

THE FREEDOM OF CHOICE

Peter Hay, prepared for the Presbytery fellowship word, 14 November 2021

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Messengers exhort their hearers to fear the Lord

Hello, everyone. In our last session, we considered the exhortation to *fear the Lord*. We noted that this exhortation accompanies the messenger's proclamation of the word of the cross.

We understood that the messengers who minister in the spirit and power of Elijah exhort their hearers to fear the Lord for two key reasons.

First, the fear of the Lord motivates a hearer to *draw near to Christ when their heart is exposed by His word*. When our heart is exposed in this way, it is exposed to the eyes of the Lord.

And second, the fear of the Lord is necessary for receiving, and then *participating in, the 'mystery of God'*. The 'mystery of God' refers to the nature of the fellowship of Yahweh. King David said that 'the secret of the Lord belongs to those who fear Him'. Psa 25:14.

The ministry of the eyes of the Lord – by the word of Christ

This is an important point to note. We receive the fear of the Lord as a ministry of *the prevenient grace of God*. So, when we resist the prevenient grace of God, through which we learn the fear of the Lord, we will draw back in unbelief from the confrontation of the eyes of the Lord.

The fear of the Lord causes us to draw near; but, where we resist God's grace and don't obtain the fear of the Lord, we draw back from His eyes.

As our hearts are exposed by the word, *the eyes of the Lord reveal the condition of our heart*. The Scriptures teach us that this *ministry of His eyes is the ministry of His word* which proceeds from heaven. We will consider some passages that establish this point.

'The Lord [or Yahweh] is in His holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven.' Psa 11:4.

The Lord's throne is in heaven, and the Lord, Yahweh, who is the Lord Jesus Christ, is seated on His throne.

'His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men.'
Psa 11:4.

As the Lord is seated in heaven, this ministry is from heaven, and His eyes are ministering from there. They behold, or see, the condition of our heart – 'His eyelids test the sons of men'.

'The Lord tests the righteous, but the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates.'
Psa 11:5.

No-one escapes the effect of the eyes of the Lord. Obviously, there are two stark differences to the effect of His eyes, depending on how we receive it.

If we *draw near* in the fear of the Lord, *His eyes test us*. If we draw back or turn away from His eyes as the word comes to us, 'He hates us', which means that we are removed from His sight.

We know that this ministry of His eyes is *by the word of Christ*, who is seated on His throne, 'in the midst of seven [golden] lampstands'. Rev 1:12-13.

So, the Lord is in His holy temple; the Lord's throne is in heaven. And, as He is seated there, His ministry of His eyes is from His throne to us.

Godly fear is essential to standing in grace

The question is: 'How do we interface with those eyes?'

The apostle John saw Jesus, with fiery eyes, seated in the midst of seven golden lampstands. Rev 1:13-14. He spoke words which bring illumination, through the stars in His right hand.

It is for this reason that the apostle Paul wrote, 'See that you do not refuse Him who speaks'. Heb 12:25.

Obviously, if we draw back from the word, that is a refusal – 'See that you do not refuse Him who speaks'.

'For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, [how] much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven.' Heb 12:25.

The Lord is seated on a throne, and His eyes are doing a work. We know that this effect of His eyes is through the word which He speaks from heaven.

‘Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have *grace*, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.’ Heb 12:28.

Godly fear, then, is absolutely *essential* to our *standing in grace* as those who are not being shaken by the word which is testing our heart.

‘For our God is a consuming fire.’ Heb 12:29. That sounds like, ‘God is Light and in Him is no darkness’. 1Jn 1:5. It is the beginning point of the gospel.

His eyes test every person through the word

With this in view, we recognise that a person’s interaction with the eyes of the Lord is not a mystical or an imagined experience.

The Scriptures teach us that His eyes are the lamp of His body. In this regard, Jesus said, ‘The *lamp* of the body is the *eye*.’ Mat 6:22. Luk 11:34. If we interface with His ‘eyes’, we are interfacing with *the lamp of Christ’s body*.

The Scriptures also teach or describe this *lamp* as being the *word* of the Lord. ‘Your *word* is a *lamp* to my feet and a light to my path.’ Psa 119:105.

The Lord is seated on His throne; His eyes are testing every person. He is testing the sons, those who are righteous; and He is bringing judgement upon those who are wicked.

This occurs through the word, which is proclaimed from heaven *through an administration that is in His hand*.

The eyes of the Lord are a *lamp*, and that lamp is a *light* to us.

The word is ministered through the fellowship between a presbytery and a local congregation

The word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path when it is ministered in the *context* of a *specific congregation* in which the Lord has placed us.

It is ministered by messengers who belong to an *aggelos* presbytery. This is an important point. We remember that there are ‘stars’ in Christ’s hand. Rev 1:16. Christ is seated in heaven, so those stars are with Him in His hand in heaven. When He speaks to us ‘from heaven’, *He speaks to us from those stars in His hand*. He said that ‘a star’ is ‘an angel’, or ‘an *aggelos* presbytery’, of a lampstand church.

The ‘light’ of a lampstand church is from the ‘lamps’ which are set in ‘flowers’ – those flowers are local congregations. Exo 37:20-23.

This means that we *receive the light* from His eyes only when we *receive the word* as a ‘lamp fellowship’ – a lamp-light fellowship – which is *by the Spirit*, in a specific congregation where it is ministered to us.

This means that you cannot receive the word that is ministering the life and light of God to you if you reject the message that is being proclaimed in your local setting.

It should be the same light that is being proclaimed to a whole lampstand, because *the light of that lampstand is from one presbytery*.

However, you cannot receive the word outside of the context in which it is being ministered *through the fellowship between a lamp and a flower*.

The light on the pathway of fellowship with the Lord

We remember that the light of the lamp is placed in the flower. Then the ‘petals’, which represent the members of that congregation, *reflect* and *focus* that *light* on the *pathway* in which we are to walk and to have fellowship with one another.

Do you see the point? We have to ‘walk in the light’. 1Jn 1:7. We walk in the light as that *light on the pathway* on which we are to walk is *focused* in an *agape* meal context. As we do that, we have fellowship with one another.

In summary, the word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path when it is ministered in the context of the specific congregation that the Father Himself has placed us in. It is ministered by messengers who are part of that congregation as well, but they also belong to the one presbytery of a lampstand.

This is when the lamplight of the presbytery is set in the flowers of the lampstand to focus light on *the pathway of fellowship with Yahweh*.

Recovery from recoiling from His eyes – believe the word ministered from a presbytery

Let us consider a practical point. A person recoils from the fiery eyes of the Lord when they reject or refuse to believe the word that is proclaimed from a presbytery.

If a person denies the efficacy and the legitimacy of a presbytery as the means of the proclamation of the word of God, they have turned their eyes and their face away from the eyes of Christ. They 'love violence' and 'do wickedness'.

The point, then, is to *turn our face back*. This is where we find *recovery*. He will test our heart for the sake of our *inclusion*. This is an important point.

Responses that represent rejection of the word; turning away and stumbling

There are two primary forms of *response* that represent rejection of the word of the gospel and turning away from the eyes of the Lord.

The first is that a person turns away and *stumbles* because they become offended – stumbling because of *offence*.

The second is that a person turns away and stumbles because they *judge the message to be foolishness*.

Both are turning away from the eyes of the Lord; from the face of the Lord. One is *stumbling caused by offence*. The other is *stumbling caused by judging the word and those who proclaim it as being foolish*.

The apostle Paul addressed this in his letter to the Corinthians. 'For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.' 1Co 1:21.

There is no salvation unless it is happening through 'the foolishness of the message'.

'For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom.' 1Co 1:22.

When Paul referred to 'Jews', he was referring to the nation of people.

As well, he was speaking more broadly about a company of religious people who should be God's covenant people – ones who claim to be true 'Jews', claiming to be part of the church, God's covenant people, 'the Israel of God'. Gal 6:16.

These 'Jews', or religious people, who should be God's covenant people 'request a sign'.

Why do they ask for a sign? That sign is their mark of the legitimacy of that word and that messenger. We remember that they said to Jesus,

in effect, 'Show us a sign, and we will believe You.' Joh 6:30.

The Jews are religious people – their belief provoked or given on the basis of a sign that satisfies them.

When Paul referred to 'Greeks', he was referring to those who know nothing of God. 'Greeks seek after wisdom.' That wisdom is an earthly wisdom; it is for the purpose of power and control in their life.

'But we *preach Christ crucified*, to the Jews a stumbling block.' 1Co 1:23.

Instead of 'a sign', the only sign that is being proclaimed is of Christ being 'lifted up'. Joh 12:32. The 'Jews' look at that, or a religious person looks at that, and says, 'That is not the life I want. It is an offence to me; it causes me to stumble.'

And a 'Greek', who knows nothing of God, looks at that and says, 'Are you telling me that I get life by dying? That sounds foolish to me.'

Paul said, in effect, 'We do not answer the sign, neither are we answering the Greek, in terms of this wisdom. *We preach Christ and Him crucified*, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness.' 1Co 1:22-23.

Stumbling caused by offence – Christ is the offender

Let us begin by considering the drawing back or stumbling that is caused by offence, and then we will consider the principle of foolishness.

The apostle Peter explained that it is Christ Himself who causes a person to stumble through offence. *He* is the offender.

'Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone," and "A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense".' 1Pe 2:7

When the word is proclaimed, its effect depends on how we receive it.

If we believe, that word and the fellowship that it establishes us in is precious to us. We delight in it; we run to it; we worship in it etc.

But, to the disobedient, as the word comes, it may variously cause discontent, jarring, questioning

and all sorts of responses, as the person *stumbles along in response to the word*.

They are being offended by the word. And it is Jesus Himself who is offending them. In fact, that was what Peter said in the next verse.

‘They stumble [through offence], being disobedient to the word.’ 1Pe 2:8.

Someone might say, ‘I’m happy to obey Jesus, but I cannot obey that “mug” who is proclaiming it, because they are not adequately qualified to do it.’

However, Peter said that the cause of their stumbling was because of ‘the word’ of that person whom they considered to be ‘a mug’.

‘They stumble [through offence], being disobedient to *the word*, to which they also were appointed.’ 1Pe 2:8.

This is a most amazing thing! The very word that was causing them offence and to recoil from it was the word proclaiming their predestination, which is a great treasure.

They rejected the gold, silver and precious stones that God wanted to give them. That is astounding! They were saying, ‘I don’t want that, thanks very much.’ They were offended by the very word that proclaimed the great treasure of their predestination as a son of God. That is staggering, isn’t it?

The word of the cross breaches every heart – do not stumble in offence

Initially, the word of the cross offends *everyone*. It is not as though there is a ‘good’ group and there is a ‘bad’ group, where the ‘good’ ones are not offended and the ‘bad’ ones take offence.

The word of the cross comes and makes a breach on *every* heart. This is because it pierces our heart and exposes our thoughts and the intentions of our heart, which are contrary to God. Heb 4:12.

We *do* have another law; we *do* sin. We are *not* saying that we are without sin. The word does come and address the sin that is within us.

This passage is wonderfully applicable. ‘These things you have done [through your conversation and conduct], and I kept silent; You thought that I was altogether like you [as though everything we are doing is acceptable and consistent with what God thinks we should be doing]; but [in

mercy] I will rebuke you, and set them in order before your eyes.’ Psa 50:21.

So He is coming in His mercy to reveal to us that we are *not* altogether like Him, rebuking those who don’t draw back from His eyes, and setting our ways in order before our eyes so that we can put them off. This is for those who are being offended by the word, which is telling us that we are not quite as good as we presumed.

It is His mercy to us so that we can walk in the truth, and can let go of the lie. *Everyone* has to interface with this.

However, a person stumbles at the offence of the cross when they *accountably choose to reject the word* that is preached to them. Everyone may be offended; but a person stumbles in offence when they accountably choose to reject the word. This is a very important point.

Everyone will be affected by the word; but it does not mean that they have to stumble. When that breach happens, it does not mean that we are inclined to turn away.

As we become mature and established in the way of the Lord, we *delight* in His eyes. That does not mean that our heart is not exposed before Him; it means that we are comfortable in this process.

If we choose to *not* believe that word, we will begin to *stumble* at the *offence*.

The prevenient grace of God – we can choose without the effect of the other law

There is another important point about offence. These ones do not stumble because of the other law within them. Remember that I said that they have *accountably chosen to reject that word*. This means that there was nothing within them that impeded that choice.

This is fundamental to the principle of prevenient grace – the prevenient grace of God, which accompanies the word, relieves a person of this impediment to choose.

So, everyone has the option or the opportunity to choose, *without the effect of the other law*.

That is why it is a great *dignity* that we are given. However, it also makes us highly *accountable*.

And if, when that happens, we begin to choose our own way, He then begins to answer us through our delusion. No more does He relieve us

of that impediment of choice; He actually *gives* us what we have asked for. That is when the light within us is darkness; and that is *a great darkness*. Mat 6:23.

The prevenient grace of God does not remove Satan's alternative word

However, the prevenient grace of God does not remove the alternative word that is offered by Satan.

When the word of the cross comes, it exposes our heart. It comes replete with prevenient grace, relieving us of our other law, so that we are laid bare before the eyes of the Lord.

Right at that point, we have the choice to *draw near to Him through mourning and repentance* or to draw back and recoil in offence, choosing another word.

This is the key point: the prevenient grace of God does not shut down the mouth of Satan. That voice is there, and we can give your ear to it and choose it over the word of the cross that is coming to us.

This voice of Satan is even present in the church through the expression of those who are part of 'the synagogue of Satan'.

It is also important to note that no-one who is part of the synagogue of Satan identifies themselves that way. That would be bizarre – to say, 'Yes, I am actually part of the synagogue of Satan. I would like to tell you a lie.'

A person is part of the synagogue of Satan because, in their delusion, they are speaking another gospel and are conducting themselves in a way that is other than the word of truth and the fellowship that is of the Father and the Son.

We join this fellowship of the Father and the Son by joining or receiving the word of the presbytery, and joining *their* fellowship.

A person is part of the synagogue of Satan on account of what they believe and express through their speech and conduct, not because they nominate themselves as of 'Jezebel' or 'Balaam' or 'the Nicolaitans' or 'the Laodiceans' etc.

The prevenient grace of God does not remove the alternative word that is offered by Satan. This means that you can choose life or you can choose another word.

Paul noted this in his letter to the Romans. He said, 'Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offences.' Rom 16:17.

The alternative word to the word of the cross may cause a person to accountably choose a word other than the word that would deliver them from their wickedness and violence or rebellion.

'Note those who cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which you [have] learned, and avoid them.' Rom 16:17.

Do you see that the cause of the division and the offence for a person is because they become entrapped by an alternative doctrine or conversation? When they become deceived by that, enamoured by it and 'run' with it, the word of the cross becomes an offence to them – they can't abide it.

It provokes a reaction against the word of the cross, and Paul said that they become an enemy of God.

'For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple. For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore I am glad on your behalf; but I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil. And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly.' Rom 16:18-20.

This alternative word is actually being offered by Satan.

Be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil – our sight is not equivalent to God's sight

There is a way of escape – 'Be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil'.

The initial confrontation of the word becomes a stumbling offence to us when we choose to believe in our inherent good, and in the 'right' to the blessing that is offered through the gospel.

That is what Satan offered Eve – it was the thought that her own sight was the equivalent of the sight of God, so that she could craft a culture in her own image and could have life according to her own understanding.

Then Adam and Eve sought to steal the life from the word of God to facilitate or to aspire to a life in their own image.

Offence directed towards the messenger

Notably, the offence is not only because of the word. The word *will* be confronting and, at times, we become offended by the word.

The offence by which people stumble is often directed towards *those who minister the word*.

There are a number of reasons why a person might be offended by those who have received authority from the Father to speak the word.

For example, we may be offended by a messenger because their appearance and the approach of their ministry is contrary to our expectations.

We may have a view of what a messenger should look like or how they should carry themselves or interact with us, or what qualifications they should have to legitimise their message or to be a legitimate messenger. And when a person doesn't measure up to that, it is an offence to us.

Obviously, that was the case for the Corinthians, who despised the appearance of Paul and his trembling speech. 1Co 2:3. 2Co 10:10.

Another example is that a person may be offended because the messenger does not appreciate or affirm their identity projections.

Sometimes people are offended because of jealousy when authority is given to someone with whom they are familiar, and whom they consider to be equal to or less qualified for ministry than they are. The offence is actually because of comparison and jealousy.

Of course, Pilate even observed that in relation to the Jewish council, and he thought, in effect, 'These people simply want to kill Him because they are jealous.' Mar 15:10.

Jesus caused offence

We note all of these dynamics in the way that the Jews and Christ's family engaged with Jesus. We will read some examples to highlight this point.

'Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these parables, that He departed from there. When He had come to His own county, He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, "Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works?"' Mat 13:53-54.

They acknowledged that there was a message and an 'effect of the word'.

However, all of a sudden, all of that was dismissed because of their view of the appearance of Jesus.

They said: 'Is this not the carpenter's son? [How can this man be qualified to speak in this manner?] Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this Man get all these things?' Mar 13:55-56.

'So they were offended at Him.' Mar 13:57.

That is amazing! They recognised His wisdom; they recognised the sign. But they said, in effect, 'We will not have that from this man, because He does not meet our expectations.' That kind of judgement is a fearful thing to be engaged in.

'Therefore many from the crowd, when they heard this saying, said, "Truly this is the Prophet." Others said, "This is the Christ" [These ones were illuminated as they heard the word being proclaimed.]. But some said, "Will the Christ come out of Galilee? Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the seed of David and from the town of Bethlehem, where David was?" So there was a division among the people because of Him.' Joh 7:40-43.

Paul said, 'Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine.' This happened – there was division among the people because of Him; *because of Jesus*.

'Now some of them wanted to take Him, but no-one laid hands on Him.' Joh 7:44.

The point is that the offence drove them to want to kill Him.

Stumbling in offence – stifling the message and injuring Christ's messengers

Those who stumble because of offence will endeavour to *stifle the message* that causes them discontent.

Everyone will be affected by the word. Those who *draw near* will find deliverance and will be established in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings, where they will grow from glory to glory into mature sons.

Those who *draw back in unbelief* begin to stumble. The point is simple – they are not 'in the pathway'. They stumble 'out of the way' because

they are offended by what is spoken and by whom it is spoken.

Those who stumble because of offence will endeavour, because of the agitation and the discomfort that they feel because of their offence, to stifle the message that is causing them discontent.

And they will undertake to cause injury to Christ's messenger.

The ministry of Stephen – the Jews were cut to the heart by the word of the cross

This very response was exemplified by the Jews who were 'cut to the heart' by the word of the cross, as their betrayal and murder of Jesus was revealed to them through the ministry of Stephen. Act 7:54,58.

Towards the end of his proclamation, Stephen spoke strongly and directly. 'You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it.' Act 7:51-53.

As I read this, I thought that we really are quite gentle in the proclamation of the word. I can't think of many times when someone has stood and said, 'You stiff-necked, uncircumcised people!'

Much of the agitation is actually exaggerated. It is not being provoked very much by a person's demeanour.

It really is the evidence that the word itself is having an effect. In this case, the word was having an effect – Stephen was not 'pulling any punches'. 'When they heard these things they were *cut to the heart*.' Act 7:54.

As the word of the cross comes, it cuts every person to the heart. Whether you are in agreement with it or not, this is *the effect of a spirit of grace and supplication*, causing a person to *look on whom they have pierced*.

And when you do that, your own heart is breached. It is what you do then that marks you either as one who draws near or one who draws back.

'When they heard these things they were cut to the heart.' Instead of drawing near in humility with mourning, 'they gnashed at him with their teeth. [That sounds beastly.] But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"' Act 7:54-56.

'God is Light and in Him is no darkness at all.' 1Jn 1:5.

'Then they cried out with a loud voice, [they] stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him.' Act 7:57-58.

Responses of anger directed toward the messenger

In our present society, it is highly unlikely that a person would literally kill a messenger. Hopefully, it is not going to happen.

But these offences *are* coming, aren't they? Betrayal *will* happen.

What happens when a person stumbles because of offence, and then desires to do an injury to the messenger? What is it like? It is highly unlikely that a person would literally kill a messenger.

However, Jesus said that 'anger without a cause' is an action of murder. Mat 5:21-22. Anger can be provoked by the word – the word which is coming to save a person. So, when a person becomes angry about that word, they are angry without a cause. And Jesus said that that is the equivalent of killing them.

Anger directed toward the messenger occurs in many different ways. Perhaps, most commonly, this happens firstly by '*shutting our ears*' to them. That is exactly what happened to these ones – 'they stopped their ears' as a first response.

We may say, 'I cannot hear from that person anymore.' And when we 'stop our ears', it is as though we are saying, 'Whatever they have to say in their initiative towards me is as though they are dead to me.' So it is an action of murder.

Another common way in which this anger is directed is by *maligning the messenger* in an endeavour to assassinate their character and their legitimacy as a messenger.

I wouldn't presume that this is happening pervasively among us as a group of people; but we will hear it from time to time. And we do recognise that venomous maligning when it occurs – where it is trying to break down or undermine the legitimacy of a messenger in some way.

Significantly, Jesus said that maligning a person in such a manner – and that might happen on social media or in social contexts through our conversation – brings the one who is doing that *under condemnation*.

Stumbling – viewing the message as foolishness

Let us now consider stumbling because of *foolishness*. The second expression of drawing back in unbelief is to remain ambivalent to the message of the cross, and to view it as foolishness.

We note this response in Paul's conversation with King Agrippa and Governor Felix. 'Now as he [Paul] thus made his defence, Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!" But he [Paul] said, "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the *words of truth and reason*".' Act 26:24-25.

I love that – because the word of truth is *by the Spirit*. Paul was saying, in effect, 'It is not only that I am speaking by the Spirit; it is also the fact that everything that I am saying is completely logical and reasonable.'

Those who respond to Christ's witnesses in this manner – that is, viewing both the message that is being proclaimed and the one who is proclaiming it as foolish or intellectually limited or uninformed or whatever description of foolishness they can think of – malign them as being simple, narrow-minded, and even insane.

They reject the word of the cross and choose to live according to their own perception of truth.

Prevenient grace gives opportunity to respond to the word of truth

The word does come. Prevenient grace was there for Festus. And we know it was there for Agrippa, because Agrippa said, in effect, 'You almost convinced me, Paul.' Act 26:28.

Right at that point, this prevenient grace gave them the opportunity. These men had no religious

background; they were purely Greek, purely carnal people.

God gives opportunity to respond to this word of the cross; but we can choose to reject the word and to live according to *our own perception of truth*.

Responses of stumbling because of the word – in the church and in the world

Stumbling because of offence is largely characteristic of the responses of those within a *religious* or *church* setting. That will primarily characterise what happens within the church or the response to the word of those who are already part of the church.

Treating the message of the cross with *ambivalence* or viewing it as *foolish* is a more common response of those who are in the *world* and have limited religious history.

As Christ's witnesses in the world, we will experience this response wherever we live.

We are testifying to the life that we are receiving, and the way that we are walking, as ones who are dying daily in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings.

Children, as you testify that you are a Christian at your schools or we testify in our workplaces or with our neighbours or unsaved relatives, we will be variously *patronised*.

'Patronised' means that people are going to 'go easy' on you because they think you are a little naive, a little simple, and not very intellectual. They will 'pat you on the back' and let you have your 'silly idea', while they get on with the true wisdom and knowledge that grants them the right to patronise you.

In the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, the life of God is being multiplied to us

We will be variously patronised. We might be ridiculed for believing something like the gospel of sonship. We might be maligning – someone might speak in a derogatory way about us. And we might even be persecuted for our testimony.

Where we stand up and bear witness to the truth, and it is over and against what is considered to be truth in the world, that will 'draw fire' on us. It will provoke a reaction as we speak the truth and as our conduct exemplifies the culture of godliness.

So, children, at school where, as part of your conduct, you do not engage in the activities that your school friends are doing or you don't 'run to the same excesses' as them, they will think that you are foolish.

As we inevitably suffer in this way, which is our participation in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, *the life of God is being multiplied to us.*

Do not lose your confidence at that point. Do not believe that you are overly stupid or simply naive. Be like Paul – 'The words which I speak are truth and reason.'

The ones who are 'insane' are the ones who do not believe that there is a God.

His life is overflowing for the sake of those among whom the Father has placed us

His life is sustaining us; it is the life now that we are living.

But, more than that, it is *beyond measure*. We are receiving *more life than we need* for the sustaining of our life.

Do you know why that is? It is because, as you are being troubled in this way, that life is *overflowing* as the opportunity of life and grace – *prevenient grace* – for the person who is doing that to you. It is overflowing for the sake of those among whom the Father has placed us.

Within these contexts, the word of the cross will have an effect upon those who are willing to 'give ear' to what you say. The way that you live may bring 'sight'; ones may 'turn aside' as Moses did, to take a closer look at 'the great sight' of our fellowship in the offering of Christ. Exo 3:3.

That is how we bear witness. And it will have a dividing effect among those with whom we share our testimony.

In our next session, we will continue to consider what it means to 'draw near' and to receive 'the kindness of God'.