

My participation in the
agape meal

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MY PARTICIPATION IN THE AGAPE MEAL

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Article I

Christ, the focus of my affection

Victor Hall

Meeting face to face

Jesus Christ wants to have a personal relationship with each one of us. Through the ministry of His word, He draws near to us so that we can meet Him *face to face*. When we meet Christ this way, we are able to receive the light of the knowledge of the glory of God that shines from His face. 2Co 4:6. This light is the knowledge of our sonship from the Father. By turning to Christ in response to His word, we look into His face. We see, as if in a mirror, who we are to be as a son of God. 2Co 3:16,18. As we continue to turn, and to look into the face of the Lord, we are progressively changed into the image of His sonship. 2Co 3:18. 1Jn 3:2.

While this is a wonderful reality, when we look into the face of Christ, we first encounter His eyes as a flame of fire. Rev 1:14. Rev 2:18. Initially, this is a confronting experience, as His word, which the Scriptures

describe as a '*goad*', pierces our heart. Ecc 12:11. Our heart is laid bare before His eyes. The eyes of the Lord expose the thoughts and intents of our heart, revealing our sin and self-centredness. Heb 4:12-13. However, if we do not draw back from the Lord's gaze, we realise that His fiery eyes express His love and mercy to us. This is because, unless we see our sin, we are unable to repent and to find deliverance from sin and from God's judgement upon us. We will remain separated from Christ and under condemnation. This is not what He desires for us! 2Pe 3:9.

When Christ comes to us with eyes as a flame of fire, He is calling us to be restored to first love, in Him. Rev 2:4. He is inviting us to sojourn with Him on the unique pathway of salvation that He pioneered for us through His offering journey. Heb 5:9. On this pathway, we are progressively obtaining the blessing that belongs to the sons of God - eternal life in the fellowship of Yahweh. 1Jn 5:11-13. Through our daily participation in His offering and sufferings, we find deliverance from our sinful rebellion, and are made alive from the death of sin. This is how we are changing 'from glory to glory' into the image of Christ's sonship.

We can only know true satisfaction, or blessing, when our hearts are set on this pilgrimage. Psa 84:5. We are delivered from the delusion that satisfaction can be found through the attainment of what we perceive to be good for us, and our avoidance of pain and distress. This is a lie fostered by Satan. Living this way results only in fleeting pleasure, punctuated by feelings of inadequacy, frustration, anxiety, depression and sorrow. It is the foretaste of eternal death and dissatisfaction. As the Lord declared, 'Their worm does not die, and their fire is not quenched.' Isa 66:24. Mar 9:44-46. Instead, as sons of God, we obtain life and peace in the fellowship of Christ's death and resurrection. We pray, 'As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness.' Psa 17:15. We progressively wake in the likeness of the Son as we are conformed to His death, and are raised in the likeness of His resurrection.

It is not enough to know the Lord by the hearing of our ear. He wants us to *know* Him and to *meet* Him face to face. This was the lesson that Job learned through the things which he suffered. Having been illuminated by the word of the Lord, Job testified, 'I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.' Job 42:5-6.

The examples of Paul and Peter

The apostle Paul testified of his personal journey with Christ from first love to fellowship. Having met the Lord face to face, he forsook everything that had previously been gain to him - his cultural heritage, his education, his religious profile, his civic distinction and his self-righteousness. Leaving these behind, Paul's sojourn became his desire to know Christ and the power of His resurrection; to remain in the fellowship of His sufferings; and to be conformed to His death. This pathway gave Paul access to the resurrection life that was in Christ. Php 3:10-11. He lived by the sustaining life of Christ in a mortal body. Gal 2:20. For this reason, he was able to testify, 'We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed - always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.' 2Co 4:8-10.

Paul commenced this journey following his encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus. A light shone around him from heaven and he heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' Paul answered, 'Who are You, Lord?' Jesus replied, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the *goads*.' Act 9:3-5.

Through this interaction, Paul experienced and received 'the affection of Christ'. Php 1:8. The Lord had come to Paul with eyes like a flame of fire to reveal his sonship to him and to establish him on the path of salvation. This was the Son's initiative of love. Rev 3:19.

Significantly, as Paul looked into the face of Christ and asked, 'Who are You, Lord?', he was confessing that he did not know himself. Until this point, all of his religious endeavours were a projection associated with his self-defined image. However, Paul's question demonstrated that he was not drawing back from Christ's gaze, even though the error of his own way was now evident. Paul's heart had been pierced by the word of Christ and was laid bare before the eyes of the Lord; yet he had received affection *for* Christ and addressed Him as His Lord and Master. This happened as the love of God was poured into Paul's heart by the Holy Spirit. Rom 5:5.

Christ met the apostle Peter in the same way that He met Paul. Although Peter had been a disciple of Christ, his self-righteous and zealous speech at the last supper demonstrated that he had not met the Lord face to face. Prior to his denial of Christ, Peter had believed in the integrity of his

own heart and in his own capacity for love. He ardently asserted his readiness to lay down his life for Christ. Joh 13:37. However, Peter's religious self-image was brought to nothing when he met Christ eye to eye in the courtyard of Caiaphas. Looking into Christ's marred visage, Peter saw the true condition of his own heart, and began to mourn. Luk 22:61-62.

Later, the Lord addressed Peter on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Over breakfast, which was an '*agape* meal', Jesus challenged Peter with a question. He asked him, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love [*agape*] Me more than these?' Joh 21:15. This is the same question that Christ asks us when He meets us with eyes like a flame of fire. Peter was unable to answer Christ's question. However, as he continued to converse with Christ, face to face, he received the word of his sonship, and the love of God was poured into heart. How do we know this?

The Lord directed Peter to shepherd the flock. These were the works that belonged to Peter's sonship. Jesus also spoke of Peter's participation in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings, saying, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish.' Joh 21:18. John noted that Jesus was signifying how Peter would glorify God as a son, in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. To this end, Jesus instructed Peter to follow Him on the pathway that He had pioneered for him. Joh 21:19. Through this ministry of Christ, Peter found the love of God and affection for Christ. He then received grace to preach the Pentecost sermon.

The children of Israel

Jesus Christ delivered the children of Israel from their slavery in Egypt in order to bring them to Himself. He said to them, 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself.' Exo 19:4. The Lord's desire for relationship with them was the purpose of their journey. However, when the Lord spoke to them from Mount Sinai, the people drew back in fear, begging that the word should not be spoken to them. Exo 20:18. Heb 12:18-19. They asked Moses to relate with the Lord on their behalf, saying, 'You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.' Exo 20:19.

Then, following their failure to obey the Lord and to enter the promised land, they wandered for forty years in the wilderness. During this time,

the Lord sought to meet and to know Israel. However, the generation who had rejected the Lord's invitation for relationship never responded to His love. They always 'erred in their hearts' and complained against Him and His messenger, Moses. As the psalmist noted, 'Again and again they tempted God'. Psa 78:41.

The Lord endeavoured to teach the children of Israel how to live as His people and be delivered from the fear of death. On each day of their wilderness sojourn, Yahweh met them in an *agape* meal, feeding them with bread from heaven. Exo 16:4-5. Psa 78:24. The purpose of this food, which sustained their mortal lives, was to teach them that their lives depended upon receiving and obeying God's word. Deu 8:3. However, they refused the Lord and His instruction, turning instead to the worship of other gods. Israel wanted God to be a 'resource' for them. They did not want to know Him or to be His friend as Abraham and Moses had been. Jas 2:23. Isa 41:8. Exo 33:11.

Forsaking the affection of Christ

Most of us were born into Christian families as children of Abraham. We belong to the true nation of Israel. The question for us is, 'Do we, through the Spirit, love the Lord with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength?' Deu 6:4-5. Mar 12:29-31. Have we turned aside from the holy commandment so that we are now in danger of becoming self-seeking idolaters? Of course, most Christians would not identify themselves as being idolaters who have departed from relationship with the Lord. What, then, is the mark of forsaking relationship with Christ?

A telling indicator of our tepid affection for Christ is the deep fear within us of failing to fulfil our own expectations of ourselves and of our lives. These may be our desires for a certain vocation, wealth, possessions, a particular courtship or marriage, ministry profile, and even our appearance. It is evident that we do not love the Lord with all of our heart when our satisfaction in life is diminished because of unfulfilled expectations. We can begin to question the provision of the Lord for us and to seek the fulfilment of our desires elsewhere. We cease receiving our definition from the Father, because we turn our face away from the Son. Instead, we endeavour to name ourselves. This is idolatry and is motivated by the knowledge of good and evil.

Whether conscious or unconscious, our hunger for the attainment of a self-defined good is our desire for the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When this desire was aroused within Eve, as she gave

heed to the lie of Satan, she 'saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise'. Gen 3:6. The knowledge of good and evil can appear the same way to us. What might this 'look like'?

Viewing the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil as 'good for food' is the quest for empowerment. It involves the identification and procurement of resources – be they social, cultural, physical or financial – to support the attainment of a person's self-defined image. This 'food' is the antithesis of Yahweh's food. His food is participation in a whole burnt offering, through which another is revealed. Num 28:2.

Eating food that is 'pleasant to the eyes' is the desire for an image that is pleasing, or valued, in society. It involves our investment in activities and resources that optimise and sustain our 'beauty' or profile within a given community. It can also involve the 'charitable' advice that we can give to others, including the church, to improve their image in society. Again, this is at odds with true beauty, or excellence, which is the expression of the divine nature. For example, Peter said, 'Do not let your adornment be merely outward – arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel – rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the *incorruptible* beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is *very precious* in the sight of God.' 1Pe 3:3-4.

Wisdom that is sourced from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil involves the utilisation of knowledge to achieve one's self-defined objectives. James described this as 'the wisdom from beneath'. Its use is motivated by bitter envy and self-seeking in one's heart. Jas 3:14-15. In contrast, 'the wisdom from above' is the word that we receive in fellowship with the Lord and with one another. Its expression is 'peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy'. Jas 3:17.

Do not draw back

If our works are driven by our knowledge of good and evil, we will not be known by Christ on the day of judgement. This is because we have not known Him face to face. Instead, we have endeavoured to name and know ourselves through self-definition. This will be true, irrespective of how active we have been in the church. Because we harden our heart and resist the Holy Spirit, who desires to pour the love of God into our heart, we have no affection for Christ. We do not seek His face. We cannot know Him, and He cannot know us. As Jesus taught, 'Many will say to Me in

that day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?" And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practise lawlessness!" ' Mat 7:22-23.

As we noted earlier, when we look into the face of Christ, we see the reflection of our own image as a son of God. The Holy Spirit is conforming us to that image. We are able to know who we are and who we have been named of the Father to be, for Christ is not only the express image of the Father, He is also the image of *all* of the Father's sons.

The imperative is to not recoil from looking into the face of Christ when He addresses us with eyes like a flame of fire. We must accept that He comes to rebuke and chasten us in love. He does this by joining us to the fellowship of His offering. The Son speaks to us and calls us to repentance through His command. Receiving and obeying this command marks us as Christ's friends. He said, 'You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.' Joh 15:14-15.

With Christ's command comes the power to believe and to obey Him. This is a measure of faith that is given to us as a gift. Rom 10:17. Eph 2:8. We demonstrate that we have received faith by believing the word, and by speaking the word to one another through our conversation and conduct, and through prayer. This is fundamental to our participation together in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. 2Co 4:13-14. Through the love of God, we live in this fellowship and are able to do the works that belong to our name as a son of God.

Article 2

What is the agape meal?

Luke Pomery

Introduction

The theme of this Young Adults Seminar is 'My participation in the *agape* meal'. Before we consider the nature of our participation in this meal, we need to first understand the fellowship of Yahweh. As we shall see, the *agape* meal is the context of Their fellowship. In reality, there is only one *agape* meal. It belongs to the Lord. Through the proclamation of the word of God, we are invited to join the *agape* meal of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit! 1Jn 1:3. We can only understand the fellowship of Yahweh, and our participation in Their *agape* meal, through the illumination of the Holy Spirit. 1Co 2:14. Without this illumination, our *agape* meals will be little more than religious activities that are informed by our natural perspectives and experiences.

The fellowship of Yahweh

The Scriptures testify that God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit live together in fellowship. The fellowship of Yahweh is the culture of love; it is how They live and relate with one another. They live by offering. That

is, by the capacity of Eternal Spirit, *two* members of the Godhead lay down Their lives in offering to reveal the other *one*. Heb 9:14. The *love* of Yahweh is Their desire, or 'appetite', for offering. Offering is Their nourishment, or 'source of energy', which enables the multiplication of life. By this means, each Person of the Godhead is revealed and edified by the offering of the other two.

The fellowship of Yahweh has a *context* for expression. This context is the *agape* meal! They commune together in 'a love feast!' To 'commune' means to 'share through participation and fellowship'. In this regard, God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have set a table for Themselves. The *agape* meal belongs to Their fellowship. How do we know this? Yahweh testified that offering is His food. Num 28:2. And love is Their desire, or appetite, for offering. Son 8:6-7.

Two revealing one

In order to understand the fellowship of Yahweh as an '*agape* meal', let us consider how God the Father is revealed through the offering of the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Father is the source of all identities. Eph 3:14-15. However, the sons of God are begotten by the word of the Father through the offering of the Son and the Spirit. This is how the Father is revealed.

Yahweh the Son is the full expression of all sonship. In love, He emptied Himself and was begotten as the Son of God by the word of the Father. Php 2:6-7. Heb 1:5. He became the Father's Seed, through whom all of the sons of the Father would be brought to glory. This offering was His food. As Jesus testified, 'My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.' Joh 4:34. Through His offering, the life of God was multiplied to an innumerable company of sons. Furthermore, everything that was contrary to the purpose and plan of Yahweh was brought to nothing.

The Holy Spirit reveals the Father by pouring the love of God into the hearts of the sons of God. Love is the power and capacity for every son of God to join and participate in the fellowship of Yahweh as a member of the body of Christ. The Holy Spirit further reveals the Father when He is sent by the Father to abide with us and in us. Joh 14:16-17. He is the expression of our name as a son of God the Father.

The testimony of Ezekiel

The fellowship of Yahweh was revealed in a vision to the prophet Ezekiel. He described the glory of the Lord as 'a raging fire enfolding itself'. Eze 1:4. It revealed the love and offering of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Scriptures describe the love of Yahweh as 'a most vehement flame' which can never be extinguished. Son 8:6-7. As we discussed earlier, the love of Yahweh is Their desire, or appetite, for offering. Their life is multiplied through offering.

Our inclusion in Their fellowship

The Lord desires fellowship with us! His desire is to commune, or tabernacle, with us in the context of an *agape* meal. In this fellowship, the life of God is multiplied *to us*, so that it becomes our *spiritual* 'food and drink' forever. Rev 21:3. This is the reason why the Lord invites us to dine with Him and He with us: so that we can 'eat and drink of Him' and have fellowship with Him. Rev 3:20. Joh 6:53-56. The word proclaimed through the ministry of the Spirit invites us to 'come!' and to partake of the Lord's table. Rev 22:17. The effect of the Spirit of grace and supplication upon us enables us to continually turn and be joined in fellowship with the Lord at His table.

It is the Lord Himself who sets the table and lays out the 'menu' for our nourishment. Psa 23:5. Luk 12:42. His flesh is our food, and His blood is our drink. Joh 6:55. They are ministered to us through His word. Joh 6:63. He taught us that *coming* to Him and *believing* in Him are the activities of 'eating' and 'drinking' of Him. Joh 6:35. This spiritual nourishment sustains our sonship and equips us for our spiritual work of offering as priests to the Father. Amazingly, even the very capacity to consume this spiritual food and drink is given to us by the Lord. As He did for the prophet Ezekiel, the Lord *enables us* to digest, or appropriate, His word. Eze 3:1-2. Our participation in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings demonstrates that we have 'eaten' of Him.

Through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the love of God the Father and the affection of Jesus Christ are poured into our hearts. Rom 5:5. Php 1:8. This affection and love compel us to lay down our lives to reveal and nourish one another. They are birthed in us and become our desire. We nourish one another, spiritually, as we share together in the fellowship of an *agape* meal, or love feast. Jud 1:12. This is the activity and culture of the Lord's table.

The testimony of John

In his first epistle, the apostle John testified of his *own* inclusion and participation in the fellowship of Yahweh as an *agape* meal. Receiving and believing John's testimony is essential for *our* participation in the *agape* meal. John said, 'That which was from the beginning, which we have *heard*, which we have *seen* with our eyes, which we have *looked upon*, and our hands have *handled*, concerning the Word of life.' 1Jn 1:1. This activity of hearing, seeing, looking upon and handling is a description of our participation in the fellowship of Yahweh at the tree of life. Rev 2:7. We are nourished and sustained as new creation sons of God as we participate in the fellowship that John described. John was eating and drinking the Word of life in fellowship with Yahweh. He was compelled by love to proclaim the Word of life, so that we may be included in this very same fellowship! 1Jn 1:3.

The communion of the body of Christ

In the fervent desire of love, Jesus invited the disciples to participate with Him in *the agape meal of Yahweh*. Luk 22:15. Their supper was sanctified as an *agape* meal through the ministry of the Lord's word and prayer. 1Ti 4:5. Joh 13-14. Luk 22:19. Mar 14:23. He called their participation in this meal 'the New Covenant'. Mar 14:24. 1Co 11:25.

Notably, Jesus got up from the table and washed the disciples' feet. In this action, He connected the disciples to the word which was able to wash them. This is an important understanding. Jesus explained that unless we receive and participate in the washing of the water by the word, we have no participation in the *agape* meal as those who abide in Christ. Eph 5:26. Joh 13:8. Joh 6:56. Significantly, Judas had no part in the Lord's table because he had already hardened his heart in unbelief and had ceased to abide in fellowship with Christ. Joh 6:64.

Throughout their supper together, the disciples were nourished in discussion with Christ as He taught them the culture of the New Covenant. Jesus said, 'A new commandment I give to you, that you love [*agape*] one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.' Joh 13:34. We nourish one another in the context of the *agape* meal through testimony, through sharing the word of present truth, and through practical care for one another. As Solomon expressed, 'a wholesome tongue is a tree of life'. Pro 15:4. The word of faith which sanctifies our participation becomes our nourishment through testimony and discussion. Rom 10:8. Amazingly, when we nourish one another in

the context of the *agape* meal, we are actually nourishing Christ. We note the words of Christ, who said, 'I was hungry and you gave Me food ... inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.' Mat 25:35,40.

In the course of their discussion together, it became apparent that the disciples had many alternative ideas and agendas. While Jesus was discussing their participation in the New Covenant, the disciples were still contending with one another concerning who would be regarded as the greatest. Luk 22:24. Through His words, Jesus addressed these agendas which were contrary to the will of the Father. He brought them to nothing through His offering journey from Gethsemane to Calvary.

Our participation in the *agape* meal involves walking in the light of the word. This is more than simply 'listening' to the word. It is our daily fellowship with Christ and with one another in His offering and sufferings. In this fellowship, we are being delivered from our fleshly agendas. Moreover, we are fulfilling the will of the Father in Christ Jesus as His life is becoming our life. 1Jn 1:7. This reveals that we are eating Christ's flesh and drinking His blood.

The four foundations of fellowship

The communion of the body of Christ is our inclusion and participation in the fellowship of Yahweh! 1Co 10:16. What does our participation in this *agape* fellowship 'look like'? The answer is found as we consider the life and culture of the church that was established on the Day of Pentecost. The three thousand souls who were joined to the church on that day 'continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers'. Act 2:42. These are the four foundations of the fellowship, or communion, of the body of Christ, which is the church. Continuing steadfastly together in these four foundations reveals our response of faith to the Lord's invitation to commune with Him.

Article 3

Agape Prayer

Stephen Bourne

Introduction

We read in the gospel of Luke that, shortly after Jesus finished praying in a certain place, one of His disciples came to Him asking, 'Lord, teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples.' Lk 11:1. The disciples were seeking to understand from Jesus how they were to participate in prayer. In this article, we are seeking to understand how we participate in the prayer dimension of the *agape* meal.

By receiving His present truth word in this season, the Lord is granting us fresh understanding and a measure of faith to participate in all four dimensions of fellowship. Rom 10:17. Prayer is one of these dimensions. Acts 2:42.

We begin our discussion by asking the following questions: What is prayer and why do we pray? What does prayer look like? Why is prayer a fundamental aspect of our communion together? How do we join the *agape* prayer conversation? Why do we say grace? Is grace necessary? How are we to have grace on our lips? And, what does it mean to bless with the Spirit?

The nature of prayer

What is prayer

A person can be motivated to pray for many different reasons. This could include feeling closer to God, to ask for blessing or favour, or to fulfil a sense of religious obligation. But what is the nature of prayer for a son of God?

The answer is quite straightforward: it is fellowship with Yahweh! Our prayer joins us to the ever-present conversation of God, in the Spirit, where we speak by faith and He communicates His endless thoughts towards us. 2Co 4:13. Psa 40:5; 139:17-18. This conversation is a fellowship. 1Jn 1:3. It is an ongoing, relational offering with the Godhead, which we access by the mercies of God. Rom 12:1.

God desires to engage each person in His conversation through prayer. Gen 18:17. *He* is the one taking initiative to *include* us in *His* conversation. In His conversation, we are both listening *and* speaking by faith. Ecc 5:1. 2Co 4:13.

The relational dependence of prayer

We can also describe prayer as being *relational dependence* on Yahweh. What do we mean by this?

First, prayer is entirely *relational*. This is because we meet God in an open conversation and connection in the light. 1Jn 1:5. We are not hiding away from Him. Gen 3:9-10. Rather, we are presenting ourselves to speak by faith. Rom 12:1. It is a context where we are knowing and being known by Him. 1Co 13:12.

And second, prayer is an expression of *dependence* on God. Why is that? It is because the life and will of God does not originate in us. God is the source of life and is the author of our sanctification. Jn 1:4. 1Co 8:6. The Holy Spirit is the one, then, who helps us to pray as we should. Rom 8:26. Jn 14:26. He helps us by joining us to Christ's prayer who prayed, 'not My will, but Yours be done.' Lk 22:42. The evidence of our dependence on God is that we pray by the Spirit and yield to His leading. Lk 22:43.

What is the mode of our prayer?

Christ taught us that when we pray, we are not to be like the hypocrites, for they 'love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners *so that they may be seen by men.*' Mat 6:5. Jesus was saying that

the heart of man is fundamentally self-centred. Jer 17:9. By default, we will seek to reveal ourselves and our own will. Christ dealt with our self-centredness in the garden of Gethsemane. He taught us that the mode in which we are to pray is, 'Your will be done'. Mat 6:10. As we yield to His leading, the Holy Spirit joins us to Christ's offering of prayer that revealed the Father's will. Lk 22:42. Rom 8:26. This highlights to us why praying in and by the Spirit is so critical. In our communion meal together, it is the Holy Spirit who helps us to cease from revealing ourselves through projection. He helps us to reveal the Father's will by being the son He has named us to be. Rom 8:23. 1Th 4:3. By His leading, we can choose instead to express love by revealing our brethren through testimony and encouragement. Rom 5:5. 1Jn 3:16. The focus, then, is no longer on what we can gain from our conversations together, but rather on how we can bless another.

Christ also taught that godly prayer is not a sacrament or liturgy. In other words, our prayer is not a religious formula that, when observed correctly, will ensure God is listening and our requests are answered. Sacramental prayer is neither relational nor dependent on God. Jesus spoke against this way of sacramental prayer when He said, 'And when you are praying, do not use *thoughtless repetition* as the Gentiles do, for *they think that they will be heard because of their many words.*' Mat 6:7. Sacramental prayer is thoughtless, repetitive and isn't heard by God because it is not joined to His conversation. It runs parallel to His conversation. By contrast, we know that Christ's prayer *was heard* because of His piety. Heb 5:7. Piety is the commitment to the fellowship of offering, which is demonstrated by the laying down of life to reveal another.

So, what is Christ teaching us? It is that prayer 'looks like' offering. Offering 'looks like' laying down our life to reveal another. 1Jn 3:16. And revealing one another 'looks like' building one another up through testimony. Eph 4:16.

The incense of prayer

The scriptures teach us that prayer is a 'perpetual incense'. Ex 30:8. Rev 5:8. Incense was burned morning and evening in the Old Covenant tabernacle. Ex 30:7-8,34. It comprised four main elements in equal measure, which we can understand as:

1. An offering of praise, worship and thanksgiving to God the Father (Mat 6:9);

2. A commitment to the will of God being done through offering (Mat 6:10);
3. The prophetic word (Mat 6:11); and
4. Our confession of faith through testimony (Mat 6:13).

We can begin to appreciate how all four elements apply in the *agape* meal. It was to these four elements of incense that salt was added, which we know to be the Holy Spirit. Ex 30:35. Col 4:6. Clearly, without the critical element of the Holy Spirit, our prayer will be reduced to thoughtless repetition. Mat 6:7.

Importantly, on the Day of Atonement, the altar of incense was taken into the most holy place, which was where the mercy seat resided. Ex 30:36. It was here that the cloud of incense would cover the mercy seat and the glory of God's presence would mingle with the incense that was offered.

This is a beautiful picture of our prayer. We are exhorted by the writer of Hebrews to come boldly, by prayer, to the throne of grace, which is the mercy seat. Heb 4:16. Christ is the Mercy Seat, who was sprinkled with His own blood seven times along His offering journey. Rom 3:25. As we pray, it is critical that the Holy Spirit is leading us to pray. Just as the incense was mingled with the cloud of God's presence, it is the Holy Spirit who joins us to His conversation and fellowship. Rom 8:26. The Spirit is also the one joining us to the Mercy Seat - namely, Christ Himself - where the blood is sprinkling *our* hearts. Heb 10:22. Our desire to reveal ourselves - or, to live according to what we believe to be right and good - is being removed from our heart, and the motivation of love to reveal the Father's will is poured into our hearts. Rom 5:5. Pro 21:2.

Keeping this understanding of the nature of prayer in view, let us turn our attention to our participation in the prayer aspect of the *agape* meal.

Prayer as part of the agape meal

Most of us who have grown up in the church have said 'grace' before a meal since we were little children. Indeed, it was often considered quite a 'big deal' as a child to be chosen to say grace. However, many of us have recently come to appreciate just how little we understood of what saying grace meant. For many, it was reduced to a ritual and sacramental tradition that was said with very little understanding of what grace is and why we say it. This is part of our repentance in this season.

The apostle Paul tells us that the *word of God* and *prayer* sanctify the *agape* meal. 1Ti 4:5. This is true for our Sunday communion as well as the *agape* meal we share with other households in our homes. The prayer of grace is our *commitment to fellowship* in the light of His word, which is the basis of our *agape* meeting.

We commit to join in one spirit with the person praying. And, we commit to meet and relate honestly in the fellowship of light that is established by the present truth word. 1Jn 1:3,7. This is what it means to gather in the name of Christ, where He is in the midst. Mat 18:20. The evidence of our participation in the *agape* prayer will be demonstrated in our willingness and initiative to participate in the *agape* fellowship. In other words, the fruit of us joining the prayer of grace will be seen as we testify truthfully to one another in the current word. This is a very practical outworking of how we lay down our lives to reveal one another.

Clearly, saying grace is so much more than being thankful for the food and drink. We are, of course, thankful for the provision of physical sustenance, but this is by no means the primary focus of this element of prayer.

The prayer of grace is a thanksgiving. Php 4:6. 1Th 5:17-18. It is an offering of thanks for our fellowship together. We are thankful for the grace in which we stand by faith, which grants to us the capacity to multiply His life one to the other. Rom 5:2. 1Co 1:4. This is an important point. Grace gives us the capacity to fellowship in Christ's offering and to bless one another. It is no wonder, then, that the apostle Paul says, 'that the grace which is spreading to more and more people *may cause the giving of thanks* to abound to the glory of God.' 2Co 4:15.

Our participation in prayer does not merely start with 'Dear Lord' and end with 'Amen!' We are to continually offer to God the incense of prayer. 1Th 5:17. Ex 30:7-8. Our conversation around the *agape* meal is to be *continually prayerful*. This is because our conversation is connected, in one spirit and by His Spirit, to His ongoing conversation. The apostle Paul linked the work of the Holy Spirit to the seasoning, preserving nature of salt. He said, 'Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.' Col 4:6. Accordingly, we are to let no 'corrupt [lit. rotten i.e. without the seasoning and preserving work of the Spirit] word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.' Eph 4:29. In other words, our conversations with one another remain connected, by grace, to *His* conversation of prayer as

we continue in the Spirit with our brethren. This is what it means to have grace on our lips. Psa 45:2.

Blessing with the Spirit

In this season, we have come to understand that *agape* prayer is not the invocation of a blessing on our food and drink. What we are eating or drinking is not somehow transformed, through prayer, into the body and blood of Christ, either physically or symbolically.

We note that Christ, in His communion with the two travelling along the road to Emmaus, 'took the bread and *blessed it*, and breaking it, He began giving it to them.' Lk 24:30. Similarly, we also know that the cup is described as 'the cup of blessing which we bless'. 1Co 10:16. What is the nature of this blessing?

The apostle Paul described this blessing as *blessing with the Spirit*. 1Co 14:16. Importantly, the capacity to bless with the Spirit is not restricted to just clergy or those we deem more holy or qualified than us. We're not to look for someone else to invoke a blessing on the food and drink. *We* bless with the Spirit when *we* are the *bread* and the *cup* to one another in our conversations together over the *agape* meal. This is an astonishing illumination that the Spirit has given to us in this season.

We are the *bread* to one another when we participate in the body of Christ as the member that the Father has named us. 1Co 10:17, 12:27.

We are the *cup* to one another when we pour ourselves out to our brethren by encouraging them to do the works of their sonship. Php 2:17. Heb 12:24.

The Lord is certainly challenging all of us regarding how, practically, we relate and behave in the *agape* meal with our brethren. He is calling each one to bless our brethren with the Spirit *and* receive the blessing and multiplication of His life from another. This is how the body of Christ builds itself up in love as each one lays life down in offering to reveal the other. Eph 4:16.

Further developing the point, blessing one another with the Spirit will 'look like': building our brethren up in faith through testimony, and receiving their edification of us; exhorting and encouraging one another to continue walking in the light of the word and its direction; and comforting one another by the ministry of His grace for our participation in His offering and sufferings. 1Co 14:3. Eph 4:16. Rom 12:8. 2Co 1:4-5.

Conclusion

In this article, we have discussed what it means, practically, to join the *agape* prayer. We have come to understand that the *agape* prayer is not a ritual or part of a useless tradition. Rather, it is a fellowship and ongoing conversation with Yahweh. By the Spirit, our conversations are joined to His conversation through prayer. Each one of us has a unique participation in this aspect of fellowship. We pray with thanksgiving in our heart for the grace in which we stand. It is this grace that enables us to bless with the Spirit, which we do as ones who are joined to Christ and led by His Spirit.

Article 4

Agape testimony

Michael Fox

What is testimony?

Testimony is the expression of the identity of an individual. Luk 22:70. Testimony is foundational to the fellowship of Yahweh – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jer 23:18. For instance, Father’s testimony is who He is and the expression of His individual identity. He testifies when He speaks in fellowship with the Son and the Holy Spirit. His conduct and the works that He does by faith are also an expression of His identity. For example, when He rebukes and chastens us as His sons, we know that He is the Father, and we know that He loves us. Heb 12:5-6.

As another example, we know Jesus as the good shepherd when He testifies by speaking to us and laying down His life for us. Joh 10:14-16. Importantly, Jesus noted that His testimony came from the commandment that He had received from the Father. Joh 10:18. He also said that the Father’s command is everlasting life. Joh 12:50. The life He received through obedience to the command of the Father was His capacity to speak. This is true for us too! Jesus was telling us that

testimony is only possible as we receive and obey the word of the Father. The life we receive from God enables us to express our true identity.

In the past, many of us have misunderstood testimony to be a prepared speech through which we explain to others that we are a successful Christian. We don't need to prove that we have everything under control. We simply need to live and speak according to the truth of our sonship. This is the testimony that we express in fellowship. Being a son of God who can testify within the fellowship of Yahweh is an amazing privilege!

The fellowship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit has a context for expression. 1Jn 1:3. This context is a love feast, which is an *agape* meal. Our church gatherings are an *agape* meal. Testimony is foundational to our participation in an *agape* meal. We are accountable to make ourselves known in the fellowship of an *agape* meal by testifying. This means presenting ourselves to meet and speak with our brethren regarding the application of the word in our lives. This is our expression of the faith of the Son of God which we have received by hearing the word of God. Rom 10:17.

Faith is our access to the fellowship of the *agape* meal. Rom 5:2. To put it very practically, faith gives us our place at the table where we break bread with our brethren. In response to the word we have heard, we testify to one another as we eat our meal. This is what it means to 'stand' in grace. Rom 5:2. Grace is the context of fellowship, and standing means testifying.

More than just making ourselves known, testimony involves ministering to our brethren by speaking edification, exhortation, and comfort to them. 1Co 14:3. Rev 19:10. This is the capacity to prophesy to one another. It is our work of ministry for the sake of building one another up in love. Eph 4:12, 16. The apostle Paul said that every one of us can do this! 1Co 14:31.

The apostle's doctrine

Our capacity for testimony depends on continuing steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine. Act 2:42. This is because testimony is firstly received. Heb 11:2. It comes from God! The apostle's doctrine is the word of present truth that is proclaimed in the church. 2Pe 1:12. Rev 2:7. When we hear and receive this word we are, in fact, receiving the testimony of God. 1Co 2:1. He testifies to us concerning His Son Jesus Christ, His once for all offering, and the eternal life that He is giving to us, as we

participate in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. 1Co 2:2, 1Jn 5:10-11.

This is a great relief! The pressure is off. We don't need to come up with our own Christian success story. God is the one who shines in our heart, giving us an illumination about our name and works as a son of God. 2Co 4:6. His testimony is the light of the knowledge of our sonship. It gives us confidence regarding who we are, enabling us to express our new-born identity. 2Co 4:13. Those who are full of this light know and are known by their brethren as they give and receive testimony. Luk 11:36.

It is by faith, that we receive testimony. Heb 11:4. Faith comes to us when we hear the word of present truth as it is proclaimed in the church. Faith enables us to believe and obey God's testimony about who we are and the works of sonship that He has prepared for us to walk in. Eph 2:10. This is the testimony of sonship in which we can stand and speak.

The apostle Paul, knowing that the Father has called us to stand in the fellowship of the body of Christ, pleaded with us that we all speak the same thing. 1Co 1:9-10. He didn't mean that testimony is repeating the words of the preacher. He is telling us that hearing the word of present truth is the only means by which we receive faith for genuine testimony. The word is ministered to us in a spirit of faith. And having received that word and the faith it supplies we can then speak the same thing in the same spirit of faith. 2Co 4:13. This is the spirit of faith that Christ Himself received and expressed. Psa 116:10.

When we speak the same thing, we know that we are being perfectly joined together in the fellowship of the *agape* meal. 1Co 1:10. We will all have the same judgement. Our judgement will be that every aspect of our life is a participation with Christ in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings. 2Co 5:14. We don't need to make judgements regarding all the issues with which we are concerned. Our own motivation for self-improvement or correcting other people are futile anyway! We simply need to let our confession be directed by the word of faith that we have heard. This is the word that is in our heart and in our mouth. Rom 10:8. It is the word that we believe, and it is the word that we speak; our testimony is in that word! Rom 10:10. Believing and speaking is how we stand in the fellowship to which we have been called by God. 2Co 4:13. Co 1:9.

Importantly, 'continuing steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine' means more than hearing and receiving the word of present truth. It also means applying ourselves to that word through repentance from dead works

and faith towards God. Heb 6:1. This means that our conversation during an *agape* meal will involve our confession of repentance, and our expression of faith, in relation to the word we have heard.

Repentance from dead works

Our confession of repentance during our *agape* meal looks like articulating the fleshly perspectives, and sinful attitudes and behaviours, that the Lord is calling us to turn away from. Those who refuse to turn from their own way are not turning to the Lord. 2Co 3:16. Rev 1:12. Those who do confess their repentance during an *agape* meal are able to forget those things that are behind and reach forward to those things which are ahead. Php 3:13.

This capacity to repent is a blessing! Acts 3:26. Our confession of repentance will be simple and easy because it is accompanied by the faith that we have received. This does not mean our repentance is light-hearted or flippant. It means that faith produces within us the desire for open-hearted fellowship. We gladly share our repentance with our brethren because we are confident that God is dealing with our sin and healing our spirit. Articulating our repentance often helps others to understand the nature of their own repentance.

At times we can find it difficult to talk about our repentance because it feels too exposing. We don't like the idea of somebody knowing we've done something wrong. This feeling of humiliation is the other law at work in our members. It is evidence that we still have darkness. If a person resists walking in the light of the word which reveals their darkness, evidently, they love the darkness. Joh 3:19-20. They have no fellowship in Christ's sufferings, and they are not cleansed from their sin. 1Jn 1:7. This does not leave them merely feeling bad about their poor choices and actions. The reality is that they come under true condemnation which is the penalty of death under the judgement of God.

The truth is, we are all turning from our own ways and we are all are finding life as we turn to the Lord. No one is keeping an account of who is doing poorly; we are all simply rejoicing in one another's testimony of repentance. When we walk in the light the darkness of our fleshly perspective does not overtake us. Joh 12:35. In fact, we are light, and there is no darkness in us, as we testify in repentance. Eph 5:8. 1Jn 1:5.

Faith towards God

What about expressing our faith towards God in the context of an *agape* meal? Our confession of faith will be that Christ is priesting to us our daily participation in His offering and sufferings. Php 3:10. Gal 2:20. We share points of illumination and understanding about how the word is impacting our life. It may be areas of personal growth, or relational maturity that the Lord is highlighting to us. At times we may testify of the grace we are receiving to embrace our fellowship with the Lord in a season of physical suffering or emotional difficulty. As the Lord addresses certain areas of lameness in our life, we can testify of the 'straight paths' that we are making for our feet. Heb 12:13. By faith, we can all testify of our obedient participation in Christ's death and life.

Asking questions regarding the application of the word in our lives is also an expression of faith. Luk 2:46. Having received illumination as the word is proclaimed, we will seek to understand more about what it means for us. Those with whom we are speaking can reflect with us around these questions, bearing witness to the truth. Eph 4:25.

In summary, when we eat our meal together at church, we speak with our brethren about how we are turning to the Lord, what we are learning as we mature, and how God is at work to heal us and give us His life. We testify of our participation in Christ's finished offering, by confessing our repentance and faith in relation to the word we have heard. Heb 10:14.

Speaking for edification, exhortation, and comfort

Testimony also involves prophesying. We prophecy by speaking to edify, exhort and comfort our brethren. 1Co 14:3. We edify, or 'build up' our brethren, as we encourage them to walk forward in the light of the word. Eph 4:29. We exhort one another by reminding one another of the truth, which is our sanctification in the will of God. Joh 17:17. 1Th 4:3. Comfort is a ministry of grace to those who are suffering tribulation. 2Co 1:4. With 'grace on our lips' we strengthen these ones to remain joined to Christ as they participate in the fellowship of His sufferings. Col 4:6. Heb 4:16.

Most often, we prophesy by simply sharing the way in which the Lord is calling us to turn and to walk in obedience to the word we have heard. Just as we are to speak in this manner, we are also to receive these expressions of faith, ministered to us by our brethren. When we come to Christ, by participating in the conversation of the word with our brethren, then we are feeding on Christ. Joh 6:57. When we believe the

word of Christ, as it is ministered through the testimony of our brethren, then we are drinking of Christ's life. Joh 6:35.

Conclusion

God has given us an amazing invitation to join in fellowship with Him. As our accountable initiative towards fellowship, let us prepare ourselves to testify in the context of our *agape* meals each week. We know that God will speak to us, and that we will receive faith. We know that the love of God is being poured into our heart by the Holy Spirit. Faith and love are given to us so that we may speak in this context of fellowship. Indeed, our testimony is our ministry one to another in the body of Christ.

Article 5

Agape fellowship

Richie Kaa

In this article we will give attention to fellowship as the second dimension of grace. In the second chapter of Acts the writer employs the term ‘the *apostles’ fellowship*’, indicating that both the doctrine and the fellowship of the early church was overseen by the apostles. Acts 2:42. Today we live by the very same principle, acknowledging that the ground of fellowship, which is the only place of true meeting and knowing, is first established by the word of present truth proclaimed by those with apostolic grace among the presbytery. We are invited to join the fellowship of the presbytery by receiving the word they proclaim and in so doing, we are able to join the fellowship of Yahweh. 1Jn1:3. As we walk in the light of His word we are also joined in one Spirit with the community of His body. It is among this community that we are known, nourished, equipped and then compelled by love to reveal another by the work of our ministry. This is how we bless one another with the Spirit. 1Co14:6. In this article we will consider the nature of fellowship and also examine alternative practices often confused with fellowship. We will also consider how we come together for fellowship, with a particular focus toward our participation in the context of the *agape* meal.

In order for a son of God to grow and bear fruit in each season of their life they must have a proper participation in a Christian community where they can express the divine nature that is growing in them. This means they must have a connection to a community in which they are able to lay down their life for their brethren. There can be no unique communication of God's life as the sanctified expression of a person's sonship unless they are joined to a *community* of believers. In this article we will develop the understanding that a genuine Christian community is defined by the culture of fellowship. In this respect, fellowship is foundational to the Christian life. It is the way in which sons of God live together in the body of Christ because it is the way that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit live. Fellowship is then the culture of love, demonstrated by offering, in the community of Christ's body, by which the will of God is done.

Fellowship is Communion

In this most recent season we have been learning that the body and blood of communion is the fellowship of the body of Christ. 1Co 10:16. In other words, we are communing as we participate in *agape* meals, both publicly and from house to house, by giving thanks to God through prayer and by expressing our confession of faith in relation to the word of present truth. 1Ti 4:4-5. As we eat and drink together we make offering by speaking to one another with grace on our lips. The effect is that we are caused to remember our unique participation in Christ's offering and sufferings. This is an essential feature of the *agape* fellowship to which we've all been called to participate. We accordingly acknowledge that the Lord, at this time, is taking initiative toward us to teach us how we are to speak, when we are to speak and how we are to receive what is spoken.

Equipped to speak

In the fourth chapter of his letter to the Ephesian church Paul makes a clear connection concerning our works of ministry being the way we converse, or speak with one another. In this passage, Paul lays out that Christ Himself gave to His church some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and we refer to these as the ascension gift graces of Christ. Their work was, and continues to be, the equipping of every son of God *for the work of ministry*. This is a key point to highlight - every son has a work of ministry that can only be fulfilled once we are equipped by graced messengers. Paul defined the work of ministry as the edifying (or building up) of the body of Christ, until we all

(the whole body) come to full and complete maturity. Eph 4:13. We are deemed mature when we learn to put off childish responses. These responses include no longer being tossed back and forth by the waves (the troubling circumstances of life) and blown here and there by every wind of teaching (the allure of other gospels), or tricked by the cunning and craftiness of deceitful schemes (that try to disconnect us from His headship). Instead, we are all to speak the present truth word (to one another) in love, that we might grow and mature in every way so that we might progressively attain to be more and more like Christ, who is the Head of His body, the church. This is how He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.

Significantly, the apostle Paul affirmed fellowship as the grace of God in which we are to stand and make offering in the body of Christ according to our name as a son of God. Rom 5:2. Therefore, fellowship is not just some sympathetic and caring conversation in support of one another; rather, fellowship is the spiritual conversation where the gift of grace is given to another. We gain access into this grace by faith, which we receive by hearing the word of God that is ministered by those with ascension gift grace. Eph 4:11-12; Rom 10:17. This means that the capacity to bless one another with the Spirit and speak in faith actually resides in us. 1Cor 14:16.

The evidence we have received the presbytery is that our response to the word will be to turn in repentance and to be obedient to the faith we've received by the word. Accordingly, our motivation will be to share and testify of the application of this word in our lives and to continue in the four dimensions of grace. We continue in these four dimensions because this is how we are progressively equipped to continue to do the works of our ministry effectively.

The word of God and prayer sanctify our fellowship

When we gather together for an *agape* meal we pray so that our fellowship together is sanctified (or set apart to the word of present truth). It's important to remember that prayer is part of the conversation of faith which demonstrates that we are joined in one Spirit with the Lord, the presbytery and with our brethren and this prayer conversation should continue through the whole meal because 'grace is on our lips'. Psa 45:2. The apostle Paul wrote: 'Your speech is always to be with grace,

seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one'. Col 4:6.

As we are eating together around an *agape* meal, this prayer conversation is joining us to the fellowship of the Father and the Son. The prophet Zechariah recorded that those who feared the Lord spoke to one another and the Lord *was present* and listened and recorded a book of remembrance. Mal 3:16. Likewise, when we come together and meet in His name, Christ is present with us and as we converse with one another by the Spirit, Christ, our High Priest, searches our hearts, for He knows what the Spirit is saying. Rom 8:27. The Son is searching the heart of every person at that meal table in order to make intercession to the Father. When the Son makes intercession for us according to the will of God, He ministers to us our particular participation in His finished offering.

Remembering through dialogue and illumination

Any son of God who is unclear or uncertain of their proper participation in the offering of Christ participates in an unworthy manner, bringing them back under the judgement of condemnation. As such, we are motivated that each member of Christ's body is discerning their participation in the offering and sufferings of Christ. Part of our remembering is to acknowledge that every situation we encounter is an opportunity for our participation in Christ's offering. Accordingly, we will need to be regularly washed by our brethren with the water of the word from our fleshly perspectives and reminded that the reactive response or desire for retribution for a perceived injustice has no merit. Rather, as we walk in the light, having fellowship, each son can know through illumination and further dialogue their unique participation in His offering, confirmed as we continue to fellowship with one another.

That all may prophesy

The specific nature of our dialogue in the *agape* meal will involve *edification* (constructive feedback and instruction that builds a person up), *exhortation* (coming alongside someone and calling them to something specific to their name) and the *comforting* of one another with the truth of the Scriptures and toward our unique participation in the fellowship of offering. 1Th 4:18; 1Co 14:3. These spoken expressions are then described by the apostle Paul as the substance of prophecy. 1Co14:3. Its effect is 'that all may learn [which means coming to an

understanding concerning your participation] and all may be encouraged [exhorted] toward their participation. 1Co 14:31.

As we each learn to speak in the *agape* meal we should embrace the opportunity to share about the realities of our daily life, encompassing all the pressures that come upon us. We must also be ready to exhort one another in order that we not be tempted to revert to a natural or fleshly response to any of the inconvenient or distressing circumstances we encounter. This is why we need each other. We are to exhort one another to be spiritual and remain watchful in prayer so that each one might discern how to remain joined to His offering journey. In fact, this is the only way that the Lord can circumcise from our hearts, our tendency to self-preserve.

When we prophesy we must remember that we are not the source of that expression, rather, the Spirit is anointing us and teaching us to speak according to our sanctification. Therefore we need not conjure up or construct a word. Rather, we are to reflect the word of present truth; or reflect the light of the lamp in hope of illuminating our brethren. So we prophesy by reflecting the light of the word of present truth and by maintaining the good confession of faith that Jesus proclaimed throughout His offering journey. Rev 19:10. The prophetic word is then confirmed, or revealed as we take heed together in our *agape* meals and remain connected to the fellowship of offering throughout the course of our lives. 2Pe 1:19.

Tarrying

Regarding relational rifts within the community of the body, we must all accept that these are part of what we will need to deal with. Paul instructed the Corinthian church, saying, 'Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, *wait (or tarry) for one another.*' 1Co 11:33. We see that to 'wait' or 'tarry for one another' means to take time to talk together and to begin to address the issues that have resulted in division and discord within, and between, households. Remembering that if we harbour anger in our heart toward a brother (without a cause), we come back under judgement, resulting in progressive damage to ourselves and others. Jesus said, if you bring your gift to the altar (the place of offering) and remember that your brother has something against you, then go and be reconciled first to him and then come and offer your gift. Mat 5:23-25. This is not a suggestion to simply say sorry, rather it's the instruction to tarry together so that the offended brother can turn again to the Lord (*as a resolution to the offence*) so that the judgement that they are

experiencing can be commuted to chastening upon them in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings.

Conclusion

In this most recent season, the word has come to illuminate the principle of sacramentalism which wars against fellowship. A 'sacrament' is a ritual or procedure that is said to reward a participant with grace, or divine favour. It presumes that if we engage in an agreed upon set of steps or actions then we will receive some spiritual favour or benefit from God. For example, early church leaders taught that when the bread and wine (elements) were prayed over (consecrated) and then given (ministered) by an ordained priest (authority), these elements were transformed into the actual body and blood of Jesus within those who ate them (benefit). The outcome was that the congregant was blessed according to the words of Christ: 'Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day'. Jn 6:53-54.

Sacramentalism is then a scripted interaction independent of the Lord, His word (ministered by His messengers) and His faith gifted in the word. Therefore a sacramental approach to fellowship is a complete departure from the intimate conversation in which new creation sons engage, in real time, speaking the truth in love, because they have been equipped by those with ascension gift grace to stand in place and bless one another with the Spirit.

For many of us, the idea of removing the elements from our weekly communion procedure seemed simple enough. But does a simple procedural adjustment mean we've actually removed the sacramental approach in our Christian life? For those who have grown up in the church, our familiar or default notion of fellowship can still contain a form of sacramentalism. This would include the development or adoption of any procedure that has a set of agreed upon actions that we employ in order to achieve some kind of spiritual benefit.

A common example is the relational dynamic we often refer to as fellowship, but which is really the management of shame related to our sin. This typically leads us to seek out a Christian leader who we can confess our sins to in the hope that we might first be relieved of our guilt. The confession is both informative (this is what I did and then it escalated to this and it ended up with me doing this), but also humiliating, to satisfy our need of punishment. The fact that the elder,

pastoral carer or Christian leader, had nothing to say in the faux fellowship exchange only confirmed the catch-up as sacramental.

The writers of the New Testament remind us that our only place of true fellowship with the Lord, His presbytery and the broader body, is in the light of His word. The point is, the word of God proclaimed by His messengers is our entry point into Yahweh's fellowship where we are illuminated to receive understanding concerning our right(eous) standing before God. This will mean we are gaining understanding of our name and the works of our name and is where, by faith we are enabled to confess or speak what we know is true.

The pursuit of a pastoral interaction seeking affirmation or reinstatement following an aberration is helpfully addressed by the apostle Paul in his letter to the Roman church. Paul stated that the person who is attaining their righteousness by faith confesses that they are no longer looking for a Christian leader 'who will (on their behalf) ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down) [*to decide the direction they should take*], or, [on their behalf] descend into the Abyss?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead) [*and intervene in their circumstances to relieve them of their sufferings*].' Rom 10:6-7. This idea of fellowship removes any sense of personal accountability to receive from the Lord His faith for their sonship. Instead, we end up viewing a leader or esteemed functionary as a kind of life coach or sonship consultant and do so at the expense of being joined in fellowship with the Lord. To emphasise this, Paul posed the question, 'What does a person [who is attaining their righteousness by faith] say?' They first acknowledge that the word of God must come near to them, and they acknowledge it comes near by receiving those among the presbytery who have been sent to preach it. As they draw near to the word and the ones who bring it, they are illuminated and are compelled to turn in repentance from their former way of living that the light of the word exposed as false or inadequate. The word that now resides in their heart becomes their confession among their brethren as their new faith motivation.

Article 6

Agape breaking bread

Tim Maurice

The early church broke bread 'daily' from house to house. We break bread together because we are motivated by the love of God to fellowship in one spirit with those who are fellow sons of God. Breaking bread together is not just physical eating; it is an offering of fellowship by those who join the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers as their way of life. In this sense, breaking bread together is a definable activity, even though it is not a sacrament or ritual.

People often ask how a physical activity like eating and drinking, can also be spiritual. An example from another area of church life is helpful by way of explanation. For instance, we sometimes draw aside to fast and pray. In so doing, we choose to deprive ourselves of food. This is not a sacrament or ritual: it is a spiritual act of worship which includes the presentation of our bodies. In presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice to do the will of God, our natural life is gathered up into the spiritual life. We can say the same thing about singing, praying, procreation and serving on a working bee. We present our bodies by undertaking physical activities - which may include eating and drinking - to make offering in spiritual service. Rom 12:1-2.

MY PARTICIPATION IN THE AGAPE MEAL

Therefore, it was perfectly natural for Jesus to inaugurate a love feast with the disciples at their Passover meal. He wasn't enacting a ritual: He was loving His brethren and worshipping the Father; as well as asking them to do the same as they ate and drank together. In the same way, on the road to Emmaus, Jesus invited the disciples into fellowship with Him at meal-time. And in this activity, we see a very important principle at work: the Scriptures say that the disciples' eyes were opened, and 'they knew Him in the breaking of bread'. Luke 24:30-35 When we break bread together as spiritual people, we will see Christ revealed among us and in each other.

This has been the testimony of many. Speaking personally, what I have found in turning from the old practice of communion, and now breaking bread in the *agape* meal, is that my eyes have been opened afresh to fellowship. Now, remember that fellowship is not just another name for Christians getting together. Fellowship is a living bond in one spirit. Fellowship is, firstly, the way that God loves. Fellowship is only possible when a person is born from above and abides in Christ. When we abide in Christ, we abide in the fellowship that He enjoys with His Father.

Their fellowship is the fellowship in one spirit to which we can also be joined each day. In being so joined, we become partakers in Their divine nature. This is possible because Jesus is able to share the life of God with us. He does this when we are joined to His one offering. Paul wrote that 'he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him'. When we are joined to the Lord in one spirit, we can also be joined in one spirit with our brethren. This is something we must maintain throughout our lives as our personal sanctification, which is the will of God.

Back to breaking bread together. We can say this: The action of breaking bread (eating food together) is never a ritual. It has to do with much more than food. Those who are joined to the Lord can break bread together as an expression of their fellowship in the one offering of Christ. 1 Cor 10:16-17 People who are not joined to the Lord can derive no spiritual benefit from breaking bread over a meal or snapping a biscuit at church.

So why have any food at all? When it comes to food and eating, God has something particular in view. We can see this by the fact that from the beginning of creation, He invited man to eat from the tree of life. Furthermore, man's disobedience was expressed through eating from an alternative tree; if you like, eating at another table.

We eat for two reasons. The first, and most important, is because we need fuel to sustain our lives. Eternity is bound up in our hearts, but not in our bodies. Our bodies require constant subsidies from the natural world in order to function. The second reason we eat is because we enjoy it. Like so many other things, God made eating something that we enjoy. What is true in the natural is all the more true in the spiritual. At the Lord's table, we find the sustenance of His life, as well as great pleasure and joy in the fellowship that we find.

As we consider the subject of food, it is easy to imagine how natural it must have been for Adam and Eve to fellowship with the Lord at the tree of life. It was here that the Lord had set His table. But Satan had set another table. In direct disobedience to the Lord, Adam and Eve ate at this table offered to them by Satan, and so broke their fellowship with Yahweh.

There is still an alternative table set by Satan, and the apostle Paul called this alternative table 'a table of demons'. 1 Cor. 10:21. It is still set at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, where the wisdom from beneath is promoted as though it came from God. Even though the fruit of this tree was suitable for the angels, men and women cannot fellowship in the knowledge of good and evil. We must fellowship in the life of Yahweh as sons of God.

The wisdom that comes from the knowledge of good and evil is described in scripture as 'earthly, sensual and demonic'. James 3:15 There is no illumination at this table, and it is here that our minds can be led astray from sincere and pure devotion to Christ. 2 Cor 11:3 Paul further described this table as one set by 'anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people.' 1 Co 5:11. The food at this table is not the will of the Father; it is the will of those who join it.

We can be confident, however, that we are not eating at this false table as we remain joined to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings and participate in the four elements of church culture together. As we abide in this fellowship, we are enabled to be overcomers. This enabling comes because we receive the life of God through our participation in the offering of Jesus. In the breaking of the bread, we recognise Him and our brethren. We are illuminated and can discern the body of Christ with increasing clarity and an overflow of thanksgiving.

So we are people who fellowship together as partakers, or participants, in the divine nature. This is evident as we testify with and hear from our

brethren. We are one bread together. The broken bread is His body, of which we are now members. 1 Cor 10:17 Paul wrote that we are ‘members in particular’, meaning that we are part of a single unity – the body of Christ – and yet still individually unique. 1 Cor 12:27 It is the capacity of the divine nature within us to be joined in a fellowship of one spirit together, while maintaining our individual identity. This is something that the natural mind cannot understand. We know it only in the breaking of the bread; and we only break bread together when we come to Him and believe in Him personally. Once we learn to live this way, it can be our daily experience!

The example of Israel

Of all the churches, it was to the Corinthians that Paul wrote most explicitly about his revelation of the communion table. In the context of this discussion, Paul warned the Corinthians not to follow the example of Israel: ‘Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved.’ 1 Cor. 10:6. The ‘evil things’ that they craved are described in Psalm 78:

And in their heart they put God to the test
By asking food according to their desire.
Then they spoke against God;
They said, “Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?”

It is of paramount importance that we do not test God by asking that His table, which is His fellowship, provide us with what we want. This demand, which is also a complaint, will make it impossible for us to break bread with our brethren. Instead, we must come to the table saying, ‘Your will be done’. This is how the Lord taught us to fellowship in prayer with the Father, when He taught the disciples the Lord’s Prayer. Our sanctification is the will of God. We are sanctified at the table of the Lord when we come to do His will. The will of God is the food of Yahweh. We come to do His will when we are motivated by the Love that He pours into our hearts!

Jesus addressed this issue among the Jews when He told them that He was the bread, or manna, which had come down out of heaven. Like their forefathers, the people Jesus was addressing were grumbling about the word of Yahweh. Jesus told them that to partake of spiritual food and drink, they only needed to do two things: to come to Him and to believe in Him.

It is both of these things that we see the disciples doing on the Road to Emmaus. They came to Him by insisting that Jesus stay with them. When He acted as if he was going on further, they entreated Him not to do so. They also came to Him because they were drawn by His word. This was how faith was activated within them, so that when they saw Him, they believed in Him. As a result, they shared their testimony with their brethren.

What we witness in Jesus' interaction on the Road to Emmaus is a package of the four elements of the apostles' doctrine, fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayer:

1. Their hearts burned within them in response the word.
2. They insisted that He stay with them, indicating their desire for fellowship.
3. Jesus prayed a blessing.
4. He broke the bread.

In other words, the breaking of bread is, in itself, an expression of all four elements of our culture and life. So our breaking bread together can be a daily expression of our whole life together as brethren in Christ.

This means that, even if we have had a poor day, we are not disqualified from breaking bread with our brothers and sisters. As we come with a heart to see the will of God done, turning from the craving of our flesh for satisfaction, and look to the Lord, He will pour His love into our hearts again. This is how His motivation becomes our motivation. We are not just trying very hard to be well intentioned: God is giving us the heart to present ourselves to Him.

This is all very practical. Our meals together are opportunities for fellowship. As the illumination of this word continues to grow among us we will find ourselves breaking bread together daily. In our congregations in NSW we have been finding great joy in turning from our former practice of communion. As we walk in fellowship together in the illumination of this word, may the Lord continue to multiply His life among us.

Article 7

Agape meals at home

Lachlan Perrin

The culture of fellowship at home

Many of Jesus' most remarkable miracles and conversations happened when He visited *houses* just like yours. The type of house, Mum and Dad's jobs, the number of children, the day of the week - none of those things mattered to the Lord. Rather, Jesus' earthly ministry demonstrated that His desire was to knock on the door of every *house*, to meet those who lived there, and to *teach them, have fellowship with them, eat with them and pray with them*. When individuals and whole households heard and believed His word, they received faith to participate in fellowship with Him and with other believers. Jesus was building His church as a *house to house fellowship*.

Importantly, it was the *culture* of the houses - including such things as their priorities, conduct and conversation - that was transformed into a *context* for fellowship. This culture of fellowship extended beyond the coordinated program of the church. Godliness, as a culture, became the standard for their day to day living. This is what the apostle Paul meant when he wrote, 'Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of

Christ, so that whether I come and see you *or remain absent*, I will hear of you that you are *standing firm* in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel'. Php 1:27. The Philippian Christians were equipped to *stand firm* in one spirit and with one mind because they maintained a commitment to the fellowship of the presbytery. Rom 5:2.

This pattern of church growth, through house to house visitation and ministry, continued after Jesus' ascension. Luke recounted that the early church believers communed together 'from house to house'. When he described what this fellowship *looked like*, he wrote, 'They were taking their *meals* together with gladness and sincerity of heart'. Act 2:46. Their fellowship *looked like* meals together. Interestingly, the Bible identifies the *mealtime* of a house as a fundamental opportunity for the expression of fellowship.

The book of Psalms describes it this way. 'Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine within your house, your children like olive plants *around your table*.' Psa 128:3. The Hebrew word for 'table' in this Psalm means 'spread' or 'meal'. The fruitfulness of a household, which refers to the life of Christ being formed within those who live there, is centred around the dining table! This is firstly because the 'table' represents the spiritual 'food' that is consumed in a household. Secondly, when those who live in a household gather together at the table, the kind of fruit that their spiritual 'food' has brought forth will be evident in their conduct and conversation. Individuals who are committed to Christian culture, recognise that mealtimes are an opportunity to share testimony for the purpose of blessing those gathered at the table.

As we reflect on the last season, and the home confinement that we experienced because of coronavirus, we recognise that our houses were the primary context for Jesus' visitation and ministry toward us. He visited us with eyes like a flame of fire, addressing many personal and family cultures that were not adequate for *agape* meal fellowship. Rev 1:14. As His word rebuked and chastened us, He was declaring to every household, 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will *dine with him*, and he with Me.' Rev 3:20.

As we have considered in our previous articles, the Scripture identifies *agape* [love] meals as the context for house to house fellowship. These gatherings are characterised by four dimensions of participation; the apostles' doctrine, the apostle's fellowship, the breaking of bread and

prayer. Act 2:42. Practically, *agape* meals provide a context for us to express, by faith, our testimony concerning the application of the word of present truth in our life.

At the first level, we participate in *agape* fellowship at church on Sunday mornings and then again when we gather for rostered house to house fellowship on Wednesday nights. At the second level, beyond the program of the church, we can also take initiatives to meet with other households and share *agape* meals throughout the week. The focus of this article, however, is how we maintain a personal initiative to continue participating in these four dimensions of fellowship, *within the context of our household*. That is, fellowship house to house implies that each participating household has a commitment to the culture of *agape* meal fellowship at home.

Perhaps, at times, you've considered the goal of the church program to be just that - a well-run church program. Then, you've considered the goal of your discipleship to be your participation in the church program. It is true; you won't grow in your sonship unless you are joined to the community of Christ. But the foremost goal of the church program is to equip you to be a spiritual son or daughter of God in *every* context of your life. The truth is, we spend much more time participating in the many and varied activities of our house and family, than we do the church program. But in *every* circumstance of life, the word of God equips us to stand, by faith, in the grace of God. This is true in our families and households. As we now revisit each dimension of the *agape* meal, let's consider what our participation in the *culture of agape* meals looks like *at home*.

The apostles' doctrine at home

Today, the mandate to proclaim Christ's word has been committed to presbyteries. Their message, the apostles' doctrine, is the word of God that is proclaimed in every generation of the church. It is the content of the gospel of sonship that ministers spiritual sustenance to every household. The culture and fellowship of our house will be in order if we receive, and live by, the word of present truth that is ministered from the presbytery. This word establishes us on the ground of fellowship and equips us with grace to fulfill the works of our sonship. The apostle Paul described our participation in this fellowship when he said that we have received 'an introduction by faith into the grace in which we stand and rejoice in the hope of obtaining our sonship'. Rom 5:2. We can 'stand in

the grace' because we believe and receive the ministry of Christ's ascension gift messenger administration. Eph 4:10-11.

Christ, the Master, has appointed ascension gift overseers and stewards over His house, entrusting them with the responsibility to feed those who abide in God's house. Luk 12:42. The apostles' doctrine is the word of grace that strengthens our heart for our fellowship in the offering of Christ. Heb 13:9. Practically, we receive the apostles' doctrine into our homes when we promote and participate in the discussion of the word of present truth. This initiative isn't reserved for Sunday mornings, Wednesday nights, or when other households visit us! Our speech can *always* be with grace. Col 4:6. And we can know, according to name and testimony, 'how to respond to each person [in our household]' with grace on our lips. Col 4:6.

There is a wonderful statement in the book of Acts, concerning the ministry of the apostles' doctrine in the early church. After the apostles preached and performed many miracles in Jerusalem, the high priest and the Sadducees laid hands on them and had them imprisoned. Act 5:18. But an angel of the Lord opened the gates of the prison and, after releasing the apostles, said, 'Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people *all the words of this life.*' Act 5:20. The apostles' doctrine ministers a *complete* equipping for your life. The path that you're walking, the events that are happening, the decisions that you're making, how to respond in your relationships and so on, are all confirmed to you as you participate in the fellowship of the apostles' doctrine.

In the book of Deuteronomy, the Lord revealed His desire for us to apply ourselves to His word when we're at home. We read there, 'These words, which I am commanding you today, *shall be on your heart.* You shall *teach them diligently* to your sons and shall *talk of them* when you *sit in your house*'. Deu 6:6-7. The Hebrew word that has been translated 'teach them diligently', means to 'prick' or to 'pierce'. The word of Christ is sharper than any two-edged sword. It comes like a goad to pierce our hearts and reveal the attitudes, perspectives and familiar responses we make, that are fallen.

When the word goads us, we receive illumination concerning the Lord's call upon our life. He calls us to turn from our fallen cultures and to, instead, walk in the way of sonship that the Father has prepared for us. If we're honest with ourselves, often the most virulently entrenched, fallen mechanisms that we keep, manifest within our homelife. At the same time, these fallen propensities are usually veiled from our spiritual sight.

The process of receiving and applying the apostles' doctrine within our house, begins with receiving the word as a goad. It pierces our heart and reveals these fallen cultures.

The passage in Deuteronomy then admonishes us to 'talk of them [the apostles' doctrine] *when you sit in your house*'. Deu 6:7. Interestingly, the word 'talk' in this verse means 'arrange'. And to 'sit in your house' is a simple description of the context where we rest. It's the place where we relax and openly express ourselves. Having received the word as a goad, we receive faith to repent and turn from our fallen ways. But there's another step. We must discuss the apostles' doctrine, practically, to 'arrange' our culture in obedience to the word. As we dwell in our houses - morning, evening, day by day - there's an *ongoing* exercise to arrange, or apply, the word of present truth so that it becomes substantial in our lives.

The apostles' fellowship at home

The second foundation of *agape* meal fellowship is the *apostles' fellowship*. Our participation in the apostles' fellowship is the basis for our participation in the community of Christ. When we receive the fellowship that is extended to us by Christ's messengers, we are joining the fellowship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The evidence that we have embraced the apostles' fellowship will be our motivation to participate in the offering of Christ.

There are two fundamental examples of our participation in Christ's offering. The first is our desire to multiply the fellowship of His word, through the initiatives we take to discuss the word. This includes sharing and testifying about how every circumstance of our life is an expression of our fellowship in Christ's offering. Secondly, our participation in Christ's offering is demonstrated practically, through our tithes, financial offerings and participation in service teams at church. Importantly, our commitment to both aspects of involvement will shape the culture and priority of our house.

The Gospel of Luke recounts Jesus sending His disciples ahead of Him to every city and place that He was going to visit. Luk 10:1. This account is an excellent demonstration of houses receiving, and participating in, the apostles' fellowship. Jesus said to His disciples, 'Whatever house you enter, first say, "Peace to this house". And if a son of peace is there, your peace shall rest on it. If not, it shall return to you. And remain in the same house, eating and drinking the things shared by them; for the

labourer is worthy of his hire. Do not move from house to house. And into whatever city you enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you.' Luk 10:5-8.

Our first point of participation in Christ's body is our fellowship with the messengers who proclaim His word. Clearly, if the disciples were able to 'remain in the same house', then the people living there had received their message. When we join the fellowship that is established by the word of present truth, we are yoked together in one spirit with the community of the church. 2Co 4:13. We are yoked together in one spirit with the Lord, with our brethren, and with those in our household. Jesus described the outcome of this 'yoking together' as finding rest for our soul. Mat 11:29. That is why the blessing of peace, which Jesus' disciples came to impart, rested upon the houses that received them.

Interestingly, Jesus instructed His disciples to *eat and drink* the things shared with them by the households that they visited. Jesus was *not* talking to His disciples about the *kinds* of foods that they would be served. Rather, He was encouraging them to utilise the mealtime of a house to exemplify the culture of *agape* meal fellowship. By adding the apostles' doctrine and prayer to a households' eating and drinking together, the disciples were *sanctifying* those occasions to the culture of *agape* meals. 1Ti 4:5.

At the same time, the response of each household to share food and drink with the disciples revealed their faith to make offering. This is an example of the second aspect of our participation in the apostles' fellowship; our *physical* offerings. At this point in history, providing food for Jesus' disciples was a significant contribution to the work of the church. The apostle Paul described this kind of participation in offering, when he wrote, 'If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?' 1Co 9:11. Importantly, the response of each house to offer material things was the *outcome* of their participation in the fellowship that was established by the apostles' word. Similarly, for us, without a tangible commitment to join the conversation of the word of present truth, the practical activities that we do in the name of offering will only be religious traditions.

The initiative of faith to join the fellowship of Christ's offering belongs to every believer. And our commitment to the apostles' fellowship should be reflected in the culture of our conversation and conduct at home. The steps that we take to discuss the word of present truth and to prioritise our practical service at church, result in the life of God, that we have

received through our participation in the apostles' fellowship, to overflow and multiply to others.

Breaking bread at home

The third foundation of *agape* meal fellowship is the breaking of bread. This foundation refers to our participation in the communion meal. 1Co 10:16. We can think of the communion meal as the provision of spiritual food that is necessary for our sustenance as sons of God. When we consider our participation in the breaking of bread *at home*, there's an important distinction that we must understand. The body and blood of Christ belong to *His* table. King David highlighted this point when he prayed to the Lord, saying, '*You* prepare a table before me'. Psa 23:5. The food and drink of the Lord's table is ministered to us by the stewards that Christ has appointed over His house. Luk 12:42. They minister the bread and the cup to us through the proclamation of the word of present truth in each season.

At the same time, our participation in the breaking of bread does extend beyond the deaconed meetings of the church program. We know this to be true because the Lord has encouraged us to pray, asking Him to, 'Give us *each day our daily bread*.' Luk 11:3. So, what is the reality of our *daily* participation in the breaking of bread at home? When we, daily, give our attention to the word that is proclaimed by Christ's messengers, we continue to *feed* on the provision of the Lord's table. We recall Jesus quoting the book of Deuteronomy, stating, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.' Mat 4:4. Our conduct and conversation remain an expression of the Lord's table when we live by the faith that is ministered to us in Christ's word. For this reason, we must be careful not to pursue alternate sources of sustenance, or entertain conversations and cultures in our homes that are contrary to the things that the Lord is saying.

When the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians about the communion meal, he reminded them that there is a 'worthy' and an 'unworthy' way of participating in the Lord's table. Paul said that our participation will be *unworthy* if we fail to discern the body of Christ. 1Co 11:29. To discern the body of Christ is to understand, by illumination, our participation in His body according to sanctification. Importantly, our sanctified participation in the breaking of bread should extend to every day and every circumstance of our life. Our whole life should be a testimony, according to name and grace, of the life of Jesus that is sustaining our sonship.

We have rejoiced, in this season, to learn that when we speak in this way, we can *be* the bread and the cup of the communion, which ministers edification, exhortation and comfort to others. We're able to minister the life of Jesus that we have received because our conduct and conversation reflect our participation in the Lord's table.

We continue to participate in the breaking of bread at home in a worthy manner when there is no discrepancy between our attitude at church and at home. This is an important point. We can be spiritually alive, committed sons of God, who are involved in service teams at church and who minister in word and song, but at the same time, have familiar cultures and ways of behaving within our houses that are not sanctified. These cultural gaps and immaturities are one aspect of Christ's chastening among us in this season. Thankfully, as we receive Christ's instruction and press in to eat and drink in a worthy manner, we see fruit in our lives. Our personal demeanour, and our cultural approach at home, grow in godly sincerity. And our participation in the breaking of bread at home will result in genuine gladness and simplicity of heart. Act 2:46.

Prayer at home

The final dimension of fellowship that is fundamental to the culture of *agape* meals is prayer. Throughout this article, we have highlighted how our participation in *every* dimension of fellowship is motivated by faith. Faith is ministered to us in the word of present truth. Rom 10:17. Having received the 'same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed and therefore I spoke", we *also believe and therefore speak*'. 2Co 4:13. Prayer is the first expression of the conversation of faith. It is foundational to our life as Christians and to our fellowship with the Lord and with our brethren.

The Scripture teaches that there is an important link between our participation in the fellowship of prayer and the order of our houses. For example, the apostle Peter said that if a married couple do not understand and submit to the order of Christian headship, then their prayers will be hindered. 1Pe 3:7. Headship is the order through which the grace of life is multiplied and ministered to others, by offering. Similarly, the Lord spoke about Abraham, saying, 'For *I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household* after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him.' Gen 18:19. What a tremendous compliment for Abraham. He was known to God because of his participation in prayer. For this reason, the Lord equipped

Abraham with the capacity to lead his household in the way of righteousness and faith.

It is a sobering thought that if we are not connected to the lordship of Christ's headship, then our prayers will be hindered. This principle explains what Jesus meant, when He said, 'If a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand.' Mar 3:25. Not being 'able to stand' refers to a house that has drawn back from the order of headship and, as a result, suffered a disconnection from the grace of God. Rom 5:2.

Many young adults actively seek to walk in the light of fellowship with their young adults' leaders, service team leaders and other firstfruits elders. This is a commendable and fruitful exercise. However, if a young adult-aged Christian is not submitted in right relational order to their parents, both their prayers and their access to the grace of life will be hindered. The hallmark characteristic of a young adult who is maturing in their discipleship is a growing capacity to walk *with* their parents in the light of fellowship.

Conclusion

At this time, the Lord is knocking on the door of our houses and seeking to speak with us about our participation in *agape* meal fellowship. The four dimensions of this *continual* fellowship are nominated in the Scripture as the apostles' doctrine, the apostles' fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayer. Act 2:42. Our participation in these foundations of fellowship has an application within the deaconed program of the church, in the initiatives that we take to meet house to house and, most importantly, within the culture of our houses, day by day. Let us zealously turn to the Lord in this season, receiving His word and, by faith, growing in our capacity to manifest the culture of *agape* meals at home.

Article 8

Participation in our young adult community

David Hall

Our young adult discipleship program is not a 'youth club'. It is a vital part of the Lord's sheepfold. This is a context in which His authority defines a place and a culture for every person as a sheep of His sheepfold. Doorkeepers open the door of the sheepfold to Christ, and the sheep hear Him call them by name. He then leads them in and out to find pasture. Understanding and respecting this offer of relationship for our inclusion and participation in the Lord's sheepfold is paramount to our salvation. There is no other way to enter the kingdom of heaven, except through the door of the sheepfold. Joh 14:6. Eph 2:18.

The door of the sheep

Jesus Christ is the Door of the sheep. Joh 10:9. This means that He is the way into the sheepfold, and that He gives the sheep access to the word of the Father. Being called by name, every sheep has access to the fatherhood of God. Joh 14:6. Eph 2:18. If anyone will come to Christ, and

enter by Him, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. He is the Good Shepherd who has come to the sheepfold so that His sheep will have abundant life. Joh 10:10.

Jesus warned that anyone who does not enter the sheepfold through the Door is a thief and a robber, whose only intent is to gratify themselves at the expense of the sheep. They do not respect Christ, the Good Shepherd; nor do they respect the authority of the sheepfold that has been given to the doorkeepers. They come to steal sheep out of the fold and, through their lies, to kill and destroy the divine nature in another. The prophet Nathan likened this behaviour to stealing another man's little lamb. 2Sa 12:1-14. People who endeavour to live this way in the church are strangers to the culture of the Father's house, and they deny the lordship of the Good Shepherd with their rebellion. These people encourage others to join in their disobedience as harmless fun or secretive indulgences. While they intend that these unsanctified activities remain hidden, those who indulge in these activities may reluctantly make confession if their deeds are exposed. 1Pe 4:1-7. They are often factious people who draw others into their own rebellious agenda. 1Co 11:19.

Jesus said that the hallmark of the sheep who belong to Him is that they will not listen to these thieves and robbers. The apostle Paul said that a sheep should not even associate with such people. Eph 5:1-7. Eph 5:11-13. 2Th 3:14-15. Christ's own sheep know the voice of the Good Shepherd. They will hear His voice and will know Him and be known by Him and will follow Him in the discipleship pathway that He has pioneered for them. Joh 10:25-27.

Jesus encourages us with the promise that if we belong to His sheepfold, hear His voice, and follow Him as His disciples, He will give us eternal life. He will also protect the sheepfold from harm. We will never perish; neither will any thief or robber be able to snatch us out of His hand. This is because the heavenly Father, who is greater than all else, has us in His hand and has given us into Christ's hand. Joh 10:28-30.

Christ has committed His authority into the context of the sheepfold and has appointed doorkeepers. These overseers are to open the door to Christ and to provide access for Him to come in, to call His sheep by name and to lead them out. The sheep hear His voice and follow Him and will by no means hear the voice of a stranger. They will, rather, flee from any alternative message to the word of Christ. Joh 10:2-5.

When Christ appoints the doorkeepers of His sheepfold, He gives authority to these servants, and to each one a work, commanding them to

'watch'. Mar 13:33-37. They are always to watch for the coming of the Lord of the house. If anyone will open the door to Him, He will come in and dine with them. Rev 3:20. Note that in both Scriptures quoted above, Jesus is not just speaking with the doorkeepers, but to *everyone*. Everyone is to watch for His visitation and to open the door to give Him access, so that He can come in and dine with them.

The Great Shepherd Himself enters by the door. This is an amazing point! The Great Shepherd, being all-powerful, could take charge of the situation Himself and force His way into the sheepfold, and no-one could stop Him. However, because of His commitment to the fellowship which He discussed with the apostle John, He has entrusted His authority to workers in the sheepfold. 1Jn 1:1-4. When He knocks on the door, their work is to open the door to Him. The interesting implication here is that no-one can come to Christ unless a doorkeeper opens the door for access. There is no access to Him outside the sheepfold. There is no 'me and Jesus' salvation alone; and no 'you do it for me' salvation through an intermediary.

A doorkeeper has the keys to bring you into the fold, and to give you access to Christ, and Christ access to you. But the doorkeeper is not an intermediary; for Christ comes to visit you personally so that you can know Him and know His voice, and He can lead you in and out to find pasture.

Where there is a failure to fellowship, Christ, while longsuffering, will personally take initiative to judge disobedient doorkeepers and sheep within His sheepfold. We note that He comes to the sheepfold in order to lead His own sheep. Joh 10:3-4. There are other sheep in the sheepfold that He will come and judge. Ezekiel 34 describes the nature of these sheep, who are concerned only with taking advantage of the sheepfold and stealing life from other sheep. Jesus also specifically names things He is coming to judge in His address to the seven churches in the book of revelation. He will personally deal with these people and their corruption in His sheepfold. Rev 2-3.

Keys to the sheepfold

In Revelation Chapter 1, Jesus declared, 'Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.' Rev 1:17-18. Our Shepherd has the keys needed for individuals to escape from the rule of sin and death that belongs to the old creation, so that

they can enter the kingdom of heaven. Rom 5:21. These keys open the pathway to new creation and to a continuing participation in the fellowship of Christ's offering. The sheepfold defines the community in which our participation is made effective.

Importantly, Jesus made a distinction regarding these 'keys', in an encounter with His disciple Peter. 'He [Jesus] said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven".'

Mat 16:15-19.

Jesus is the Door of the sheepfold and has entrusted the keys of the sheepfold to its doorkeepers. We can also call doorkeepers 'watchmen', or 'messengers'. They are commanded to watch and guard the sheepfold. Mar 13:34. They are given charge over the sheepfold so that the sheep can go in and out and find pasture. Joh 10:7-9. Christ's initiative to guard the flock has been given to them as their work. They watch over the sheepfold and close the door so that thieves, robbers and wolves are unable to gain access to the sheepfold and cause damage to the sheep. They protect the sheep from the initiatives of these wicked pretenders who seek to steal and destroy the sheep from the fold. As we noted earlier, their watchfulness also means that when the Lord comes to find His own sheep, they open the door to His initiative to call His sheep by name and to lead them on the path that He has pioneered for them.

If we refuse to follow Jesus on the discipleship path that He has ordered for us, we reject faith, we reject Christ as our Lord, and we reject our inheritance as a son of God.

When Christ brings His own sheep out, He goes before them, and the sheep follow Him because *they know His voice*. His sheep will not follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers. He leads them on the path that He has pioneered for them. This is the will of the Father for them; it is their predestination. Jesus used this illustration, but they did not understand the things which He spoke to them.

We, likewise, need to hear the word of the sheepfold and to understand the fellowship context that He has given to us. Joh 10:6.

Ask, seek and knock

The Scriptures instruct us that the Lord is our God, and we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand. We are further exhorted that, when we hear His voice, we are not to harden our hearts in rebellion nor to test the boundaries He has set for us.

The psalmist exhorted us, writing, 'For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand. Today, if you will hear His voice: "Do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion, as in the day of trial in the wilderness, when your fathers tested Me; they tried Me, though they saw My work. For forty years I was grieved with that generation, and said, 'It is a people who go astray in their hearts, and they do not know My ways.' So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest'.'" Psa 95:7-11.

Jesus gave us some instructions on how to do this. He said, 'Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.' Mat 7:7-8. This means that, through prayer, we must ask for the gospel of sonship from the Father. We knock on the door by coming to Christ, who is the Door. Joh 10:9. We do this by receiving the word that is proclaimed by His ascension gift messengers and by continuing in the fellowship of the word with them. Eph 4:7-12. Joh 13:20. 1Jn 1:1-3. This word also contains the keys to the kingdom of heaven, which have been given to the doorkeepers of the sheepfold.

The keys of the kingdom

From the Scriptures, we can identify three keys to the kingdom of God. They are:

1. The word of the cross, which gives us illumination and faith so that we can see and accept our calling as a son of God. 1Co1:26. Rom 10:17.
2. Baptism as the means by which a son of God is crucified with Christ and joined to Christ as our sin offering. Having been united in the likeness of His death through the waters of baptism, we are made alive by the Spirit of the Father, the Holy Spirit and the resurrection life that is in Christ's blood. Rom 6:3-5.

3. The ministry of the Spirit, enabling our participation in the body and blood of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is the essence of the New Covenant. 2Co 3:6. He enables our participation in the body of Christ as a son of God, because He is the life and expression of our name as a son of God.

Our discipleship culture

In Australia, the church is a legally recognised community. It has been given the right to express its position and practice concerning that which constitutes Christian morality. While this is a legal right, in our first love culture this right should not be differentiated from our understanding of what constitutes a healthy, first love, relational fellowship that is practised in public meetings and also from house to house. We have the freedom on some issues to maintain and teach which behaviours are acceptable and unacceptable within the Christian faith, according to what the Scripture teaches. As presbyters and youth leaders who are doorkeepers to the sheepfold, we do not draw back from this responsibility. And we will be asking every disciple to speak the same word that we teach, and to have the same mind concerning the culture of the sheepfold.

Paul was extremely clear when he drew a cultural 'line in the sand' and said to the congregation at Ephesus, 'But fornication, and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for the saints.' Eph 5:3. Speaking further to Timothy, Paul specified the Christian culture for a man and a woman, and also for marriage, and for leaders in the church. It is interesting to note that there is no discernible difference between the conduct required by a 'leader' in the church or by the head of a household or even by young people.

Addressing the Corinthians, Paul indicated that many worldly behaviours were not compatible with the culture of the Christian community. 1Co 6:9-11. Note that any addictive practice is included here and elsewhere in Scripture, whether social media, drunkenness, drugs, gossip, revelling or partying, and even stubbornness, do damage to the individual and to the community to which they are joined. 1Sa 15:23. 2Co 13:1-5. King Saul was addressed by the prophet Samuel, who told him that iniquity is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as the sin of idolatry. This is where a person is addicted to their own world view (good and evil) and is disobedient to the word of God. The result is a damaged, or dystrophied, identity. Those who are stubborn always resist the conviction of the Holy Spirit as they pursue their own desires. They will

also speak against those whose testimony challenges their disobedience.
Act 7:51 -53.

Identifying the worldly cultures that are at odds with the culture of godliness that belongs to the church, Paul said, 'Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers (abusers), nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.' 1Co 6:9-11. (Note that the text indicates that a pathway of recovery is available to those who seek it.)

Our exercise, as we engage in this discipleship program, is to be clear about our own testimony in relation to these cultural matters and reforms, knowing that whilst recovery is available as per the Scriptures above, these sinful pursuits will only do us damage, because they are the fruit of disobedience to God's word. Today, in fellowship, we are reviewing what it means to come into the church as the sheepfold, in proper respect for the leadership of the church, so that we are properly connected to the community of the church. This is the context for our safety and security, and the place where we are obtaining our inheritance of sons of God.