

Church Life Notes

Study 2 – Sharing with other churches

These notes are to accompany our series, Church Life, on Sunday mornings. Their purpose is to give you a summary of the message, bible passages referred to, and some questions for further study.

These will also be available on the church website (www.bethel-laleston.co.uk).

This local church is part of a bigger whole, the entire body of Christ, all of God's saved people. "Church" used in the bible to refer to local congregations, Christians in an area, worldwide group or even church throughout all time. So whatever is true WITHIN church (as in study 1) is true BETWEEN churches to some degree.

As an independent church, might be easy for us to see sharing with other churches as something optional. Might view it as so problematic as to not be worth the effort or at other end of scale, might think we should join with anyone who claims the name "Christian". To attempt some clarity, look at three points. First, the importance of this issue, second the need for discernment, third, some thoughts on practice.

Christian fellowship is pleasing to God

Sharing between Christians is not just an add-on but goes to heart of what it is to be saved.

Titus 2:14 "*[Jesus Christ]...gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.*"

Christ wants to create a people, not just isolated individuals. Every Christian is part of a new community of people.

Ephesians 2 speaks about the community of people that God has created in Christ. No longer Jews and Gentiles but one group, people, fellow citizens, members of God's household, a dwelling of God (all phrases in Eph 2!).

Ps 133:1 "*How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!*"

Lots of things are good but not pleasant, some things are pleasant but not good but Christian fellowship is good AND pleasant.

Eph 4:1-6 and 1 Peter 3:8-9 support this point. The "one-anothers" of the NT referred to in study 1 also support this.

If this is pleasing to God as his word says it is, then it should be a priority for every believer.

Christian fellowship needs discernment

Having said it is important, be careful not to rush to extremes. Enthusiasm for fellowship with all other Christians might lead us to be keen to share with EVERYONE

who claims the name "Christian." But we don't want the opposite extreme either (sharing with none). So discernment is needed.

Discernment means to know and understand the BASIS of our fellowship with others. In other words, what is essential, crucial, non-negotiable and what is optional, peripheral or negotiable.

Certain truths are foundational – bible as God's word, nature of God as triune, sovereign, creator, saviour, man as a sinner in need of the saving power of Jesus Christ in his life, death, resurrection and ascension. Could use the word "gospel" if by that we mean whole truth about how God chose to send his Son to save this lost world and how his saving power is applied to us by grace through faith.

Truth of gospel is crucial. Look at strong words of Paul about those who would add to gospel:

Galatians 1:8-9 "*But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!*"

See also 2 Cor 6:14-16. Fellowship needs discernment. These pointers from the time of the protestant reformation might be helpful shorthand for us.

Scripture alone, Christ alone, Grace alone, Faith alone, Glory to God alone.

Before we stand with anyone, ask how they stand on these! This is not simple black-and-white issue, but if fellowship is pleasing to God, must think it through without bigotry or prejudice. It requires prayer!

Christian fellowship in practice

Big issue for brief notes! If this is pleasing to God, we ought to be thinking about how we can practice this unity with other churches, local, regional, national and worldwide.

Some local applications have already taken place (Carols services, joint mission etc.).

At national level, we are members of Affinity. Some questions to challenge you:

- How important do you think these relationships are?
- How much time (as a church) do we invest in them?
- What might we do to further be involved in real and sincere Christian fellowship with brothers and sisters in Christ?

At very least should pray for them! We will be starting to systematically pray for other evangelical churches on Thursday evenings. Pastors will be swapping pulpits later in the year for a Sunday morning.

Read 2 Cor 8-9 to see Paul speaking about one very practical area of help, the sharing of money with struggling churches.

Pray that God would help us to value fellowship with his people wherever they are and to work to encourage that fellowship in Christ here in our local church, with brothers and sisters in Bridgend, Wales, the UK and across the world.