

BLAMELESS AND WITHOUT SPOT PART 4

Peter Hay, prepared for word ministry, 14 March 2021
Transcription of recording, slightly edited

Introduction

Today, we will continue with our subject of the circumcision of Christ, and our participation in the fellowship of that circumcision as a reality of our baptism.

The circumcision of Christ

The focus of our last Bible study was the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. We made the point that the circumcision of Christ was the action of a sword which was applied to His corporate body when He was made the Head of the corporate body of sin, in the garden of Gethsemane.

The *first* side of that circumcising action of the sword against Him is the means by which *all flesh was condemned*, as He took it out into the sea of God's forgetfulness.

The *second* aspect of this circumcision is that those who are *conformed to His death are raised with Him and in Him*, as new creation sons of God.

Baptism - faith for participation in Christ's offering; being made alive in new creation

It would be helpful to remember some key points.

First, *baptism* into Christ is a believer's *faith* for *participation in the full provision of Christ's offering*; that is, participation in everything that is being judged, which is *our immersion in the waters of judgement*.

Second, it is participation in everything that is being *made alive, as part of the new creation*.

Baptism establishes a believer on the pathway of salvation that Christ has already perfected for them through His once-for-all offering.

The fellowship of Christ's sufferings

We have given particular attention to *the fellowship of Christ's sufferings*. This specifically refers to *our sufferings* that Christ experienced, and which He made to be *His sufferings*, dying them by the grace of God.

The key point of our sufferings being fellowship in the sufferings of Christ is that, through our *fellowship* in these sufferings, as we acknowledge that *we are crucified with Christ*, our *sin* and the *other law* are being *removed from us*.

The whole of humanity is dying with Christ

The whole of humanity is *dying with Christ*. This is another of our foundational points.

We must be illuminated to this truth, and be delivered from the deluded presumption that we are preserved from dying with Christ – either because of our belief in His vicarious offering or because of our accumulated 'righteous' works.

Everyone is dying with Christ and no-one escapes that; that is not what we are escaping. We escape from the judgement of God, which is that we 'stay forgotten'.

The apostle Paul made this point in his letter to the Corinthians. 'Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.' 1Co 10:12.

A person who thinks that he stands is someone who believes in his own righteousness, or he believes that the way in which he is walking has some inherent 'good' to it.

Paul warned against thinking that way about yourself or about your Christian walk. He wrote that if you think that way, you will fall. This 'falling' is the condition of the whole of humanity; we are 'dead in trespasses and sins' that Christ has already taken out. Eph 2:1.

This is presumption – a belief that it is 'in the light'; but it is actually in darkness. We must receive *true illumination*.

The way of escape – finding grace in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings

'Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation [adversity] has overtaken you except such as is common to man.' 1Co 10:12-13.

Paul wrote to Christians that the sufferings that we experience are common to everyone; no-one will escape them, even though they are a believer.

'No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.' 1Co 10:13.

In the past, many people have used this Scripture to say that the Lord makes a way of escape *out of* our sufferings. This has been less so in recent years because we have begun to understand what Paul was writing.

If we read it that way, we are contradicting the verse before it. He wrote, 'No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man.' So, that is obviously not what it means for 'a way of escape' to be made.

The second part of this verse is 'that you may be able to bear it'. The way of escape is not 'out' of suffering; it is to do with the capacity to 'bear' the suffering.

So, what is the escape? The way of escape is 'from the judgement of God'; it is not 'out of the suffering'. It is 'out of the context of condemnation', which is forgotten by God.

That is the escape that we are looking for. That is the escape that *leads to an inheritance*; to an eternal blessing. The way of escape is from the judgement of God; it is not from the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. We are able to *bear* these sufferings because, *in fellowship with Christ*, we endure them by the *same grace* by which He tasted them.

We remember that He, by the grace of God, tasted our sufferings of death; 'the sufferings of death for every man'. Heb 2:9.

By *faith*, which we receive by hearing the *word*, we are granted an introduction into this *grace* in which we stand. Rom 5:2.

We do not stand on the basis of our own righteousness or presumption. Rather, we stand in the grace by which He tasted these sufferings. This grace is the way of escape that is turning, or commuting, sufferings that are of the judgement of God to being 'conformed to His death'. Php 3:10.

Conformed to His death

Today, we will understand that what it means to 'be conformed to Christ's death' is different from 'the fellowship of His sufferings'. Obviously, there will be a connection point here; but Paul, when he listed these, separated them.

He wrote, 'That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death'. Php 3:10.

What does it mean to 'be conformed to His death'? The point is that the way of escape is not *out of* suffering; rather, it is the capacity to be able to *bear* it, which is *the grace of God*. We understand that that grace is *resurrection life*.

The judgement of God commuted to a chastening

Now, having said that we are not escaping out of suffering, we do note that some sufferings will come to an end when we are illuminated regarding our sin and self-centredness, and we *turn in repentance to the Lord*.

Why is that? It is because the sufferings that we are able to bear are *the chastening of the Lord*, and they are the sufferings in which God does not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able to bear.

But, when we are under judgement, that is eternal torment. And, unless we turn from the sin and self-centredness that is under the judgement of God, we will continue to suffer, and it will get worse.

When we turn from judgement, or we are illuminated to what it is that the Lord is calling us to 'put off', the judgement that is associated with that sin will cease.

And, as we will see, the sufferings that we endure become *for the sake of another*; they become part of our participation in the ministry of grace to another.

So, we note that some sufferings *will* come to an end when we are illuminated regarding our sin and self-centredness and we turn in repentance to the Lord. This is because, when we are delivered from the judgement of God and that judgement is commuted to chastening, it achieves its purpose in our life. Something has come to an end.

Those who have been trained by chastening will express sonship life

Paul noted that *afterward* - after we have experienced or endured this suffering - it yields the peaceable fruit of *righteousness*. The peaceable fruit of righteousness is the expression of the life of *sonship* by those who have been *trained* by it. Heb 12:11.

This is a key point. Some of us will experience seasons of suffering, and we will *not* be trained by it. It will not have worked any effect in us except to have caused us to age and to become more mortally frail. We have to *hear* what the Lord is

saying, and what He is addressing through these sufferings.

Illumination, repentance, faith, obedience

Another way of saying it is that simply experiencing sufferings does not lead to righteousness.

There actually has to be *illumination*. There has to be *repentance* – turning from something – and *faith* towards God. That faith is demonstrated by *obedience*.

There is a way of walking, and that obedience reveals the peaceable fruit of righteousness. So, it is not a situation where, simply because you suffer, when that suffering is ended, it has resulted in a change.

Speaking by faith according to the word

There will be a testimony in the suffering, and there is a consequence of it – that is, the ‘speaking by faith’. That is not merely, ‘I feel better now’.

Speaking by faith is because of the *illumination* that has come in the context of suffering. That speaking by faith is *according to the word*. That is why the word is the foundation to this.

His death is the death to which we are to be conformed

Let us understand ‘being conformed to Christ’s death’.

We have noted that Christ made our death to be His death, dying it by the grace of God. And, at each point of judgement, which is *our* death that *we* are suffering under the judgement of God now, when He makes that death His death, *He* is suffering under the judgement of God.

He was being made alive by the shedding of His blood. As His blood was being shed and multiplied, He was actually coming back from the death of our sin. This was because His blood contained the resurrection life, or grace, of God. Paul called this ‘the death that He died’. This death is the death to which we are to be conformed.

‘For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all.’ Rom 6:10.

That is the implication of ‘the scapegoat’, which reveals the edge of the circumcising sword that is ‘cutting something off’. Lev 16:8-10.

‘The death that He died, He died to sin once for all.’ That is ‘sin going out with Him’, as the scapegoat; that is the edge of the sword cutting something off.

Reckoning ourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ

‘But the life that He *lives*, He lives to God.’ Rom 6:10.

That is the element of ‘the Lord’s goat’, the second edge of the circumcising sword, which is bringing us to God. Lev 16:8-9.

Two goats represented the one work of the Lamb of God, and also revealed the two sides of the circumcision of Christ.

‘Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be *dead indeed to sin*, but *alive to God* in Christ Jesus our Lord.’ Rom 6:11.

This does not mean that I simply reckon that ‘because Jesus has done this, I am no longer a sinner and I am alive to God’.

Paul wrote, ‘Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God *in Christ Jesus* our Lord.’ The reckoning is: ‘I reckon that I am *dying with Christ* and being *made alive with Christ*.’ It is the reckoning that, not only am I *in Him*, but I am journeying *with Him each day*.

This is our faith, our mindset. ‘Reckoning’ is how you think. So, this is you setting your mind on the Spirit, because the Spirit is the One who enabled Christ to make this offering, and He is the One who is leading you into ‘all truth’ – the truth established by the offering journey of Christ.

‘Likewise you also, reckon yourselves [or, set your mind] to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.’ Another way of saying that would be to say, ‘Likewise reckon yourselves to be *in Christ Jesus* our Lord, where you are able to be *dead to sin* and *alive to God*.’

Christ’s death was the means by which life was multiplied, and *new creation* was brought forth. For us, that is the outcome of being conformed to His death. It is new creation life. *We are being made alive in Him and with Him*.

We are joined to the process through which sin is being removed and destroyed.

‘Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.’ 2Co 5:17.

That is the obvious statement of the circumcision of Christ: 'Old things have been passed away; behold, I make all things new.'

The point is that it is not that we are in the *new* creation when all things are going 'well', and we are in the *old* creation when we have a 'bad' day, and we sin. That is not what it means to be part of the new creation.

To think in that way is to think that 'blamelessness' is on account of our 'goodness' or that we are unable to be blameless because of our 'badness'. That is the knowledge of good and evil, isn't it?

It is not as though we are 'in' and then 'out' of the new creation, depending on whether we sin or not.

Rather, as part of the new creation, we are *joined to the process through which sin is being removed and destroyed*.

It is no longer I who live; the life that I now live, I live by the faith of the Son of God

We are walking in a *new* way as we are being *progressively changed into the likeness of the Son*.

The point of new creation life is that it is a *new* way of walking. This is walking in such a way that we are fully conformed to the fellowship of His sufferings, and fully conformed to His death.

We are accepting that every step of this new and living way is dealing with sin and the other law; but, at the same time, we are being made alive with Christ to walk in a new way. That is what it means to be the new creation.

The whole world has already been made part of the body of Christ. And, unless they join new creation life, they remain under condemnation, forgotten by God – dead, gone, judged, finished!

The same is true for us, but when we come into the new creation, that process of immersion is the way in which sin and the other law, which would otherwise leave us condemned, are being taken away from us. We are emerging from that water, with Christ, revealing the life of the new creation.

Another way of saying it is that you cannot have the life of new creation unless you are leaving and letting go of the sin that is being put away. That is what it means to be part of the new creation.

So, reckon yourselves *joined to the fellowship of that process*. That is what the Lord is calling us to.

The fruit of being conformed to Christ's death is that *Christ lives in us*. Paul wrote, 'I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live [nothing of my own righteousness is being recovered] ... and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God [because it is Christ who lives in Me]'. Gal 2:20.

So, the fruit of our being conformed to Christ's death is that Christ lives in us, and that *the life that we live is by the faith of the Son*, which we receive as we continue to hear, believe and obey His *word*.

Being conformed to Christ's death delivers us from living for ourselves

The point to note is that, having been conformed to Christ's life, we *no longer live for ourselves*. That is the fundamental principle of the flesh – living for ourselves. Even if we are a very charitable person, 'living for ourselves' is not that we are 'trying to get life to sustain ourselves'. 'Living for ourselves' is 'deriving identity by what we do'.

You may be a very charitable, great looking person, a person whose deeds appear righteous, but the 'doing' of them is for the sake of deriving identity. That is what has to go.

Deriving identity through your own works is living for yourself. Even though you may be giving away all of your possessions, and may be caring for all the poor etc, that is 'living for yourself'.

The only way to be delivered from that is to be *conformed to Christ's death*.

The love of Christ compels us – we confess His lordship

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

The love of Christ is being poured into our heart by the Holy Spirit, and it is the love that Christ demonstrates to us when He comes to us with 'eyes like a flame of fire'.

When we look into His face, those eyes expose all of our self-righteousness, and we feel challenged and undone by His eyes. That is the love of Christ, and it compels us in a particular way.

The Holy Spirit pours this love into our heart, and the evidence that we are receiving that love, which is coming from His eyes, is, first and foremost, our confession of His *lordship*.

So, for Him to be our Lord, it means that we follow in His way.

Living to reveal Christ

‘The love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all [as the body of sin], then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.’ 2Co 5:14-15.

This is an important point. When we touch the resurrection life of Christ in our daily life, the resurrection life of Christ is the life of our sonship; but we do not live His life for the purpose of ‘finding ourselves’, or even for finding our sonship.

We are *living to reveal Christ*, in our conversations with one another and in the community in which the Father has placed us. We are no longer living for ourselves, but we are living for Him. Paul wrote, ‘But *for Him* who died for them and rose again’. This is a completely *new* way of living.

The mercy of God is *new every morning* for us to live and walk in this new and living way.

We receive resurrection life in the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings for the sake of another

We will still experience sufferings as we are joined to this process. However, as we continue to change, our sufferings will have less to do with addressing our self-righteousness, because we have been progressively putting it off, and more to do with *our participation in the ministry of Christ’s life*, by which we are living to reveal Him and Them.

As we are engaged in this process, we are being delivered from our self-righteousness, and we are being made alive from the dead as the sons of God.

But we find that we are still suffering. So, does that mean that our self-righteousness is not being dealt with? No, it does not mean that. Our self-righteousness is ‘going out’ and we are changing. We are able to testify, ‘I am no longer like I was before.’

Those sufferings, and our participation in them, are becoming less and less to deal with our own self-righteousness, and more and more to do with our capacity to *minister grace to another*. This is ‘the death that He died’.

This was the testimony and example of the apostle Paul. ‘Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all

comfort, who *comforts us in all our tribulation*, that we *may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble*, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.’ 2Co 1:3-4.

Now, that comfort reveals that we have *obtained life* in the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings. We are experiencing these tribulations and we are obtaining comfort, which is grace, not for ourselves, but for the purpose of being able to *comfort others* in their tribulation.

‘For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.’ 2Co 1:5-6. How beautiful is that!

This consolation is the *exanastasis* life that Paul desired when he declared that his focus in life was to know Christ, the power of His resurrection, the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death. Php 3:8-10.

Resurrection life is the consolation and comfort of grace that becomes our inheritance, and it is the life that we minister to one another. This is actually the basis of our *agape* meal, which we will consider today.

Maturity in Christ – the removal of carnality

Paul made it clear that that which keeps us immature as Christians is our self-righteous carnality.

This is an important point. We do not grow as sons of God merely through the course of time.

We grow up naturally in the course of time, but we can remain babes in Christ if we hold on to our carnality. It does not matter how experienced you are, in terms of how many years you have been a Christian, if you are not being delivered from your carnality, you are still a babe in Christ.

Maturity in Christ actually requires our *connection* to the process by which that is being removed from us. This is so that, unencumbered by our self-righteous carnality, we are able to ‘stand up’, no longer living for ourselves, which keeps us like little children.

Rather, we are able to *live for Him* who died for us and was raised from the dead. This is important.

As we mature, which means that we are connected to this process, we suffer less because of our carnality, immaturities and self-centredness. This is because they are being removed from us.

Sanctified in our conversation and conduct

As sons of God, our maturity is demonstrated as a *fruit*.

Fruit results from this, and we *see* it because we become more circumspect in our speech – our ‘speech’ is our conversation and conduct.

Another way of saying it is that we are being *sanctified*.

We participate where it is our accountability to participate, and we do not participate, or speak, where we have no accountability.

We actually obtain some mature perspective that is not defined or driven by our self-definition. Rather, it is actually the reality of Christ’s life in us, which is the motivation or the capacity to speak.

Speaking by faith

Faith, by which I *speak*, works by that life – it works by *love*. Gal 5:6.

As we mature, we suffer less because of our carnality, immaturity and self-centredness. This is because it is being removed from us.

Our maturity as sons of God is demonstrated by our circumspect speech, less reactivity in life, and we become more content in every circumstance of life.

Towards the end of his life, Paul said that he had learned the secret of how to abound and how to be abased, and to be content in every circumstance of life. Php 4:11-13.

That is the statement of a mature person. That is not only a mature person; that is a mature son of God, growing up into the fullness of the stature of Christ. Eph 4:13.

Crucified with Christ in every suffering circumstance

We will still suffer, but it is more for the sake of another’s salvation, rather than only for our own salvation.

That does not mean that we go around looking at our various different sufferings and saying, ‘I’ve suffered a lot during my life, I must have dealt with

my self-righteousness; this is all for the sake of another.’

Rather, in *every circumstance of life*, as we suffer, our *confession* is, ‘I have been co-crucified with Christ.’ We accept that that is a mark of us being immersed in the *fellowship of His sufferings*.

And *fruit* is what is ministered in suffering. It is not that I am saying, ‘I need to have this fruit.’ Rather, in the circumstance, as we are *illuminated by His word* and as the Holy Spirit ministers to us *the love God*, we will express that *sonship life* in every circumstance.

That is our culture. We do not sit and make a judgement about whether we are suffering righteously or unrighteously.

Being conformed to His death

The only judgement we are to make, because we are *compelled by the love of Christ*, is ‘that if *One died for all, then all died*; and He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.’ 2Co 5:14-15.

So, being *conformed to His death* is the way in which we are to think.

Our participation in God’s Everlasting Covenant

Most importantly, our *connection* to these two dimensions of Christ’s circumcision – that which is *passing away*; as well as that which is emerging, or *growing up*, the maturing of the sonship that we are receiving from Christ – indicates our participation in God’s Everlasting Covenant.

The Lord said to Abraham that circumcision is the sign of that covenant. So, if we are not receiving, or we are not joined to, the circumcision of Christ, we are *not participating* in the Everlasting Covenant.

Our connection to the Everlasting Covenant is neither a position nor a nomination.

The Everlasting Covenant describes *a context for life*. The mark of our connection to that context of life is this *fellowship* in His dying and His living.

Fellowship in Christ’s dying and living

Remember that our understanding of the action of this *sword* on Christ comes from the prophet Zechariah, who said, ‘Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd.’

This is the effect of those who are joined to the new creation: 'I will bring one third through the fire.' Zec 13:7-9.

This is the same point as, 'But with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.'

He did not say, 'I am taking one third *out* of the fire.' He said, 'I will bring one third *through* the fire, will refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested.' This is the divine nature.

We are refined and tested through the fire

The testing, or proving, of silver and gold means that it is getting rid of everything that is not gold or silver - wood, hay, stubble, etc. Through this process, which is bringing them through the fire, they are refined as silver is refined, and are tested as gold is tested.

And the expression of a person who is joined to this is, 'They will call on My name'. A person who *calls on the name of the Lord* is expressing *the love of Christ* that is poured into their heart by the Holy Spirit.

'They will call on My name, and I will answer them. I will say, "This is My people", and each one will say, "The Lord is my God".' This is the statement of the Everlasting Covenant.

The key point is that we are not connected to that unless the reality of our life is that we are being brought *through the fire* and are being refined as gold and silver, the evidence of which, or the 'speech' of which, is *calling on the name of the Lord*.

This is beautiful, because it is the foundation of our *agape* meal. We need to understand the circumcision of Christ to truly understand what it means to participate in the *agape* meal.

We are experiencing this testing, and the fruit of it will be speech that is calling on the Lord's name. And He will answer them and say, 'This is My people'; and each one will say, 'The Lord is my God.'

Christ has invited us to participate in the Lord's supper

A person who calls on the name of the Lord is one who is *committed to participation* in the *agape* meal.

As Jesus Himself declared, 'Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the

midst of them.' Mat 18:20. That is our fellowship context.

Those who belong to Christ have gladly received their invitation to the Lord's supper.

How does the invitation come? It comes by *a word* that is spoken. It is a *message* proclaimed and, if we will receive that message, the response of faith is to *meet in the name of the Lord*.

So, the invitation goes out. It is a word that proclaims the cross of Christ, or the word of the cross, and we receive faith in that word *for participation*.

Those who belong to Christ have gladly received their invitation to the Lord's supper.

Inherent in our participation in the Lord's supper is our forsaking every other *fleshly impediment* or desire.

The parable of the great supper

On this point, at the last supper, Jesus said, 'A certain man gave a great supper and invited many.' Luk 14:16-20.

Jesus gave that supper when He established the *agape* meal as the context of our *participation in the New Covenant*. He did not give it as a sacramental practice, but as a statement of our participation in *Yahweh's very fellowship*.

This is a great supper, isn't it? And He has invited *many*. Everyone who hears this word of the cross is invited to commune at a table that marks them as being part of that household.

'And He said to him, "A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, "Come [we all have to come to Christ], for all things are now ready."''

Now, there is an eschatological reality to this, but the Holy Spirit is saying, 'Come', *every time* that we hear the word. We are coming to the Lord; we are coming to this table.

The pursuit of a different inheritance – my own image of myself

'But they all with one accord began to make excuses.' This is quite confronting, isn't it: 'All with one accord?'

There is a oneness that is over and against the call of the Holy Spirit to come to Christ. So, what are

the things that mark our oneness over and against that fellowship to which we are being called?

'The first said to him, "I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused".'

What is the 'ground' talking about? In the Scriptures, 'ground' talks about our *inheritance as a son of God*.

A person who says, 'I bought a piece of ground', means that they are reaching for or applying themselves to define a *different inheritance* for themselves. This is the pursuit of *their own image* of themselves.

I love the way that this lines up with the scriptural principle: 'I have bought a piece of ground, I must go and see it'. It is similar to what happened when Eve heard another word from Satan, and desire within her was aroused, and she began to see the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in a *different* way. She began to see that it was 'good for food'. She began to see it as 'pleasant to the eyes'. She began to see it as 'desirable to make one wise'.

That is what this 'ground' is. It is the knowledge of good and evil which can be at work in the midst of the activity of the church, but is not joined to the *agape* meal.

In practice, it is the imposition of the knowledge of good and evil as a ground from which a person makes judgements about others, about themselves, about whatever. That is how the aspect of 'purchasing a ground' is manifest.

The pursuit of riches

'And another said, "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to *test* them. I ask you to have me excused".'

This is the response of a person who is completely invested in *labour*. Oxen were yoked together to plough ground so that it could bring forth produce to sell, illustrating *employment*.

So, this is where our focus in life is the *pursuit of riches*, of pleasure, the desires of the flesh. And we are 'testing' these things out. We give ourselves, or we commit, to these activities, which impedes our participation in the *agape* meal.

Eating and drinking is the way in which we are the bread and cup to one another. But here is a priority

towards our employment that affects our seeking first the kingdom. That is how 'buying five yoke of oxen and testing them' manifests.

The cares of the world

'Still another said, "I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come".'

That is a classic statement, isn't it? What did the wife say; that he wasn't allowed to go? I suspect that is not what he was saying. I suspect what had happened is that the cares of the world had taken over. Remember that the cares of the world are a man's orientation towards how he may please his wife.

This man is not able to participate in the *agape* meal that Christ has set, because he has not *set his face on Christ*.

A cultural alternative has arisen because his attention is given to the facilitation of the culture that his wife is crafting in her own image. It is a *fallen marriage culture*.

This may occur, for example, when a couple's courtship becomes the whole focus of their life at the expense of their participation in the fellowship of offering.

This person actually ignores the *agape* meal, even though they might be having morning tea and going through the activities of the foundations of fellowship. That is not their true orientation. Rather, it is a means to a different end, which is marriage or relationship.

We need to let go of everything which impedes fellowship

This is a key point. Inherent in our participation is our *forsaking* all of these other things.

We cannot just 'stop'; we actually have to be joined to the process by which they are being taken out. The Lord does come and confront these things in our life.

So, what happens when they are being confronted in your life? Do you recoil and turn your face *to* those things to try to do them better, to make them more 'righteous'; or do you accept that they have to go?

If we want to attain *true riches*, which are found in this fellowship of Yahweh where the blessing is, we do have to let go of everything that *impedes* that fellowship.

Not only does our participation in the communion involve prioritising this fellowship, but it will also involve the expression of *affection* for one another as we cease from judging each other and let go of our petty grievances.

Relational grievances impede our participation in the *agape* meal

Now, some people have a difficulty in participating in the *agape* meal because of long-held grievances; or it might be just petty judgements that they make of one another.

Not only can they not eat and drink with one another; they don't even like each other!

Now, that is hardly *agape* - the love of God which *lays down life* to reveal another.

We have to accept that the Lord is coming to deliver us from our *self-righteous judgements* where we hold on to these grievances and points of judgement of one another.

If you have a problem with another person, even if they have legitimately injured you, they *are not* the ones who are impeding your connection to the *agape* meal. *You*, holding on to that grievance, are impeding your connection to the *agape* meal.

Christ demonstrated love to those who would betray Him

It is clear that we have to let go of these things, because Jesus communicated His strong desire to eat this Passover. He said this to those whom He knew would betray Him and would deny Him.

Sometimes, the grievances and the difficulties that we hold on to are actually in our own head; they are actually in our own *heart*, more likely.

But, with Jesus, there was none of that judgement. He actually did know that some would betray Him and deny Him, and yet He poured Himself out for them. He even washed their feet. He gave them bread. He gave them drink. He demonstrated love for them.

So, if He could do that to those who were legitimately evil toward Him, and we are being called to that same fellowship, then we need to let go of the things that withhold affection towards others in Christ.

'He said to them, "With fervent desire ..." Isn't that the expression of love? This is the love of God

which is like 'the vehement flame' that 'waters cannot quench'. Son :6-7.

'With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover *with you* before I suffer.' '*Eat it with you!*' He said this to Judas; He said this to Peter; He said it to all the disciples who deserted Him. 'I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.' Luk 2:15-16.

Blamelessness is an outcome and a condition of our participation in the communion

Now, this highlights that blamelessness is both an *outcome* of our ongoing *participation* in the communion, and is a *condition* of our participation in the communion. It is both aspects.

To be blameless, we have to be joined to the very process by which we are *letting go* of these judgements; and able to *express our sonship* so that we can eat and drink in a worthy manner.

That is why we need to understand the circumcision of Christ. And, if we continue to eat and drink in the fellowship of that offering and sufferings, what will we do? We will continue to walk in that way.

Evidently, a believer who is obtaining grace to walk without spot and to be blameless before the Lord - recognising that without spot and blameless are two different expressions - will desire to have *agape* fellowship with their brethren in the body of Christ.

A person who eats and drinks in a *worthy manner* will participate, by faith, in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings.

Not discerning the Lord's body - denying blamelessness

However, we may live in a manner that denies the reality of our blamelessness by either thinking that we are righteous through our own good works or by simply presuming on the covering of Christ in getting on and doing whatever *we* want.

So, if we live in a manner that denies the blamelessness that is only possible in the *fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings*, we will be eating and drinking judgement to ourselves, not discerning the Lord's body.

One bread; one body

We will consider *blamelessness* in relation to both elements of the *agape* meal - the bread and the drink offering, or the cup.

We will start by looking at the bread. A key understanding of the *agape* meal is that we are to be the bread because we are one body together.

If we do not actually like each other and will not meet with one another, it does not matter how altruistic our activities are, they will *not* be the bread of communion; they will be another ground.

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

We are the one bread, or body, if we partake of the one Bread. Jesus is the Bread from heaven, and we ‘eat of Him’ by *coming* to Him.

Jesus says, ‘Come’

We read the parable, ‘A certain man gave a great supper and invited many’, and said, ‘Come, for all things are now ready.’

We have learned over this season that *we eat of Him by coming to Him*. So, we are responding to His invitation to ‘come’.

In order to respond to this invitation to come, there are things that we need to let go of - another ground, another work orientation, a fallen family culture.

We eat of Him by coming to Him and *abiding* in Him. This is the implication of *living by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God* through His messengers.

Dealing with leaven; the culture of blamelessness

The bread of the grain offering, which we are to be, is described in the Scriptures as ‘unleavened’.

A focal point is that *dealing with leaven* is the *culture of blamelessness* that we are to have as we participate in the *agape* meal.

Leaven is a substance which is added in small amounts to bread dough to make it rise. This natural image helps us to recognise Paul’s references to leaven in his letter to the Corinthians; references to what becomes ‘puffed up’, or rises up, in us. That is a leavenous attitude.

It is something small that permeates a person so that they are entirely corrupt. The connection then, obviously, to circumcision is that a *small* piece of flesh needs to be *removed*, which indicates a whole life principle.

Now, under the Old Covenant, the implication of not getting rid of leaven from one’s house was that a person or a household was *cut off* from God’s covenant people. Likewise, in the New Covenant, we are *disconnected from the body of Christ*. Remember, we are *one bread* because we are *one body*.

We are disconnected from His body when we cease from applying ourselves to *riding* our houses of leaven, because leaven causes us to be *puffed up over and against one another*.

As we walk in the process of purging out leaven we are truly unleavened

‘Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened.’ 1Co 5:6-7.

I love this verse! ‘Purge out the old leaven since *you are truly unleavened*.’ Here is a contradiction! How can you be unleavened if you are purging out leaven? How can you be blameless if you are being delivered from sin?

This beautiful point is that we are walking each day in the *actual* perfection of Christ that He has finished for us, as long as we are committed to this process.

We have to give attention to purging out these attitudes and this alternative spirit, which we can do in the fellowship of Christ’s offering and sufferings.

‘Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven.’

I had previously thought that the ‘old leaven’ was the Old Covenant, which is true. But we see now that the old leaven was our former sacramental practices. That is what we are putting off.

‘Not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness.’ That is everything that is sourced from the other law. The leaven of malice and wickedness is the fruit of, or what is conceived by, living according to the desire, or the other law, in our heart. That is a leaven.

It has a permeating effect on our life and relationships. So, do not keep the feast with that, ‘but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth’.

And that is to be *us* – unleavened bread. The key point is we are not unleavened because we are without leaven but, rather, because we are *committed to the process of removing leaven from our houses*.

We are blameless as we walk in the process of being delivered of walking by the flesh

Likewise, we are not blameless because we are sinless but, rather, because we have an *ongoing participation in the circumcision of Christ*.

This is the process through which we are being delivered from the flesh as the principle of our life, and are living by Christ's life as a son of God.

To be blameless is to pour out on another and to receive ministry from others

I want to draw our attention to the drink offering to highlight that blamelessness is fundamental to our participation in the drink offering. And it is particularly connected to the ministry of grace to one another.

The drink offering is *me* being *poured out* on the sacrifice and service of another's faith.

I am pouring out the life that I have obtained in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. This is a lovely statement of the *fruit* of being conformed to Christ's death.

'Do all things without complaining and disputing [the evidence of leaven], that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or laboured in vain.

'Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith [What did that look like? His labour so that they might be blameless and harmless. Yes, if I'm being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith], I am glad and rejoice with you all. For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me.' Php 2:14-18.

Paul said that he was poured out as a drink offering on his brethren so that they might be *blameless and harmless* children of God. He exhorted them to be poured out on one another in the same manner.

We note that blamelessness involves *receiving* this ministry from others. Paul said, 'I'm pouring out on

you so that you might be blameless and harmless.' If you cannot *receive* that ministry from your brother or sister, you are not blameless.

We note that blamelessness involves receiving the ministry of others through which *our names are revealed* through sacrifice and service.

It equally involves *our commitment* to pour out on the sacrifice and service of others. That is the ministry of life to another so that they are revealed and enabled.

Pouring out on another is a practical work

This pouring out is not mystical, and it is not just sharing your testimony with others - although that is important.

Pouring out on another is a *practical work* that we do to *enable* the participation, or the sonship expression, of another person. It is practical, it is tangible; there is a labour involved.

Paul said, 'That I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or *laboured* in vain.'

This, then, has a very *practical implication* for how we live and relate with one another.

For instance, we can give aid to individuals and families where needed, according to our grace and abilities, so that they are *enabled* to do *their work* of offering and service.

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

We look forward to our ongoing conversation in the coming weeks to do with how this blameless culture is manifest in our families.