

C.H.U.R.C.H.

Relationships within the Church

1 John 1:5-7

5 This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.

6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

Imagine that we are putting together a 1,000 piece puzzle. In turn we each put pieces into place; slowly the beauty of the picture begins to take shape. As we continue putting the puzzle together we talk about what it would be like to be a part of the scene before us. As the final pieces are being put into place we are suddenly confronted with the fact that our picture is incomplete; 4 pieces are missing. How do you feel about all our work together knowing that it will forever remain incomplete?

Now imagine that instead of missing pieces, the puzzle is alive. As the final pieces are being put into place they change shape and refuse to be joined together with the adjoining pieces. Or worse yet we watch as parts of the puzzle we have put together suddenly separate and pieces leave the table. How do you feel knowing that the beauty of the image being put together will never be finished, because the pieces won't cooperate with each other?

I wonder if that is sometimes how God feels about His church? He fits people together only to find that some are missing, or individuals which He has purposed to join together refuse to be connected or deliberately separate from each other. I know that there have been times when I have had those kind of feelings.

God's desire is that we be joined together to fulfill His purpose in the world. As a local body of believers we have been uniquely designed by God to reach our community for Christ.

What is the church? The word church comes from the Greek word “**ekklhsia**” which literally means “a calling out;” it is a meeting of people who have been “called out” or “summoned together.” In the New Testament “**ekklhsia**” refers to the congregation of God's people who have been called out or separated from the world into His kingdom; the church is made up of those God has joined together into the body of Christ.

The word “church” can refer to a local assembly of believers, or the universal church as a whole. For our purpose today when I refer to the church, I mean the local church, But let me be quick to point out two things. **First**, what is true for relationships within our church is also true for the relationships between believers in other local churches. **Second**, collectively and individually local churches or body of believers should share in the same type of relationships with other churches as are found within the individual local church.

What should our relationships within the CHURCH be like? Let's discover God's plan for relationships within the C.H.U.R.C.H.

CHRISTLIKE

Relationships within the church should be Christ like.

Putting it simply, because we are individually connected to Christ, our relationships with one another should be the same as Christ relates to us.

1 John 1:6-7 If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

Let's unpack what John says. **Verse 6** tells us that if we claim to be in relationship with Jesus our lifestyle will validate our friendship with Jesus. You can't say you are a Christian and then live like the devil; the way you live will be transformed because you are in relationship with Jesus.

Verse 7 then builds upon that truth. If we are walking in the light—that is if we are in relationship with Jesus, then we will share fellowship with one another. The word fellowship comes from the Greek word “**koinonia**” which is to literally be in partnership with another, it is a mutual relationship which benefits one another. In other words, if I am connected to Jesus, then I am also connected to you!

Furthermore, because I share fellowship with Jesus—walking in the light as He is in the light, then my relationship with you should be like Christ's relationship with me. Putting it simply, relationships within the church should be loving.

Now if we are not getting along with one another within the church—if our fellowship or partnership together is broken, then we should know that there is a sin problem. And before we are quick to point the finger at our brother or sister, let's look in the mirror. John put it this way:

1 John 4:19-21 We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

Our relationships within the church should above all things be Christ-like; we should relate to one another in the same way that Jesus relates to us. **We are walking in the REALM of God. We relate spiritually.**

House to House

Relationships in the church should be House to house.

Friendships within the church should not be “Sunday only.” We should interact with one another through out the week.

Acts 2:42, 46 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. . . Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.

The New Testament church was connected to each other. The fellowship of the early church was more than joining together for a worship service. **Their partnership brought them together in one another's homes. The church should run counter to our culture.** Americans are **increasingly more and more isolated** from each other—**circles of friendship grow smaller and smaller.** But within the church our friendships should be increasing to include those who are a part of the body of Christ.

As believers we cannot live like the lone ranger—we need friendships with other Christians.

Hebrews 10:25 tells the lone ranger to get reconnected with other believers; we are to join together regularly to encourage each other from House to House.

Relationships within the church should be

United

1 Cor 12:12

12 For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.

1 Cor 12:18-20

18 But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.

19 And if they were all one member, where would the body be?

20 But now indeed there are many members, yet one body.

The connection we share with each other is not superficial; rather it joins us together as one. Our body is made up of many different parts, but it forms one body. Likewise each of us are united together forming the body of Christ.

How important are our relationships to the body of Christ? If we disconnect ourselves from one another, then we deform the body of Christ. A deformed body is challenged and even unattractive to the world, but a body that is whole is attractive—when the church is united as one, it will draw others to Christ.

Relationships within the church should be united because:

Redemptive

Relationships within the church should be Redemptive.

Jesus came to redeem lost humanity back to God. Without Jesus' death and resurrection God and man would be eternally separated from each other. But Jesus has made it possible for God and man to be brought back together; the sin which separates man from God can be forgiven.

The relationships believers share within the church is one of the ways God uses to draw the lost to Christ. The unity of believers one with another is a magnet pulling people to Jesus.

John 13:35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

John 17:20-21 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

We see Jesus prayer being answered within the early church as believers related to one another with the love of Christ people were being saved;

Acts 2:46-47 Every day they continued **to meet together** in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the **Lord added to their number daily** those who were being saved.

Jesus prayer remains the same today, and He desires to see it answered through you and me, so that our relationships might be redemptive drawing others to Him.

George Barna has shown the importance of relationships within the church. Christian church-goers were asked about the importance of a variety of factors when deciding whether or not they will return to a church that they have visited. Among a number of factors considered when choosing a church, the importance of the friendliness of the church was assessed. The results were as follows:

- 53% indicated that **how much people cared for each other** is a key factor in determining whether or not they

will return to the church.

- 45% indicated that the **friendliness of the people in the church is a key factor**.
- 12% indicated that the number of friends they have attending the church is a key factor in deciding whether or not they will visit again.

Barna has also found keys to reaching the unchurched. Unless things change significantly, Barna estimates that fewer than one out of every five unchurched adults is likely to be a part of a church in the near future. But he is quick to point out what would draw a larger number of people into the church. "In general, they want a place that is caring, casual, contemporary, creative, child-friendly, control-granting and contextualized. Frankly, they want many of the same things that churched people want. They are simply less forgiving in terms of the level of excellence with which these elements are provided. The people, the process and the product matter to them. If the church does not meet their standards, they'll simply look elsewhere to have their needs met." Will our relationships be redemptive drawing people to Christ? Let's be the body of Christ—let's be one.

Compassionate

Relationships in the church should be Compassionate.

We are not to live in our own little world ignoring those around us; because we are of one body—united in Christ—we are to identify with and respond to the needs of others. Look again at what Paul said about our being joined together as the body of Christ:

1 Corinthians 12:26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

The love of Christ within us compels us to reach out in love to those in need. Our hearts should be moved by the suffering of others; no one should have to bear their pain alone.

Luke 22:31-32

31 And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat.

32 But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren."

Galatians 6:2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Jesus summed up the law with the second greatest commandment, "love your neighbor as yourself." In the same way that we cannot ignore pain within our physical body, our love for our brother or sister in Christ will move us to share their burden. But compassionate relationships are not just about feeling one another's pain or sorrow. Compassion moves us to action.

Helpful

Relationships within the church should be Helpful.

The early church put their love and compassion for one another to work. They shared whatever they had with those in need.

Acts 2:44-45 All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.

Material possessions were not held within a clenched fist, rather they were held in an open hand; God had freely given, and they in turn could share with one another.

1 John 3:17 If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?

John makes it very plain; if we ignore our brother who is in need and we have the means to help them, then God's love is not within us.

We cannot just give lip service to reaching out to others. Our lives back up what we say about loving God as we freely share with those in need. Compassion moves our hearts to help the one in need.

Conclusion

Christ like, House to House, Unity, Redemptive, Compassionate and Helpful; these characteristics should set our relationships apart from those in the world. As believers we are a part of the body of Christ, we are more than friends; we are family—children of God. The love of Christ unites our hearts as brothers and sisters.

Anything less is only a social club. We are a part of the church—those called out from the world.

1 Corinthians 12:18 But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.

God is putting a living puzzle together; may He knit our hearts together so that the beauty of His Body will be seen in us.