that is, for the expression of our sonship as members of the body of Christ.

Speaking together – the nature of our conversation and conduct

It is 'speaking to one another', which is the nature of our conversation and conduct, as we have a meal together, which marks us as a member of His house. It is a meal in His name.

It is in His name because it is *sanctified* by the word of God (the word proclaiming His name) and by prayer (our saying of 'grace') which continues throughout the meal.

We, therefore, *come* to Christ, which means to 'eat His flesh'. We also *believe* by the faith that comes by hearing His word, which means 'drinking His blood'. These are vital aspects of our participation as we share with one another, speaking with one another and caring for one another over the *agape* meal, which is the Lord's table.

We, though many, are one bread

In this regard, Paul said, 'We, though many, are one bread and one body, for we all partake of that one bread.' 1Co 10:17.

What does that mean? It means that we all have *come to Christ!*

It doesn't mean that we ate from one loaf of bread, or from the same packet of savoury biscuits.

It is that we all have *come to Christ*, to *abide* in Him with one another. This is *where* the eating is. This is what it means to be the 'one bread'. This is the significance of the bread element.

Poured out as a drink offering

Furthermore, Paul testified that he was being 'poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of another's faith'.

An important element to note about the drink offering is that it had two elements to it. Part of that drink offering was to be *consumed*; and part was to be *poured out on the sacrifice*. It was, in fact, a burnt offering on the altar.

Now, why is that significant?

It is significant because we drink *by believing*; and then we *pour out* on the sacrifice and service of another's faith by *laying down our lives* for them, literally, when we get together for our agape meals. As a result, as we realise where the needs are, we are learning to care for one another. It is very straightforward, isn't it?

We become the 'tree of life' to one another

This ministry of one to another as the bread and wine is 'the tree of life'. Allow this reality to distil upon us, that our fellowship together as the bread and wine to one another is 'the tree of life'! We are ministering *that* life to one another.

In this regard, that is exactly what King Solomon said: 'The *fruit* of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise.' Pro 11:30.

This is a wonderfully pertinent Scripture in the light of what we are understanding about the *agape* meal.

The righteousness of faith

Being 'righteous' is not being perfect. A righteous person is not someone who has achieved the standard of the Law. A righteous person is a person who is a son of God. They are righteous because of *faith being expressed*.

From where has that faith come - from themselves?

No, it comes from the word that they have believed and that they are hearing and speaking. And, as they speak by that word, *they are* the tree of life to one another.

That is a wonderful reality for us - 'the fruit of the righteous is a tree of life'. And we *partake* of that - of one another - as we eat and drink together, and as we care for one another throughout the week.

Now, to be able to participate in this ministry is fundamental to why we are fasting for three days as a church. And it is slightly ironic that we are *fasting* so that we can *participate* in this meal.

Joined to the fast that the Lord has chosen

We are able to participate in this ministry because we are joining the fast that Christ Himself has chosen.

Speaking of this fast, the Lord said, 'Is this not the fast that *I have chosen*?' This was not Isaiah saying that he had chosen this fast. And we do not say that we have chosen this fast. The Lord Himself said that this is the fast that He Himself has chosen.

And He is saying, 'Come and join My fast.' For what reason? 'Is it not to *share your bread* with the hungry?' Isa 58:7.

Ministering bread to those who are hungry

If you are joined to Him, to His body, you have the capacity to minister that bread to those who are hungry, both in His body together and as a testimony to those who are outside the body where there is a 'famine' of hearing.

I believe that, in this season, as we are being established in this *agape* meal, where we are able to minister the tree of life to others, that famine of hearing is going to be undone by the word in our mouth, as we share, house to house, with our neighbours. This is where the word will spread mightily.

'Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out?'

Ministering grace to one another in our houses

Now, who are the 'poor'? That should be *all* of us, shouldn't it? Are not we supposed to be the 'poor

in spirit'. And are not we supposed to be inviting one another into our houses, to minister grace to each other?

'When you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh.'

This is an amazing point about our fast.

Practically, then, what does it look like to be those who minister the bread and wine to one another as we have a meal, either as morning tea at church or as a meal in our houses.

Sharing the word of present truth with one another

First, we are able to share and testify with one another from the word of present truth – remember, it is the ground upon which we meet – that we are receiving and devotionally applying.

In our nuclear houses, we have been considering the word, talking about it, and applying it. We are then able to share with others what we are understanding.

This is fundamental to being the 'bread of sincerity and truth' to one another.

Pouring out on others – practical service within the church family

The *agape* meal-time also presents us with an opportunity to consider *how* we can we pour ourselves out upon the sacrifice and service of others. This means that, over the meal, we can make plans to care for and to serve one another during the week.

As we speak together, we see where help or care or support is needed, which then is an opportunity for us to pour out on the sacrifice and service of another's faith, so that they can continue to do their sonship works. We give aid to individuals and families, where needed, according to our grace and abilities.

We don't, however, need to be going around and doing, fulfilling, all the jobs that others probably should be doing themselves. Do you see the point?

Sanctification is fundamental to this.

Walking and being guided in the truth by the Spirit

What we *do* need to know is who we are and what is *our expression of the life*, demonstrated by revealing another. Wisdom is required here. We do need to walk in the light and have fellowship

with one another, and the blood cleanses us from all fleshly motivations. So, we don't need to go and solve all the church's 'ills'.

We simply need to begin to hear what the *Spirit* is saying to us, because He is making Christ's word *substantial* in us. He is *feeding* it to us, so that what we are doing is according to the truth.

We are walking and being guided in the *truth* by the *Spirit*. This is what 'worship in Spirit and truth' looks like.

Therefore, we are not to try to do *everything*; but we *are* to do what belongs to us, according to grace and capacity, to care for one another.

There are also deaconing teams in the church that need further help and support, to which we can offer ourselves.

Instruction to tarry for one another

I want to finish on the point of 'tarrying for one another'. Paul referred to this in relation to the *agape* meals that were happening in Corinth.

Speaking about divisions in the church, he said, 'Now in giving these instructions [on relational disconnections] I do not praise you, since you have come together not for the better but for the worse.

'For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it.

'For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognised among you.' 1Co 11:17-19.

We have spoken previously about these factions and how they can cause sorrow to 'the elect'. This is not our subject today, but I do want to talk about the need, where there is relational disconnection, to tarry for one another.

Time taken to recover and reconcile with one another

This means to actually *take time to recover and reconcile*, and is a ministry of reconciliation to one another, so that our meals, as we eat them together, are not to be considered 'unworthy'.

Our meal is not to be eating 'a fatted calf with hatred'. It needs to be eating our food with love. We do need to take time to give attention to this.

Evidently, in Corinth, these divisions, or factions, were causing distress in the church. These sorrows, or distresses, were proving, or revealing, who was participating in the *agape* meal in a worthy manner, with love; and who was participating in an unworthy manner, with hatred or anger or anything that intervened in relationships.

We are not to eat or drink in an unworthy manner

As Paul also said, 'He who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner, eats and drinks judgement to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.' Remember, we are supposed to be eating of *His* body, at *His* table.

Where there is an 'unworthy manner' - a disconnection or relational disharmony - we are not discerning, or aware of, our participation in the body.

Paul said, 'For this reason, many are weak, many are sick among you and many sleep.' When he referred to 'sleep' there, he was saying that they were actually *spiritually dead*. They may have been well and truly engaged in the activity of the church, yet there was *no* participation in blessing.

For this reason, it is important, as we gather to eat and drink, to take time to talk together and to begin to address the issues that have resulted in division and discord within and between households. We do need to give attention to this.

Eating our food with gladness and sincerity of heart

If we are committed to an *agape* meal, we are committed to *fellowship* which has, at its basis, *love*, and is established in the *truth*.

This is what Paul meant when he said, 'Therefore my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait [or, tarry] for one another.'

If we don't take time to tarry with one another, recognising that eating and drinking in an unworthy manner brings us under judgement, it doesn't matter how good our meal is - 'the fatted calf', or the gourmet meal or whatever it is - we are eating and drinking in an unworthy manner. We are actually eating and drinking judgement to ourselves.

Our judgement commuted to a chastening

Through this ministry to another, we are able to turn to the Lord so that the judgement that we are experiencing can be commuted to *chastening* upon us, in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings.

And, when it is commuted to chastening, there is capacity to put off that which is of the flesh, and there is a ministry of grace causing us to grow, or to mature, in our sonship as legitimate sons of God.

It is an encouragement to us all to remember that we are to have a meal together, but that it is not to be a sacramental practice.

It is to be our *participation in the life and culture of God's house*.