
All believers are one under the headship of Christ, and it is his desire that they be perfected in unity (John 17:23). Therefore, when God’s providence provides the opportunity, local churches ought to promote fellowship and co-operation among themselves (Acts 15:1–4; 2 Corinthians 8:18–24; Galatians 2:10; Philippians 1:4–5).

In cases of difficulties—whether in matters of doctrine or administration—that concern the churches in general or any one church, it is Christ’s will that representatives of the churches meet together to consider the matter and give their advice to all concerned (Acts 15:1–35; Galatians 2:2). It should be understood that the governance of a church is only valid to the extent that it conforms to the will of Christ the head (Revelation 1:12–20), and because Christ’s will is not defined by the decisions of a local church or of its leaders, a church may often be helped to follow Christ by obtaining counsel from other churches (Proverbs 12:15; 13:10; 19:20). The representatives do not have power to impose their decision on any church or its officers or members, but their counsel must be taken seriously, in the spirit of genuinely seeking the Lord’s will; local churches should be aware of the danger of rejecting wise and godly counsel (Proverbs 1:20–33).

(Sola 5 Confession 7.5–7.6)

As we considered previously, Baptist churches recognise the autonomy of the local church—that each church is self-governing under Jesus Christ—and reject the authority of denominational structures. Independence, however, does not negate interdependence. Autonomy does not equate to isolation. Confession 7.5–7.6 highlights the necessity of local churches partnering together in gospel work.

Despite the autonomy of the local church, however, the Confession maintains that **all believers are one under the headship of Christ, and it is his desire that they be perfected in unity.**

What is the unity spoken of in John 17:23? _____

Is it possible to maintain this unity in the face of the denominationalism we see all around us in contemporary evangelicalism? _____

What is required of churches if they will pursue this unity? _____

Given that churches ought to pursue this unity, the Confession continues: **Therefore, when God’s providence provides the opportunity, local churches ought to promote fellowship and cooperation among themselves.** Read the supplied texts and note the context in which cooperation was pursued in each case.

Acts 15:1–4: _____

2 Corinthians 8:18–24: _____

Galatians 2:10: _____

Philippians 1:4–5: _____

Taking into account what you have learned above, what lessons do you learn about inter-church gospel partnership? In what areas should churches consider partnering? _____

The Confession zones in on a particular matter of this partnership: **In cases of difficulties—whether in matters of doctrine or administration—that concern the churches in general or any one church, it is Christ’s will that representatives of the churches meet together to consider the matter and give their advice to all concerned.** What do you think the Confession means by **cases of difficulties**? When is it necessary to seek outside intervention? _____

The Confession continues: **It should be understood that the governance of a church is only valid to the extent that it conforms to the will of Christ the head.** How does Revelation 1:12–20 support this affirmation? _____

Practically, what does it mean that **the governance of a church is only valid to the extent that it conforms to the will of Christ the head**? _____

Continuing on this theme, the Confession adds: **And because Christ’s will is not defined by the decisions of a local church or of its leaders, a church may often be helped to follow Christ by obtaining counsel from other churches.** Why is outside counsel (as commended in Proverbs 12:15; 13:10; 19:20) so helpful for local churches to seek? _____

While it is good and wise to seek the counsel of others, **the representatives do not have power to impose their decision on any church or its officers or members.** Nevertheless, **their counsel must be taken seriously, in the spirit of genuinely seeking the Lord’s will; local churches should be aware of the danger of rejecting wise and godly counsel.**

Why do representatives of other churches **not have power to impose their decision on any church or its officers or members**? _____

What is **the danger of rejecting wise and godly counsel**? Consider Proverbs 1:20–33 as you think about this? _____