

# What Really Matters? The Test of Fellowship

For many years, I served as a student pastor in a smaller town. A one-high-school-but-lots-of-churches kind of small town. Working with other student leaders in the various churches, we held a joint worship event with our students. Some church leaders were not too hep on the idea. One asked me, “Why? Aren’t you concerned about these other denominations influencing your own students, impacting their beliefs?”

I simply said, “We don’t gather to focus on our differences. We celebrate what we share in common. Jesus.”

It was a great experience each month, celebrating Jesus with those of other denominations and persuasions. That’s not to discount the areas where our churches differed: style of leadership, missional philosophy, some minor points of biblical interpretation or doctrine. But one night a month we just talked about and sang about Jesus.

Where do we draw the line when it comes to recognizing other faith groups or beliefs? Do we accept any group just because they include the name of Jesus somewhere in their beliefs?

There are foundational truths that are non-negotiables. Regardless of whatever else they may get right, a denial of these key truths separates non-Christians from true Christ followers.

- The Bible is God’s revealed Word and contains all we need to know for life and salvation.
- God is one—but three Persons: Father, Son, Holy Spirit.
- Jesus is fully human and fully God.
- Humans are created in the image of God, but we are sinful, fallen creatures.
- Salvation is possible because of the death and resurrection of Christ. We receive salvation when we trust in Christ and confess Him as Lord.
- Jesus will return one day.

Those are extremely brief expressions of these truths, but they are critical for a right (biblical) understanding of Christianity. You and I can differ on matters such as Calvinism/Arminianism or how to interpret the details around the second coming of Christ, but we can still fellowship together because of our shared beliefs in the foundational doctrines.

I’m not saying these other areas of belief are unimportant. Far from it. Study God’s Word. Read books of theology and church history, and even read these subjects from other viewpoints. The problem arises when we make non-critical viewpoints the standard for right beliefs. Recently, I received a scathing email from someone who took me to task for publishing a quote by a certain author. The quote was a good quote, but his beef was with the author. This author has been highly regarded in the evangelical church for years. While I do

not agree with everything this author believed, I have never heard anyone question this author’s faith—until now. My publishing team was floored by this man’s attack and his reasoning behind it. He was convinced this author was a non-Christian pagan. He reasoned we should know better and someone should be fired for using this author.

As I prepared to reply to this individual, I discovered he is part of a church with a very narrow viewpoint. The church, in turn, is a part of a fellowship of churches, and if your church wants to be a part of this group, you must acknowledge your belief in certain doctrines and standards. These doctrines include the core beliefs I noted earlier, but the list does not stop there. You must also confirm things like:

- Only one English version of the Bible is correct and is “the preserved Word of God.” All others are corrupt.
- No reformed theology. Period.
- No contemporary Christian music. No Chris Tomlin or Casting Crowns. Contemporary Southern Gospel music is also worldly.

The list goes on and on. If your church doesn’t adhere to all these, you’re not allowed to fellowship with him and the other like-minded churches.

We should never exclude others simply because we disagree on some point. If I lived my life that way, I would lead a very lonely life. Even my wife and I don’t always see eye-to-eye!

It’s what we do with Jesus that matters! Look at what Paul taught as “most important:”

“For I passed on to you as most important what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve. Then he appeared to over five hundred brothers and sisters at one time; most of them are still alive, but some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one born at the wrong time, he also appeared to me” (1 Cor. 15:3-8).

John wrote of the importance of who Jesus is. “Who is the liar, if not the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This one is the antichrist: the one who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father; he who confesses the Son has the Father as well.... This is how you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God” (1 John 2:22-23; 4:2-3).

Center your life on Jesus Christ. Study. Dig. Learn. But through it all, keep Jesus central.