

RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE CHURCH

Scripture: 1 John 1:6-7 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-27.

How do you spell Church – C H U R C H Today we are going to use the spelling of church to explore how we should relate to each other in the church.

Have you ever worked on a large jigsaw puzzle, maybe a beautiful landscape scene and perhaps friends or family have been helping. You get to the final pieces when you realise you are 4 pieces short. You may frantically search everywhere but the fact is – all of your hard work on the puzzle will forever remain incomplete.

Now imagine instead of missing pieces – the puzzle is alive. As the final pieces are being put together they change shape and refuse to be reconnected or deliberately separate from each other.

I am sure we have all experienced times like those when you just want to distance yourself from others – even the church, maybe even God.

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.

The word CHURCH comes from the Greek word "ekklhsia" which literally means "a calling out or a summons to get together."

In the New Testament it refers to a "congregation" who have been called out or separated from the world into God's kingdom – people that God has joined together into the body of Christ.

So relationships in the church do not just refer to our church here in Chelsea but all churches throughout the world. Let's discover God's plan for relationships within the church.

C = CHRISTLIKE

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

1st John John was confronting a number of claims that came from false teachers – they stated you can still have fellowship with God and go on living in spiritual darkness. But John says – no-one can claim to be a Christian and still live in evil and immorality. We can't love God and court sin at the same time.

The false teachers claimed it didn't matter if you physically sin because the body was going to be destroyed anyway. But John says – sin by it's very nature brings death. Jesus had no sin, but He died by a transaction we may never fully understand – He died for the sins of the world. He has paid the penalty of our sins.

You see, we are judged by our actions and behaviours – if we claim to follow Jesus, if we say we are a Christian, yet we continue to allow the devil to tempt us – then we are lying and we will not be in a loving fellowship with others.

The Greek word for fellowship is “Koinonia” – a mutual relationship that benefits one another. So if you walk in the light and are connected to Jesus, you will also be connected to others.

Relationships within the church should be loving. But we should firstly look in our mirror before we point the finger at our brother or sister.

In 1 John 4:19-21 we read – if you say I love God but hate your brother, you are a liar. Whoever loves God must also love his brother or sister.

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H = HOUSE TO HOUSE.

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

Acts 2:42 and 46 tells us that the early church apostles devoted themselves to teaching and fellowship, to breaking bread and praying together. Theirs was a partnership.

Apart from the COVID restrictions, I suggest many of us have become more isolated from each other leading to friendships growing smaller and smaller. But within the Church our friendships should be increasing to include those who are a part of the body of Christ.

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U = UNITED.

As believers, we need friendships with other Christians. Relationships should be united. And it should not be superficial.

1 Corinthians tells us that 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.

Just imagine if one day your right foot said – well I have had enough. I am getting tired and you are stomping on me all the time – I am taking myself out of this body – I am not going to do what you want me to do anymore. I guess you could always hop – but it would get very tiring and other parts of your body really cannot take over that roll – they have their own tasks to complete. The same relates to the body of Christ in the church.

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R = REDEMPTIVE

Jesus came to redeem lost humanity back to God. Without Jesus' death and resurrection God and humanity would be eternally separated from each other. But Jesus has made it possible for God and humanity to be brought back together, the sin which separates us 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 Jesus prayed that for those who will believe in Him they would be one, just as He and the Father are one.

Jesus' prayer was being answered in the early church as believers related to one another with love and His 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.

The founder of a Market Research firm that specializes in studying people's religious beliefs, George Bana identified the importance of relationships within the church. The questions he asked were what factors impacted people when deciding to return or not to a church they had visited.

53% said how much people cared for each other was a key factor in determining if they would return.

45% indicated the friendliness of the people was a key factor.

12% indicated that the number of friends they had attending would influence them.

C = 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.

1 Corinthians 12:26 Paul says – if one part suffers, every part suffers with it. If one part is honoured, 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.

Jesus summed this up with the 2nd greatest commandment – love your neighbour as yourself.

Compassion moves us to action.

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H = 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 give and they in turn could share with one another.

John makes it very plain – if we ignore our brother or sister 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 needs. Compassion moves our hearts to help the one in need.

Conclusion:

**CHURCH = Christlike; House to House; United; 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.

Remember the example of the jigsaw puzzle – when God has all the pieces; He has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as He wanted them to be.

He knit our hearts together so that the beauty of His body will be seen in us.