

# The Doctrine of Church Fellowship

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1. The doctrine of church fellowship is not a set of dry, formal man-made church regulations which hinder the work of the Holy Spirit and make it hard, if not impossible, for pious pastors, teachers, missionaries, and evangelists to witness for Christ and to bring the Gospel to mankind.
2. The doctrine of church fellowship is rather a spiritual, living truth from God's very Word, connected to the heart of the Gospel itself, that of a poor sinner's justification by grace for Christ's sake through faith. As such it should call forth from each one of us the humility, wonder, and praise expressed by Paul:

O depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counselor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen. (Ro 11:33-36).

## I. From Sinner to Saint.

3. We speak of **church** fellowship, and this necessitates a consideration of the doctrine of the church, specifically, that of the essence of the church that is, the believers in Jesus Christ.
4. What about this church? How has it come into existence? On whom does it rest? How does a lost sinner become a member of it? Here we recognize that we are at the heart of the Gospel, and it is here where the doctrine of church fellowship has its roots.
5. The church is Christ's church. It belongs to him by virtue of his atoning sacrifice. Paul writes in Ephesians that "Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (5:25-27).
6. On the basis of Christ's holy life and suffering and death God has justified the whole world and is now reconciled to every sinner, as Paul testifies: "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation" (2 Co 5:19).
7. This is the good news, or Gospel, which goes out to sinful man, and with it also the gracious invitation: "And the Spirit and the bride say, come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev 22:17).

8. It is through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament that Christ seeks out and calls the sinner, declaring forgiveness of sins to him. All who repent and believe the Gospel are justified and have this forgiveness as their very own possession. "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law" (Ro 3:28). As God's child, the Christian has peace with God and access to every divine blessing as Paul states: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God" (Ro 5:1-2).
9. This faith by which one receives the forgiveness of sins and adoption as God's child is God's work and God's gift. Paul stresses this truth in his letter to the Ephesians when he writes: "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins ... For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph 2:1,8,9).
10. God the Holy Ghost creates and preserves faith in the Christian through the Gospel in the Word, the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, and the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Since it is through these means, and these means alone, that God brings man his grace and makes him a partaker of that divine grace through faith, the Word and Sacraments are called the Means of Grace. That God accomplishes such divine wonders through such humble earthly means is made clear in Scripture. Concerning the Gospel as such, Paul declares: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Ro 1:16). Speaking specifically of the Word, our Savior prayed: "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (Jn 17:17). Peter also testifies to the word as a means of grace when he writes: "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever" (1 Pe 1:23). Paul likewise, when he writes: "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"(Ro 10:17). Our Savior said regarding Baptism: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (Jn 3:5-6). Paul, in writing to Titus, declares: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost. . ." (Tit 3:5). While we recognize that the Lord's Supper is instituted for those who have already come to faith we must also remember that it is the Gospel ("This cup is the new testament in my blood," Lk 22:20) and that it bestows forgiveness of sins ("which is shed for many for the remission of sins," Mt 26:28) thus comforting, strengthening, and preserving the Christian in true faith. (cf. also Jn 8:31,32; Jn 17:20; Jn 14:23-26; Jn 15:3,7)
11. Through the continued proclamation of, and bestowal of, the forgiveness of sins in the Gospel in the Word, in Baptism, and in the Lord's Supper, the Christian is preserved in true faith and nourished and comforted and strengthened on his way heavenward. Without the Gospel he is lost. Rightly does Moses say of the Word: "For it is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life" (Dt 32:47).

12. Two things that play a decisive role in the doctrine of church fellowship should be noted already at this time. 1) The one is that the Word, Baptism and the Lord's Supper are called the Means of Grace, and they are precisely this, means by which God gives his Holy Spirit, and by which the Holy Spirit works faith, and through which God brings and bestows forgiveness and life and salvation. They are the Means of Grace for through these means, and no other, God works faith and bestows his grace and forgiveness. 2) The Means of Grace are limited to the pure Word and Sacraments. "Sanctify them through thy truth," Jesus prayed, adding, "Thy word is truth" (Jn 17). Scripture never attributes any saving power whatsoever to error or false doctrine. On the contrary, scripture attributes only destructive, damaging power to error or false doctrine, listing "heresies" as one of the works of the flesh, saying: "that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal 5:20,21). Paul tells Timothy to "shun profane and vain babbling: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some" (2 Ti 2:16-18). Then there is Paul's well-known statement: "Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth? This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you. A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (Gal 5:7-9). Even where truth and error are mixed, as is the case in heterodox churches, it is only through the truth that is still proclaimed there, and never by the error or false doctrine taught in that church, that souls are brought to faith and nourished and preserved in faith. We must not let the fact that we gratefully acknowledge the presence of Christians also in such heterodox communions dull our spiritual senses to the danger of the soul-destroying error there, or to the truth that the Means of Grace and their soul-saving work are limited to the **pure** Word and Sacraments.
13. Wherever there is a lack of appreciation for, or a lax practice regarding, the doctrine of church fellowship, especially on the part of pastors and teachers who are "stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 Co 4:1), one of the chief reasons must lie in a person's failure to grasp or to believe the vital significance of the Word and Sacraments as the Means of Grace, and to limit the Means of Grace to the pure Word and Sacraments.
14. The importance of the means of Grace in the doctrine of church fellowship is seen also when we now in our presentation on church fellowship go on to note how the individual Christian as a pilgrim finds other Christians in this world and joins with them in worship and work. Here too the Means of Grace are indispensable.

## **II. From Foreigner to Fellow - Citizen.**

15. The Christian does not stand alone, ever. Not only does the Savior abide with him, but he also, in becoming a Christian, becomes a member of Christ's church, the communion or fellowship of saints, and is joined by faith with all those sinners who have been justified by faith through the power of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel, even as he. God Himself establishes this unity between Christians. (Eph 4:3-6).

16. In spite of distance and even time itself, the Christian is united not only with every Christian presently living on the face of the earth, but also with every Christian who has ever lived on earth from the beginning of time and who is now before the throne of God in heaven, and also with those not yet conceived or born, but of the elect nonetheless.
17. This unity of the church, and with it the fellowship of the church, is brought out in many passages of Scripture, under such figures as body, temple, house, etc. The Father, Paul says, gave Christ "to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph 1:22-23). Writing to the Romans, Paul says: "So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another" (Ro 12:5). To Timothy Paul writes of "the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of truth" (1 Ti 3:15). In 2 Corinthians he says: "For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (6:16). The unity of Christ's church is forcefully brought out by Paul in writing to the Ephesians: "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; and one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph 4:4-6).
18. For our comfort and also for our admonition it is well for us to be reminded of the truth that the church's unity does not depend upon us and our own efforts. There **is** one body. . ." (Eph 4:4), Scripture says. Likewise the church's welfare and eternal destiny does not ultimately depend upon us and our efforts, but rests alone in the hands of God himself. Jesus says that he will build his church and "that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Mt 16:18). He promises: "My sheep hear my voice and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" (Jn 10:27-28).

### **III. Locating Other Christians for Church Fellowship.**

19. The church is, of course, invisible. It is this because that which constitutes one a member of it is invisible, namely, faith. In connection with this, Pieper also observes: "Suppose we could single out every member of the Church, we still would not be seeing the Church, because our mortal eyes can see only the old man in the Christians, while the new man lives deeply hidden in God during this life (Col 3:3, 2 Co 5:4). Not until Judgment Day will the members of the Christian Church differ in their external appearance from the non-members (Col 3:4; 1 Jn 3:2). The halo with which artists surround the heads of the saints reflects merely our charitable belief" (Pieper, III, p. 409).
20. But the church, though invisible, is nonetheless real. That is, it really does exist. There actually are people here on earth who believe in Jesus Christ and who through faith belong to Christ. This reality of the church is brought out by the Lutheran Confessions when they say that in the proper sense the church is the assembly of saints who truly believe the Gospel of Christ and who have the Holy

Ghost, of those here and there in the world (Apology, VII, 28; the German version; Triglotta, p. 236).

21. Christians are to acknowledge and exercise here on earth the church fellowship that they have with one another. They are to do this, for example, by a joint use of the Means of Grace, as Scripture says: "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Heb 10:23-25). Or again: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Col 3:16). Or again, as regards the Lord's Supper: ". . . This do in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19); and "For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread" (1 Co 10:17). Christians are to acknowledge and exercise the church fellowship that they have with one another by giving special help to one another. Scripture says: "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Gal 6:10). Christians are to acknowledge and exercise the church fellowship that they have with one another by striving with might and main to live peaceably with one another, letting nothing disrupt in an outward way the unity which they have in Christ. Paul writes: "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph 4: 1-3). Christians are to acknowledge and exercise the church fellowship that they have with one another by watching out for and guarding one another's spiritual welfare through admonition, and, if necessary, church discipline. Scripture says: "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such as one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Gal 6:1). Also: "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican" (Mt 18:15-17).
22. Finding other Christians in the world is no great problem for the Christian. Remembering how he himself has become a Christian, namely, through the Means of Grace, the Word and Sacraments, and remembering God's promise that his Word does not come back empty or void, but bears fruit (Isa 55), the Christian knows that where the Word is used, there Christ's church is, there Christians are to be found. The Means of Grace thus become also the marks of the church, pointing out where the church exists and is present.
23. The assembly where the Word and Sacraments are used is not the church as such, since hypocrites may well be a part of that assembly also. Even if one defines the visible assembly as being made up only of believers, it still is not the visible

assembly as such that is the church, because it is the believers themselves, rather than any visible assembly, that is the church. The church is the believers and is therefore hidden, as it were, in the assembly. But the church is there, and in fellowshiping with the members of the assembly, the Christian is fellowshiping with the church itself, that is, with the Christians in that place. This is what makes church fellowship such as we have it in our congregations and between congregations, in our synod, and, through our synod, with other synods, such a wonderful, sacred, blessed thing. It isn't a fellowship of this or that congregation, or this or that synod, as such. It is church fellowship, fellowship of the saints.

24. It is a gross distortion, indeed, a misconception of the church and church fellowship, when we make the church fellowship which we have in the congregation or the synod or the sister synods, to be an outward, organizational, or even confessional fellowship, and then go on to speak of another fellowship that we have, that of our *Una Sancta* fellowship with the many Christians found in other congregations and denominations. To be sure, the Christian is in fellowship with all Christians the world over; but this is not a different kind of fellowship from that which the Christian has within his congregation, sister congregations, synod, or sister synods. It is the same fellowship, the only difference being that in the former case the fellowship cannot be acknowledged and exercised on earth, while in the latter case it can be and is acknowledged. and exercised on earth. And that brings us to our next point, namely:

#### **IV. The Basis for Acknowledging and Exercising Church Fellowship.**

25. Two Latin terms may be helpful in our discussion of this point: *Fides qua*, that is, the faith by which one believes, hence, personal, subjective faith, the faith of the heart; and *fides quae*, that is, the faith which is believed, the doctrines taught in God's Word.
26. We do not want to forget, ignore, or slight the *fides qua*. It is by such faith that we are justified. Further, it is by such faith that we are made members of Christ's church and are brought into fellowship with all believers. But at the same time we have to remember that such personal, subjective faith, though known to God, is hidden to man and therefore cannot serve as the basis for the acknowledgement and exercise of church fellowship between Christians here on earth. There are those who try to make it serve this purpose, but it cannot be done. And we must be on guard lest we are drawn into this same subjective, pietistic morass.
27. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), the "founder of modern Protestant theology," is largely responsible for the shift from the objective Word of God to the subjective "inner consciousness of the individual heart" as the source of doctrine, which has taken over such large segments of Christendom today.
28. This has had a profound influence also on the doctrine of church fellowship, and, of course, the modern ecumenical movement. This is frankly stated in *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948*, Rouse, Ruth, and Neil, Stephen Charles, ed., Second Ed., The Westminster Press: Philadelphia, 1968:

It is in the light of all these tendencies that it is possible to estimate the ecumenical importance of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), the father of modern theology. . . . For him religion could never be exhausted in purely intellectual formulations; it included the contemplation of the universe, but it must also be based upon the deep inner piety of absolute dependence upon God. Dogmatic formulations thus become of secondary importance. . . (pp. 269-270).

29. Dr. Samuel Mc Crea Cavert, a leader in the WCC for many years, proclaims subjective faith to be the basis for the acknowledgement and exercise of church fellowship. He says in his book, *On the Road to Christian Unity*. (Harper Bros., 1961) that unity "lies in the experience, of finding that God meets us in Christ and in our response to him in faith. He also states that agreement in doctrine "is a function of the united church rather than a precondition of it. The community of faith and love comes first, and agreement in doctrinal statements grow out of this—not vice versa" (p. 99). How he is able to determine the presence of faith in an individual is not stated. That this seems to present no problem is not to be wondered at. If man's "inner consciousness of the individual heart" is the final source and arbiter of doctrine, then determining the presence or absence of faith will also present no great problem.
30. Let us be frank to admit that we ourselves are not always as clear and sharp as we should be in distinguishing and repudiating subjective faith as the basis for the acknowledgement and exercise of church fellowship. We all need the admonition contained in Thesis II of the Overseas Brethren Theses on Church Fellowship:

The marks of the church are all-decisive. Everything must be referred to them. This duty is hindered by presumptuous judgments or statements concerning the faith or lack of it in individuals. It is Enthusiasm to build on subjective faith (*fides qua*) and love, for faith is hidden and love is variable. Both are in man. The means of Grace are objective, solid, apprehensible. Since these are God's own means, we must attend entirely upon them and draw from them the distinction between the orthodox church and heterodox churches (1961 ELS Report, p. 41).

31. It is *fides quae*, that which is believed, that is, the doctrine, the objective truth of God's Word that is the basis for the Christian's acknowledgement and exercise of church fellowship with other Christians here on earth.
32. This is Lutheran doctrine:

...For it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places. It is as Paul says in (Eph 4:4,5, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism." (AC, VII, p. 32 Tappert).

33. Liberal Lutherans, trying to keep one foot in their Lutheran tradition while planting the other foot in the modern ecumenical movement, have sought to keep from being split apart at the seams through the ever-widening gap by trying to tone down the basis for church fellowship that is set forth in Article VII of the Augsburg Confession. "The Gospel," which must be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it, mentioned in Article VII, does not mean all of Scripture, every doctrine of Scripture, they say, but rather some of the teachings of Scripture, its central teachings, in particular, that which is necessary for salvation. This contention is made again and again, for example, in the essays presented by men from the National Lutheran Council in the NLC—LC-MS exploratory meetings of the early 1960's. Speaking for the NLC Prof. Conrad Bergendoff said:

The *doctrina evangelii* (the doctrine of the Gospel), thus, is what the New Testament proclaims as its fundamental truth and this is the Gospel which is to be preached in the church of Christ.

What has been said hitherto clearly points to a Gospel or message which proclaimed what God had done for man in Christ Jesus and what God still does in human hearts by the ministry of the Word. . . It is the message of Christ dying for our sins and rising to reign in the hearts of his people eternally.

The force of the *satis est* (it is enough) is as much as to declare that not **more** than the Gospel could be demanded for true unity as to declare that nothing less was required. This throws the weight of the matter on what is the Gospel, and we have seen that its sum and substance is the forgiveness of sins secured by the atoning life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Wherever this Gospel is proclaimed and believed there is unity, and such unity should be witnessed to the world.

There is warrant neither in Scripture nor in the Confessions for a demand that a whole theological system be held in common before a unity can be established between groups of Christians . . . .

The proposition of complete unity or none at all cannot be defended on scriptural grounds, nor is it the description of the relations between Christians in church history. (Conrad Bergendoff, "A Lutheran Study of Church Unity," *Essays on the Lutheran Confessions Basic to Lutheran Cooperation*, published jointly by The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, St. Louis, Missouri, and The National Lutheran Council, New York, N.Y., 1961, pp. 7.9.10.14.)

34. The Lutheran Confessions, however, are clear also in this matter. The Article in question (AC, VII) is itself clear, for the contrast in it is not between some doctrines of Scripture and other doctrines of Scripture, but between the doctrine of the Gospel and church ceremonies. If there should be any doubt that the word "Gospel" or "the doctrine of the Gospel" as used in Article VII means all the doctrines of Scripture, one should read the Apology which, written by the same

author, and published less than a year later, serves as the chief commentary on the Augsburg Confession. Note how the word "Gospel" is used in the Apology:

The Gospel declares that all men are under sin and are worthy of eternal wrath and death. For Christ's sake it offers forgiveness of sins and justification, which are received by faith. (IV, 62, p.115, Tappert).

It (the church) is, rather, made up of men scattered throughout the world who agree on the Gospel and have the same Christ, the same Holy Spirit, and the same sacraments, whether they have the same human traditions or not. (VII & VIII, 10, p. 170, Tappert).

Our opponents say that universal traditions should be observed because they are supposed to have been handed down by the apostles. How devout they are! Apostolic rites they want to keep, apostolic doctrine they do not want to keep. (VII & VIII, 38, pp.175-176).

For the sum of the proclamation of the Gospel is to denounce sin, to offer the forgiveness of sins and righteousness for Christ's sake, to grant the Holy Spirit and eternal life, and to lead us as regenerated men to do good. Christ gives this summary of the Gospel in the last chapter of Luke (24:47), "That penitence and forgiveness of sins should be preached in my name to all nations." (XII, 29-30, pp. 185-186, Tappert).

35. The Formula of Concord also makes clear how the word "Gospel" is used when it states:

The word "Gospel", is not used in a single sense in Holy Scripture, and this was the original occasion of the controversy. Therefore we believe, teach, and confess that when the word "Gospel" means the entire doctrine of Christ which he proclaimed personally in his teaching ministry and which his apostles set forth (examples of this meaning occur in Mark 1:15 and Acts 20:24), then it is correct to say or write that the Gospel is a proclamation both of repentance and of forgiveness of sins. (Epit., V,6, p. 478, Tappert).

We believe, teach, and confess that no church should condemn another because it has fewer or more external ceremonies not commanded by God, as long as there is mutual agreement in doctrine and in all its articles as well as in the right use of the holy sacraments, according to the familiar axiom, "Disagreement in fasting does not destroy agreement in faith." (Epit. X,7, pp. 493-494, Tappert).

Hence yielding or conforming in external things, where Christian agreement in doctrine has not previously been achieved, will support the idolaters in their idolatry, and on the other hand, it will sadden and scandalize true believers and weaken them in their faith (Solid Declaration X,16, p. 613, Tappert).

In line with the above, churches will not condemn each other because of a difference in ceremonies, when in Christian liberty one uses fewer or more of them, as long as they are otherwise agreed in doctrine and in all its articles and are also agreed concerning the right use of the holy sacraments, according to the well-known axiom, "Disagreement in fasting should not destroy agreement in faith." (Solid Declaration, X.31, p. 616, Tappert).

36. This position, as quoted above from the Lutheran Confessions, is what we by our ordination vow and by our promises at our installation, are pledged to "believe, teach and confess" on the doctrine of church fellowship.
37. Perhaps this would be the place to mention the issue often raised among Lutherans regarding fundamental and non-fundamental doctrines. The distinction is rightly made when the question under consideration regards how much it is necessary to know of Holy Scripture in order to have saving faith. There are truths of Scripture that are non-fundamental in this sense. But the question regarding fundamental and non-fundamental doctrines arises more frequently regarding the doctrine of church fellowship. The Lutheran Confessions, as may be seen from the quotations above, know of no non-fundamental doctrines, doctrines on which it is not necessary to agree, for the acknowledgment and exercise of church fellowship. That is fundamentalist Reformed teaching, not confessional Lutheran teaching, which makes some doctrines of Scripture nonfundamental for church fellowship.
38. The matter regarding a "fundamental unity" should also be mentioned at this point. In stressing the scriptural requirement of doctrinal agreement for church fellowship one must bear in mind that among Christians, especially in congregations and church bodies, there will seldom, if ever, be more than a fundamental unity in doctrine and practice. This means that misunderstandings due to an incomplete knowledge and understanding of scripture may well arise among those who are in church fellowship. It does not mean an outright denial of any doctrine stated in scripture or a rejection of the scripture itself. The church will bear with weak brethren in all patience and love. In so doing the church will also make clear who are the weak and who are the strong (cf. Ro chapters 14 and 15). But this is something other than saying that certain doctrines of scripture are expendable, or than agreeing to disagree.
39. But are the Lutheran Confessions right, and is our synod right, when it insists on agreement in doctrine as a prerequisite for the acknowledgment and exercise of church-fellowship? There is only one sure and true test also for Lutheran doctrine, and that is: "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa 8:20). What does the Bible say regarding the demands for church fellowship? It says:

Eph 2:19-20 "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone.

The foundation of the apostles and prophets is, of course, the Holy Scriptures, the apostolic-prophetic word, and in this passage the church is tied to, connected to their word, and that is, of course, the pure word.

John 8:31-32 Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

Again, this means the word in its truth and purity.

Eph 4:3-6: Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

Here the unity of the Spirit is connected to the "one Lord, one faith, one baptism." Even if you take the "one faith" in the sense of subjective faith, you still have the church and its "unity of the Spirit" connected to the Sacrament of Holy Baptism and the confession of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Spirit.

1 Co 1:10: Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

Paul here tells the Christians in Corinth that they should be united in the right and in the same understanding of the Word. They should not be divided, but stand together in doctrine and practice.

Acts 2:42: And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Here we see that the early church exercised church fellowship on the basis of agreement in doctrine.

2 John, vv. 9-11: Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.

The "doctrine of Christ" mentioned here includes all of the Old Testament for Christ himself accepted it, and said of it: "The Scripture cannot be broken" (Jn 10:35). It likewise includes all that Christ himself taught, Law and Gospel; and also everything that his disciples taught, including their writings of the New Testament. In brief: everything in the Old and New Testaments. We are not to acknowledge or exercise church fellowship with anyone who does not abide in

this doctrine, or with anyone who comes to us but does not bring this doctrine. Church fellowship is tied here to the pure marks of the church.

Gal 1:6-9: I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.