

FELLOWSHIP IN THE PRESBYTERY

Peter Hay, prepared for word ministry, 13 December 2020

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Introduction

In our session today we will look at fellowship in the presbytery and, from the writings of the apostle John, we understand that this fellowship is to be the same fellowship in which we all participate.

While we are looking at how the presbytery functions, and the nature of fellowship in the presbytery, it is important that we understand that the dynamics of that fellowship are to be the same fellowship *across the whole church*.

‘That which we have seen and heard we declare to you.’ 1Jn 1:3.

Obviously, it was the apostle John who was writing, but he wrote the letter as ‘we’, which indicates a collective of presbyters.

We are to be in fellowship with the Father and His Son

‘That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly *our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.*’ 1Jn 1:3.

We have quoted this passage many times over these past months, but it has impacted on me again that we are to be in fellowship with the Father and His Son - and *that* fellowship is the fellowship of the presbytery.

It is an amazing thought, and the reality for us is that that is where and how we are to live.

For our joy to be made full, we need connection to fellowship

‘And these things we write to you that your *joy* may be full.’ 1Jn 1:4.

This ‘joy’ is the joy that is first expressed when the seed of God’s word germinates in a believer’s heart, and they are born of God.

This is what we learned from the parable of the sower and the seed. Mat 13:20. When that seed germinated in the ground, it sprang up; and Jesus said that this was the joy of new birth.

The parables teach us this key point - that that joy has to be *made full* in order for us to obtain our inheritance.

This joy is made full as we grow up, or mature, in Christ, and inherit eternal life as a son of God.

John’s point was that this is only possible if we are established in the fellowship of the Father and His Son, which requires our fellowship with the presbytery.

That is a focal point. John said, in effect, ‘We are telling you these things so that your joy may be full, or the initial joy of new birth comes to its fruition’ - this needs *connection to fellowship*.

Fellowship is God’s culture of love - it is demonstrated by offering

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 in which the Father, Son and Holy Spirit live.

Fellowship is the culture of *love*. We know that God is love. So, fellowship is the way that the three Persons of the Godhead live; and this love is demonstrated by *offering*.

The context of fellowship is established by the word of God

The *ground*, or context, of *fellowship* in the presbytery, and in the church more broadly, is established by *the word of God*.

John made the point that ‘that which we have seen and heard [They were hearing a word.] we declare to you’.

There was a proclamation, by those who were part of a presbytery, of that word which they had seen and heard. Then John said that this was so ‘that you may have *fellowship* with us’.

So, this word that proclaims the gospel of sonship is the ground upon which we have fellowship with one another.

We have been learning this about the communion - that our fellowship is sanctified by the word of God and by prayer, which is our conversation.

Repentance and the obedience of faith demonstrate our application to the word

This means that the capacity to *participate* in fellowship requires our *diligent application to the word of present truth*.

Now, our application to the word is not simply listening to and studying the word that is proclaimed - although that is important. Across our fellowship of churches, one of the fruits of this season has been commitment and easy application to the word.

That is a wonderful reality, but the reason why there is so much testimony has been because of the *true application* to the word, which is the foundation of *repentance* and *faith* toward God.

Our response of repentance and the obedience of faith demonstrates our application to the word.

We do have to 'give our ear to hear it', and we do have to study these things. In the book of Acts, Luke described the Bereans as being noble-minded because they did this; but the *true application* is where *the word* has become *our culture*. Act 17:10-11.

This is 'understanding', isn't it? And it happens because we are turning *from* something *to* what the word is illuminating.

And we are confessing that understanding through our obedience, both by our speech as a testimony and through our conduct as a way of living.

This is true for every believer, irrespective of their authority and accountability in the church. This principle of application through repentance and faith is the same for anyone in the church, including those with apostolic grace.

This is what we find in John's letter. He was one of the apostolic messengers, grace messengers, and his testimony was that he was among fellow presbyters. He was testifying to a specific application to the word, and he opened his letter this way.

'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.

John was saying that no-one is exempt from this kind of application. We have to understand the nature of this application, because this is the fellowship to which we are all to be joined. It is supposed to be the fellowship of a presbytery as well as the fellowship of a church.

THE GROUND OF OUR FELLOWSHIP HAS FOUR DIMENSIONS OF APPLICATION

In this session we will consider each of these four elements: what we have *heard*; what we have *seen* with our eyes; what we have *looked upon*; and what *our hands have handled*.

Those four dimensions of application are the basis, or ground, of our fellowship. Let us begin with 'what we have heard'.

What we have heard - the word down by offering in the fellowship of presbytery

The word from the beginning is first spoken, or laid down, by offering, in the fellowship of the presbytery by those with ascension gift grace from Christ.

Christ gives this grace to some within the presbytery, but not to everyone. And it is the work of offering, particularly by those with apostolic, or revelatory grace, to lay this word down in the fellowship of presbytery.

That is the word 'that is heard'.

The capacity to minister the word is by faith, which only comes by hearing the word

This does not mean that other presbyters do not hear from the Lord themselves or know what the Spirit is saying.

Rather, the *faith and capacity to minister the word comes by hearing it*.

I am not saying that there are only a few people in the presbytery who hear what the Spirit is saying or hear from the Lord or converse with the Lord. That is not true. It is not even true across the whole body of Christ.

We are saying that the capacity to minister the word is by *faith*, and that faith only comes by *hearing the word*. Paul made it clear that that is the word that is *preached*. Rom 10:17.

That is true in the church and in the presbytery itself.

The first point of ministry is to lay it down in the fellowship of the presbytery

The next point to note is that what is being illuminated to any presbyter by the Spirit will also be laid down, or offered, in the fellowship of the presbytery.

While there are those with ascension gift grace who do have the capacity from Christ to lay down

the word in that fellowship, there will be others, of course, who are hearing what the Spirit is saying.

Their first point of speaking is not in their self-defined context of ministry. The first point of ministry, particularly for those who are given to care for the church, is to lay it down in the fellowship of the presbytery.

The leaven of collegiality

As the word is laid down in the presbytery, *according to grace and name*, it is not vetted or assessed by fellow presbyters.

It is not the case that, at a presbytery gathering, someone who has grace from Christ lays down the word in the context of presbytery so that all the other presbyters can 'assess' whether this is a sufficiently articulate ministry of the word to the whole church.

That would be collegiality, and we have spoken about the leaven of collegiality. It is one of the most destructive leavens in the church. That is *not* the mode of laying down the word.

The word is received by offering – by the grace that is given to the humble

So, how do fellow presbyters interface with the word as it is being laid down?

It is to be *received* by them in the same way that it is being laid down. It is being laid down in offering, and it is to be received *by offering*.

This is grace, isn't it? We remember that grace is the context, or fellowship, of Christ's offering, and God gives that capacity of grace to the humble. 1Pe 5:5.

These ones do not assess the word. Rather, they accept that they need to *hear* it and *receive* it, so that they can participate. It is being received by them in offering.

Nevertheless, there will be a witness in the Spirit among presbyters to the truth of the word that is laid down.

The word is proclaimed, and a witness is borne in the Spirit – 'our conscience bearing witness in the Holy Spirit' – that this is the word which we are all being called to express.

The fellowship of presbytery is a spiritual activity, only understood by illumination

The nature of the ministry of the word in the presbytery is not autocratic, as though there is only one person designated to present the word, and everyone else is passive in relation to it.

Neither is it democratic, where we would all sit around and vote – 'Yes, we agree, that is the way that we are going to go.'

'Autocratic' and 'democratic' are all 'of the flesh'.

The presbytery is one *fellowship*; and fellowship is a *spiritual* activity.

There is no equivalent to 'fellowship' in the world. We cannot understand fellowship by comparing it with a board of a committee or a dictatorship or any other manifestation by humanity.

That is not 'fellowship', because fellowship belongs to the Lord. It is *His* fellowship, and the way it operates is *by the Spirit*.

We have to understand that this is why, in the book of Revelation, Jesus explained to the apostle John that this is a mystery. Rev 1:20.

It is a mystery because it cannot be understood naturally; it has to be understood by *illumination*.

Presbyters are to be exemplars of discipleship

To hear the word of God, as it is proclaimed by the Spirit through the graces of Christ, requires presbyters to be *disciples*.

We have talked about discipleship in the past. We must let this register – *we do not 'graduate' from discipleship*, particularly if someone has been called to care for the church.

In fact, presbyters should be the exemplars of discipleship.

It is not as though we graduate from discipleship so that we can then disciple others. We disciple others through *our example* of discipleship.

The grace to minister is found in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings

These are men whose ears have been 'awakened' to the word.

We are considering the first element of application: 'what we have *heard*'. We can only hear if our ear has been *awakened* to His word.

We are awakened to His word because we, and our ears, have been joined to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings.

We are being made alive from the death of our own way and understanding, so that we are able to speak the word of truth to those who are weary. Isa 50:4.

The point is that the capacity to minister the word that is being laid down is not merely because of our 'agreement' with it.

It is not because of our inherent 'wisdom' nor because of some history that we can draw on.

The reason why we are able to minister to the weary is because we are *connected to the offering and sufferings of Christ*, and the grace to minister is found in the fellowship of that offering.

That grace is called 'resurrection life', and we cannot have it unless we are joined to where it is being multiplied and ministered.

This is why discipleship is fundamental to being able to testify of 'what we have heard'.

'The Lord God has given Me the tongue of disciples [the 'tongue' means the 'speech' of a disciple], that I should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary.' Isa 50:4.

How do we get that 'tongue'?

It is because He awakens us morning by morning. The 'awakening' there is 'from the dead'.

We are awakened from sleep; and 'sleep' in the Scriptures is synonymous with 'death'. We are being awakened from our condition of being 'dead in trespasses and sins', morning by morning, by the mercies of God. Eph 2:1.

And, by the mercies of God, we are able to present our bodies as a living sacrifice. Rom 12:1.

Our capacity to speak a word to him who is weary is because He awakens us morning by morning.

'He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple. The Lord God has opened my ear; and I was not rebellious, nor did I turn away.' Isa 50:4-5.

There is no drawing back here - no turning away from His face as He comes with His word that exposes the condition of our heart, which is rebellious.

It is in the fellowship of that offering that rebellion is being removed from us. Praise the Lord!

Foundations to fellowship

Now, a presbyter and, indeed, every Christian, is unable to hear the word of God if they do not 'give their ear to hear'; if they do not apply themselves to understanding; or if they believe that they can receive the word apart from the order of grace established in the church by Christ.

These are foundations to fellowship.

Presbyters turn to the word and receive the reflection of fellow presbyters

Let us move to the second element of application: 'that which we have seen with our eyes'.

Presbyters 'see with their eyes' when they receive *illumination by the Holy Spirit*.

For a presbyter to 'see with their eyes', they need to turn to Christ so that the 'veil' of their own fleshly perspectives, which impedes their spiritual sight, is removed.

So, to be able to 'see', two things need to happen. We need to have 'eyes' that are healed, that are not damaged or dull, because the 'eyes' refers to our spirit. We also have to have anything that is in front of our eyes, which is stopping the illumination, removed.

We need to *turn to the face of Christ* to have this 'veil' removed from our sight, so that we can testify that we have 'seen with our eyes'.

This involves two things. It involves *turning to the word* - we have already talked about the necessity to have our ear awakened.

It also involves *entreating and receiving the reflection of fellow presbyters*.

'Turning to the face of Christ' is not simply listening to the word. It is accepting that the face of Christ, from which the light is being reflected, is a mirror that is practical and tangible in the face of fellow presbyters.

There has to be entreaty. If you are letting go of your own understanding, it means that you are accepting that understanding is found as you *receive your brethren*.

By repentance, the veil is taken away

As soon as someone says, 'I don't need to hear from them,' or 'My understanding is the equivalent of theirs,' they are left with their own understanding - it becomes a 'veil' over their eyes.

'Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil [which is bringing some spiritual occlusion] is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit [In our next session, I am going to talk about the importance of the Spirit to our fellowship together.]; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

'But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord [We need to have some reflection on us, don't we?], are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.' 2Co 3:16-18.

Turning, which is necessary for the veil to be taken away so that we can receive the light and see, is *repentance*.

Repentance has become a *foundation* in a person's life when their disposition is to turn and receive the word of truth, which is ministered to them by the Spirit through those whom Christ sends.

Receiving the word brings healing to our spirit - we can receive illumination and express it

Through this word, the 'eye' of their body, which is their spirit, or identity, is being *healed*, or *regenerated*, so that they can receive the light of the knowledge of God that proceeds from the face of Christ.

Remember that we are considering 'what we have *seen* with our eyes'.

Our 'lameness' affects our ability to see, and then our ability to *communicate* light, because the eyes are to be the lamp of the body.

As a lamp, they receive the light; but then we, as an identity, are to communicate, or express, it.

But if there is lameness in our identity, it means that the light, or lamp, of our body is dim or dull. And it means that our lameness, or fractures, become the *limiting* factor on our *ability to express* the light.

It actually means that we can't see properly.

So, we have to accept the word that is coming, and the fellowship in which we walk, because we are to walk in the light of the word that is bringing healing to our spirit, to our identity, so that the lamp, or eye, of our body is clear.

We are able to both *receive the light* and then, as an identity, to *communicate* that light *according to our name*.

Our lameness, or fractures, are in our identity, which is our capacity to *see*, because Jesus said it is 'the lamp of the body'. Mat 6:22.'

'Seeing with our eyes' is the testimony of healing, which is necessary for illumination.

When John wrote about 'seeing with our eyes', he testified that they were turning to the Lord so that the veil was being removed.

And that word brought regeneration to their spirit, so that the 'eye' of their body was clear, able to both *receive* illumination and to begin to *express* it.

Mourning for the impact of our sin upon Christ

Let us consider the next one of the four elements of application: 'that which we have looked upon'.

So, what are presbyters 'looking upon'?

Obviously, this relates to the word of life, because John wrote, '[That] which we have looked upon ... concerning the Word of life'. 1Jn 1:1.

It is not that we are 'investigating' it or 'looking into' it. When John referred to looking upon something, it was upon an object; and that object is Christ Himself.

That is how John started his Gospel. He highlighted the fact that the Word from the beginning is Jesus Christ. Joh 1:1-4.

In writing, 'that ... which we have looked upon', John was referring to us 'looking to Jesus'.

The first implication of looking upon Christ is mourning for the impact of our sin upon Christ.

'And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me [or look upon Me] whom they pierced.' Zec 12:10.

And what is the evidence of having looked on Him whom we have pierced?

'Yes, they will *mourn* for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.' Zec 12:10.

The Holy Spirit turns our mourning into travail

Let us consider the amazing principle of *fellowship*. We remember that the Holy Spirit is called 'the Spirit of fellowship,' or it is called 'the fellowship of the Spirit'.

He is the One who not only enables us to meet in one Spirit but, as we look on Christ and see the impact of our sin upon Him and upon others, *He turns our mourning into travail* because, when we look on Christ, we are looking on His body.

Here is a key point: if we do not mourn, we cannot travail.

We made this point in the last session. It is because Jesus comes to us with 'eyes as a flame of fire' that we can be joined to Him – but we have to *mourn*.

The travail is the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings

This is why these are foundations to obtaining *blessing*.

We are to be '*poor in spirit*', and '*those who mourn*' because, unless we mourn, that mourning cannot be turned to travail - and travail is actually the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. Mat 5:3-4.

The Holy Spirit enables our mourning to be turned to travail as we are joined to the offering prayer and travail of Christ in Gethsemane.

We understand that the word is coming with grace and supplication, enabling us to look on Jesus whom we pierced, and we begin to mourn.

Praying in the Spirit - joining the travail of Christ for the fulfilment of the will of God

This is 'weakness' – this point of being broken or bankrupt in spirit and mourning is 'our weaknesses'. Rom 8:26.

It is not only the weakness of being in the flesh – the *acceptance* of the weakness of our flesh is *because we are poor in spirit*, isn't it?

'Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses [Or, the poor in spirit who mourn.]. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us

with groanings which cannot be uttered.' Rom 8:26.

This is where the transition from mourning to travail occurs by the Holy Spirit.

'Now He who searches the hearts [That is Christ. Rev 2:23.] knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints [which means that He is praying] according to the will of God.' Rom 8:27.

We look on Him whom we have pierced, and we mourn.

The Holy Spirit is joining us and turning that mourning to travail, connecting us all the way back to Gethsemane, where Jesus prayed, 'Not My will, but Yours, be done.' Luk 22:42.

That is why Jesus knows what the will of the Father is. He is joining us to that prayer and to that will.

This was the travail of Christ that was manifest as He prayed to the Father, 'Not My will, but Yours, be done.'

And Gethsemane was not the whole travail. It was the *beginning*, if you like, of the manifestation of this travail, which Paul said was the prayers and supplications that Jesus offered up throughout the course of His offering journey. And He was 'heard because of His godly fear'. Heb 5:7.

So, to look upon Christ is to mourn and then travail by the Spirit in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings, in order to fulfil the will of God. That is amazing!

There is no travail without mourning; and there is no fulfilment of the will of God without being joined to that travail.

Prayer and supplication in the Spirit

Paul encouraged us all in this, writing, 'Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit'. Eph 6:18.

Supplication initiates our mourning. The Spirit does not *relieve* that supplication. He *enables* supplication to become travail.

Paul said, 'Pray always that way.' Another way of saying this is, 'Stay in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings, by the Spirit'.

‘Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being *watchful*.’ Eph 6:18.

What does ‘being watchful’ mean? It means ‘being able to look and see’.

‘Being watchful to this end, with all perseverance and supplication [not only for ourselves, but also for *one another*] for *all* the saints.’ Eph 6:18.

This is the *fellowship* of prayer.

Travail in the Holy Spirit brings forth life

So, travail is a *wholly positive expression of faith*.

We can become preoccupied with ‘mourning’, because we connect mourning with death – and that is true.

However, when the Holy Spirit turns that mourning to travail, it is a *wholly positive expression of faith*. This is because it involves *renouncing* the hidden things of shame, which are causing death – our religious, self-righteous practices – and *pressing on* to what the Lord is revealing to us from His face, as He comes to us with eyes like a flame of fire.

It is travail that *brings forth life*.

It brings life forth, and it also defines for us where *the next step of life* is, as we let go of the hindrances, which are darkness.

Forgetting what lies behind and pressing forward toward the goal

Paul testified to this in his letter to the Philippians. This is beautiful!

He declared, ‘I am letting go of all my religious excellence!’ And he testified that that ‘excellence’ amounted to a good *curriculum vitae*! Php 3:4-6.

But he summed it all up as being ‘refuse’ or worse. Php 3:8.

He declared that he was getting rid of that, for this purpose: ‘That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection [*exanastasis* life], and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death [this is where we derive the term, ‘*fellowship* of His sufferings’], if, by any means [that means ‘by every and any means’ – all things working together for good], I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.’ Php 3:10-11.

Paul was saying to the Philippians, ‘This is what it all entails.’ This is travail, or ‘prayer at all times’, supplicating by the Spirit.

Then, regarding this very same process, he said, just two verses later, ‘Brethren, I do not count myself as having apprehended. I am not at the end of the process yet!’ Php 3:13.

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

That is travail! Travail involves *forgetting* those things which are *behind*.

This does not mean the forgetting of just the ‘bad things’. We are to forget our ‘good’, because our good and our evil are all damned.

We are forgetting what lies behind – not defining our trajectory by what has happened in the past.

Progressively apprehending the goal

This is travail, because it is leading to the *apprehension*, or the *attainment*, of a prize; of the *goal*.

And, it is not that the goal is a long way off and we are drawing closer to it. We are attaining the goal because we are attaining elements of the goal *at every step*.

It is not as though there is ‘a pot of gold’ at the end! Rather, we are ‘picking up’ all of the pieces of the gold as we progress to the full sum!

I am rejoicing about looking on Him, accepting that there is mourning! Every day, morning by morning, He is turning that mourning to travail, so that I can remain in the fellowship of Christ’s offering and sufferings.

That which our hands have handled

The last element of application to the word is ‘hands have handled’. 1Jn 1:1.

The phrase ‘hands have handled’ refers to *the works of faith*. Our understanding regarding this has been somewhat confused – perhaps because of its significant implications.

When the Scriptures refer to our ‘hands’, they are referring to *what we do with them* – the works that are achieved *because* we have ‘heard’, ‘seen’ and ‘looked upon’ Christ, the Word.

Having received the word into our hearts, there is a work to do – works of faith: ‘hands have handled’.

This is the work of *offering*, by which we reveal and multiply the word according to our name and grace as a son of God.

So, 'hands have handled' has to do with our *expression* as *sanctified sons* of God.

This work is first demonstrated by *speaking* in the presbytery according to our sanctification.

Speaking in the presbytery

We will now consider this principle of 'speaking' in the presbytery.

How do presbyters *speak with one another*, as those who are established in these foundations of hearing, seeing, looking?

What is the application of 'hands have handled'? It is as though 'hands have handled' is the *doing*.

By receiving the word that is ministered by Christ to the presbytery and the church through His ascension gift graces, a hearer receives faith. This is the faith of the Son of God Himself.

We are familiar with this, but it is important to lay down these foundations and points very clearly, so that it is more than simply familiar jargon. We see how the Scriptures bear out this principle of 'speaking'.

Faith comes by receiving the word

In his letter to the Romans, Paul wrote, 'So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.' Rom 10:17.

There is *no other way* to obtain the faith of the Son of God.

If we presume on faith *apart* from hearing, we are resting our salvation on our *own* capacity to understand and believe. That is a very limited capacity. In fact, it is completely bereft of any enduring reality.

However, *by receiving the word* that is ministered by Christ to the presbytery and the church, through His *ascension gift graces*, a hearer receives faith. This is 'the word of His grace', which is the word from the Father, by the Holy Spirit. Act 20:32.

The evidence of faith received is to speak

The apostle Paul explained that the *evidence* of receiving faith is the initiative, or motivation, to *speak*.

We *give our ear* to hear – it is 'awakened' by the Lord Himself. It is a beautiful thought that we do

not even have to awaken our own ear; it is awoken *by the Lord*. Isa 50:4-5.

It grants to us faith; and the evidence of faith is the strong motivation to *speak*.

Paul expressed it in this way, 'And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed and therefore I spoke" [if you are a believer, you will be a speaker], we also believe and therefore speak, knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and present us with you.' 2Co 4:13-14.

We hear the word. It grants faith to us. The evidence of faith is the capacity to believe and to speak.

The fellowship of offering is the context for the 'speaking' or expression of faith

Where does that speaking happen? It happens where 'He who raised up the Lord Jesus is raising you up with Him.' 2Co 4:14.

This verse declares that 'speaking by faith' happens *in the fellowship of His offering* – no other place.

Speaking by faith is also called, by Paul, 'the *obedience* of faith'. Rom 1:5. Rom 16:26. So, it is important to note that the fellowship of offering is the context for speaking by faith.

Paul described fellowship as 'the grace of God'.

We sometimes think of grace as being power for us to go and do 'good things'. That is not it at all!

Grace is the capacity to join the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings so that *grace is multiplied by offering*.

Paul described 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'.

Our access into this grace is by faith, which we receive through the word of God that is ministered by those with ascension gift grace.

To the Romans, Paul wrote, 'Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ [that is the outcome of mercy, isn't it?], through whom also we have access by faith'. Rom 5:1-2.

This is the faith that is *demonstrated by speaking*. So, the question is, '*Where* does speaking happen?'

'Access by faith into the grace in which we stand, and rejoice [or exult] in the hope of the glory of God.' Rom 5:2.

Speaking by faith – offering ourselves according to name in the fellowship of our brethren

That 'rejoicing' is the triumphant *expression* of the glory of God, which is *your sonship*.

Paul was saying that *by the faith* that you receive by hearing the word, you *join the fellowship*, or context, of grace.

And there is speaking, or *expression*, that is completely *consistent with our name* as a son of God.

By this faith, we *present* ourselves to *meet* and relate *in the truth* with our brethren, among whom God the Father has placed us. This is where we make *offering*.

Offering involves giving ourselves to *reveal* and *care for one another*. It is not simply 'fulfilling a role' in the church.

Obedience to the grace given

It is helpful to demonstrate this principle of 'speaking' by using the example of these Bible study sessions to explain how this word is proclaimed to us.

I am not the *source* of the word for these Bible study sessions. I do not have the revelatory grace of apostleship.

I do have certain natural capacities and intelligences, and I can make connections, but I do not have the grace to know what the Spirit is saying to the church, and the revelation from the Scriptures.

This does not mean that the Spirit does not illuminate things. But it does not *originate* from me.

The word laid down in presbytery according to grace

This word that we proclaim – whether it has been written in books or in notes or proclaimed verbally – is *first laid down in the presbytery*. It is laid down, not just to me, but to the whole presbytery, by Victor Hall, *according to the grace* that Christ has given to him.

This is not according to his *natural ability*, although God does give graces according to ability. Obviously, there is an intellect and an

articulation and capacity involved; but it is because of the *grace* that the word is laid down to a fellowship of presbyters.

The word received firstly as Christ's initiative towards our life

In the same manner as every other presbyter – in fact, as every other person in the church – I *receive* the word as *the initiative of Christ towards my life*.

I do not listen to the word, thinking, 'Right, what do I need now to do to articulate that?'

However, I do say, 'Lord, what are You saying to *me* about my participation in this fellowship, in the fellowship of the church, in my family, and as an individual?' – because Christ is coming with eyes as a flame of fire to expose my heart.

However, I also *present myself in offering* to reveal Vic and this word, by preparing notes and speaking according to my name and grace.

A point to note is that the word is *having an impact*. The 'speaking' of this word laid down will be in *my conduct* at home, for example, or among those in the presbytery or in the church. That is part of the 'speaking' that we are referring to.

The offering is myself; the work an obedience

But there is an offering by which I am *laying my life down to reveal* both *the one who has proclaimed* the word – in this instance, Vic – *and the word* of Christ, according to my name and sanctification.

One of the ways in which I do this is by recording these Bible study sessions. I am not the source of the word, but there is *a revealing of the word* through this medium.

And I have been given to this, in *obedience*, by the presbytery.

However, I did not just say, 'Right, everyone, the best way to do this would be for me to stand up, over the next few months, and do Bible studies for everyone!'

There was discussion. There is offering. But then, there is also *obedience*, or the *giving*, of each one to a *particular work*.

So, the offering is *myself*. The actual work is *obedience*.

The word laid back

Now, before I record these sessions, I prepare my notes, which I 'lay back' to Vic.

Remember that Vic 'lays down' the word; and there are others in the presbytery who 'lay down' the word like this. However, I am referring only to the preparation of these Bible studies.

I prepare my notes, which I lay back to Vic as a *point of fellowship*, and to ensure that what is taught is the light of *one Spirit*.

Having received the word laid down, I do not prepare my notes as an 'assignment', as though in response to a 'lecture' that I have heard – an 'assignment' which I then submit to Vic, and he marks it, and responds, 'Oh yeah, you got reasonably close! That's a B+ this week!'

That is not why my notes are being laid back! The initiative for it is not even to get the content right – because the 'rightness' and 'wrongness' of content is a different conversation.

The question at hand is, 'Is this what the Spirit is saying?', so that the *light* of it is the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, as it is shining *from His hand*, through this particular articulation.

Do you see that the initiative to lay the word back is not to do with 'is this right and wrong?'; and it is not 'getting marked'?

It is part of a *conversation* that is happening regarding ensuring that the word sharp and clear, and seeing it multiplied *beyond* that first articulation.

The key here is *multiplication*. This is offering.

The messenger is accountable for the word they declare

Although the word that I am teaching did not *begin* with me, I am not simply a conduit – a 'pipe' – for the articulation of the word on *behalf* of Vic, or even Christ.

It is not simply that Vic is really busy, and he cannot do all the Bible studies on the camera, so I am a 'conduit' to do it.

Rather, through *repentance* and *faith* for participation in the offering of Christ, this word is in my *heart* and in my *mouth*, to speak according to my *name*, so that I am speaking *in Christ*.

I am not speaking on *behalf* of anyone.

It is me, as an individual, and an identity, in Christ, speaking a word for which I am *entirely accountable*.

So, while I am not the source of it, I am both responsible for and accountable for what comes out of my mouth, *before the Lord and the presbytery*.

Because of this principle, grace can be *multiplied* through the ministry of the word. And it is multiplied to many hearers.

The word multiplied through the sanctified 'speaking' of the many

The word was originally laid down within the fellowship of the presbytery; but it is not multiplied by me alone. *Every one* of the presbyters who receives it in offering multiplies it according to *their sanctification*, by their *unique expression*.

I will give an example of what that practically 'looks like'.

The ministry of this word through these Bible study sessions is only possible because of the *offering obedience* of those who facilitate these recording sessions.

They are not just 'doing a technical job'.

They, too, have heard the word, and this *facilitation of the word* is one of the ways in which they are '*speaking*' and *multiplying* the word of faith. It will not reach all the thousands of people without them.

They have heard the word. They have obtained faith; and the 'speaking' of it, according to their name and grace, is to facilitate the ministry of these Bible study sessions.

Do you see that the *expression* of the word is not simply its '*re-preaching*'?

It is the living and abiding word of God. It is being multiplied by *every part*, *every member*, doing its part.

So, from this initial word that has been laid down by grace, it is being multiplied through notes and articulation; and then it is multiplied thousands of times over by this 'speaking by faith' – by these ones who technically support the Bible study session.

Do you see that the 'speech', by name, is not just the 'proclamation'? The proclamation is in the *multiplication of the grace*.

As this Bible study ministry is then *received in offering* by *everyone who hears it*, they are also then able to multiply the word as they speak with one another according to *their* name. And, again, that speaking will be as varied as are all the names in the body of Christ.

Unique expressions of the one word - the word as an offering culture

Do you see that this is how the word of God grew mightily among the early church in Jerusalem? Act 12:24.

It was because of this principle – that everyone continued, daily, in one accord in the temple, *receiving the word* that was proclaimed by the twelve apostles. Then they multiplied it from *house to house*, in their *practical care*, which was their *expression* of that word *as a culture*.

That is what it means to ‘speak in the presbytery’.

It is amazing, isn’t it! It is not simply sitting around, conversing, thinking about ‘deep things’!

This is the word *in our feet*, as *an offering culture* among us. This is what it means to ‘love one another’.

So, it means that those who are receiving the word will not speak the word in the way that I do, because their name is not my name.

They may speak it through hospitality, through service, through testimony, through teaching.

Wonderfully, the grace of the word is multiplied because of the *multitude* of *unique expressions* of the *one word*. This is how the word of God is spread to many.

Initiatives laid down into the fellowship of the presbytery

Now, I would like to speak, as I conclude, about people in the presbytery.

Remember that there is *one* presbytery, or angel, for a lampstand church.

But, in every lamp, in every flower congregation, the Lord has established overseers who should be *part* of that presbytery fellowship.

I would like to discuss the *initiatives of faith* that a *presbyter* takes in relation to the care of local congregations.

It is important to reiterate that the presbytery is a *fellowship*.

It is not a committee, whose members ‘report’ to one another on the work or initiatives of faith that they exercise in their local settings.

We do not have leadership groups in all the settings, who periodically send back a vetted, perhaps sanitised, ‘report’ to a ‘corporate organisation’, to find some sort of approval for what they have already done.

That is not what fellowship is! That would be a ‘committee’, wouldn’t it?

As we have already considered, the first and primary *expression of faith* in the fellowship of the presbytery is for *each man to speak* according to their *name as a son* of God.

This means that, by faith, and according to their name, they ‘lay down’, or present, their initiatives, *before* they do them.

We are not speaking here about, for example, an initiative to have a barbecue at your house or to interact with one another or to care for one another.

What we *are* speaking of is initiatives relating to the *administration of the church*.

We are speaking about building projects, about ministry initiatives, about travel, about things to do with the overall care, both of local congregations and of the whole church.

These are laid down, or presented, in the midst of the presbytery.

Again, this is not in order to be ‘empowered’ to go and do what is ‘stuck in our guts’ to go and do.

In the context of the presbytery, *others*, who are part of the presbytery, are able to *speak to these matters*, according to their sanctification.

This does not give every presbyter the right to speak to a matter, because some men in the presbytery have no *appropriate* authority or grace to speak to certain matters.

Each person in the presbytery needs to be sanctified, and to know what to talk to, and what not to talk to.

It is not merely a democratic debate! It is an *offering fellowship*, where something is being laid down. The presbyter presents themselves, and offers an initiative. Then, those who *do* have an

accountability and a grace are able to speak to the matter so that it is *ordered* as an offering.

By this means, the offering of *each* presbyter can be properly ordered. In other words, 'hands can be laid on them', *setting them apart for this work*.

They have not 'gone and done it', and reported back. They have brought the work to the presbytery, so that they can know what *the mind of the Spirit* is in the matter, and can lay on hands, *setting them to the work*.

The work is no longer in *their* hands. They have laid it down and taken their hands from it.

'Setting them apart for the work' – this is fundamental to the principle of offering. Act 13:2-3.

An offering initiative becomes an obedience

When this happens, and hands are laid on them, their offering, which was *their* initiative that was *laid down*, becomes *the obedience of faith* when it is *given back* to them.

They are not doing that which was their *own* initiative any more. The initiative is *no longer theirs*; it is in fellowship. It is being *deaconed*, and the mind of Christ is sought on the matter.

Then, in the light of that, the initiative is given back to them as *an obedient response* – and it may have *changed* in nature and direction.

So, their offering becomes *the obedience of faith*, through which *life and blessing* are *multiplied* in the context of their work and ministry.

This is the reality of *Christ's offering*.

Offering as an obedience multiplies blessing

Let me make this principle clear: *no initiative will produce any blessing unless it is by obedience*.

It does not matter how beneficial it may be – or we think it might be – for the church or for a local congregation. It will be *dead works*, if it is not *the obedience of faith*.

Jesus was the example of this.

Paul wrote to the Philippians, 'Let *this mind* be in you' – our thinking has to be transformed in relation to how these initiatives operate.

'Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be *equal with God* [In relation

to the initiative, in relation to how to proceed, He was part of the discussion.]. Php 2:5-7.

But what did He do? He 'made Himself of no reputation, *taking the form of a slave*'. So, as a presbyter, where we are laying these things down, we become a *slave* in the matter.

'Taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself [This is access to grace, isn't it?] and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.' Php 2:7-8.

Now, through this offering, sin and death were completely overcome, and the life of God was multiplied to be the life of a numberless multitude of sons of God – *because He was obedient!*

Offering in the same mind as Christ

Do you see that any offering initiative, if it is not *received back as obedience*, will not multiply a single 'twinkle' of blessing, because it will not be connected to *the same mind as Christ*?

It will be our *own* initiative. And Paul called that a '*dead*' work. It will be a living work only if it is *by a living offering*.

If our offering is not by obedience, it is not joined to Christ's offering, and is unable to minister the blessing of God's life to anyone. In that case, it really is only for our own benefit, isn't it? It is to derive some sense of identity verification or validity through what we have done. It is a *dead work*.

However, we are those who are being *reformed* in our fellowship.

We thank God for Christ, who is *coming to us* with eyes as a flame of fire to expose our hearts and our propensity toward this kind of fleshly engagement.

He is delivering us from this so that, as a presbytery, we can be the exemplars of a *culture* which we are proclaiming as a *word*, so that those who hear it can join *the very same fellowship* that we are part of.

There are not two 'classes' here. There are simply *sons of God*, operating according to their *sanctification*, in love.

Praise the Lord! We are rejoicing that this is true among us. And we thank the Lord for His reformation to us.