

The Blessings of Fellowship

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Introduction: Satan's attack on Christian fellowship

Does Satan learn from his mistakes? I think so. It's true that in his unregenerate state the Prince of darkness lives in spiritual darkness. For the unbelieving spirit there is inherent inability to grasp the blessedness of spiritual truth and innate insistence on rejecting it. But that does not mean he is intellectually challenged. When the Bible urges us to remember that we are fighting against "spiritual wickedness in high places (Ephesians. 6:12)," the implication is that we are not dealing with dummies in our battle of faith. Nor are we ignorant of his devices and goals. The Bible says he is constantly "prowl(ing) around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour (I Peter 5:8)." He is viciously intent on robbing individual Christians of their faith and would "love" to destroy the whole Christian Church if he could. And that is where, I believe, history is showing that he has learned from his mistakes; or at least learned some lessons from his failures.

Failing in his attempt to prevent Jesus from accomplishing man's redemption, Satan set about trying to keep people from believing in Jesus and being saved. At first he attacked the person of Christ and thought he would keep people from saving faith by introducing errors like Arianism. He met with success. But despite the length of time that Arianism kept spooking around, many people still kept on believing in Jesus as the God-man, our Savior from sin. So he tried another tactic. Using the voice of those who claimed to represent Christ on earth, he led the church on a downhill slide into the ever-deeper muck of work righteousness. And for many years Jesus was not seen clearly as Savior, but only as a righteous Judge ready to condemn people for not living lives righteous enough to please God. Many souls were led astray, but still the Christian faith was not extinguished. A heroic monk from Germany learned from the Scriptures of God's grace in Christ. And God used him to refocus the church again on salvation in Jesus Christ through faith alone.

Satan did not give up. He does not tire of his evil intent to destroy. And he has learned from his failures. The errors he introduced did not succeed in destroying the Church because people still had the Bible to go back to to learn the truth. So he plotted his final plan. Go after the Bible. The oldest strategy would again be the one that does the most damage. Get people to doubt God's Word, the very source and power for faith in Jesus. He could not destroy God's Word itself because "it is imperishable seed... the living and enduring Word of God ..which stands forever (I Peter 1:23ff)." But he could get people to ignore God's Word. So he attacked it on two fronts. First: he would strive to convince people it wasn't true by denying verbal inspiration and inerrancy. And second: he would strive to confuse people about what is true by mixing its truth with error. This he would accomplish by getting people to set aside fellowship principles in the practice of their faith. This is what has happened in these last days. We need only read the religious journals and listen to the pronouncements of religious bodies to see how true it is. Satan is trying hard to destroy the Church by taking away the foundation of the Church, God's Word, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.

Satan will fail again. The gates of hell shall not prevail against Christ's Church (Matthew 16:18). But Satan will succeed in doing it much damage. "And many false prophets will appear and deceive many people" (Matthew 24:11). They will use false teaching to eat away at faith in Christ, and they will use false fellowship to make room for their error. Do they always do so

intentionally to deceive and harm? No. Sometimes they themselves have been deceived and think they are doing God a favor. But the damage that is done is damning nonetheless. “If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened” (Matthew 24:22).

It should not be surprising to us, then, when in these last days we will need to face ever increasing pressure, and withstand ever-greater attacks on the doctrines of Scripture and fellowship. Our members are feeling it and so are we. When was the last time a month passed without some question, or comment, or even criticism being raised by our members on our practice of fellowship. We need to remind ourselves again and again of the importance of these things. We need to cherish and defend with all the strength God gives us the teachings of the Bible, and the practice of fellowship in which we use the teachings of the Bible to nurture Christian faith. We need to “encourage one another and all the more as you see the day approaching” (Hebrews 10:25). We need not only to recognize the importance of practicing fellowship, but to appreciate and enjoy the blessings of fellowship as God intends for us.

Fellowship has become an identity of the WELS

Much has been written on the subject of fellowship in our circles. That is natural since God has brought us through a time when we have had to identify and clarify our understanding of what the Bible teaches on fellowship. Material is still being written. As this paper was being prepared an article was written in *The Northwestern Lutheran*ⁱ answering a question on fellowship. At this summer’s Synod Convention the convention paper read to the delegates was entitled *We Are Reborn Into God’s Family*, by Professor David Valleskey and spoke of our practice of fellowship. Many other references could be made.

Have individuals in our circles ever been unclear on an understanding of fellowship? We would be vain to think otherwise. Has some writing or address ever been expressed poorly on the subject of fellowship? Surely, that has happened. Have pastors or congregations ever been weak in putting Scriptural fellowship principles into practice? We would not deny that. Yet through fire the metal is tested and purified. Through the struggle God has granted to us as a church body a blessed understanding and practice of fellowship that is in keeping with His will. And we thank Him for His grace to us.

All that has been said and done relative to fellowship in the Wisconsin Synod has given us a fellowship identity in the world. This is not bad. We would agree with Professor John Brug in the introduction of his book *Church Fellowship - Working Together for the Truth*, that “The doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone holds first place in our hearts and in our preaching.”ⁱⁱ We would be pleased if people would identify us with a clear and bold proclamation of the doctrine of justification by faith. And we would be satisfied as Brug says, “to have the inerrancy of Scripture listed second among the WELS’ doctrinal priorities.”ⁱⁱⁱ However, it is usually with fellowship that we are most identified—and sometimes in a negative way. “The WELS position on church fellowship is simple. They are against it.”^{iv} Even our own members often think of our church’s practice of fellowship mainly in terms of “closed communion” and not being able to pray with other Christians. Nevertheless, that does not change the fact that the benefits of Scriptural fellowship practice are a very positive thing for our faith. An identity with this teaching ought to be viewed as a blessing from God.

Much of what has been written about fellowship has stressed the limitations and restrictions of fellowship. This is understandable since it is the avoidance of error and errorists that preserves the truth. And preserving the truth is what leads to ongoing blessings from God

through His truth. Fellowship principles, therefore, often are associated with what we might call the negative side of fellowship—namely a recognition of those with whom we ought not practice fellowship. The Church of the Lutheran Confession even calls their doctrine, “The Separation Principle.”

Recognizing error and avoiding those who persist in error after admonition is very important to faith. That’s what we must do to withstand Satan’s attacks against proper Scriptural fellowship practice. Yet, the emphasis on this aspect of fellowship has often left unsaid what great blessings are ours when Scriptural fellowship is properly practiced. Since much of what has been written about fellowship in our circles has emphasized the limitations and restrictions of fellowship, we will devote our attention in this writing to what we will refer to as the positive side of fellowship—the blessings and benefits of fellowship. We will pray that God help us see, and others see in us as our WELS identity, also this blessed side of Scriptural fellowship practice.

The Basic Tenets of Fellowship

Before reflecting on the blessings of fellowship, it would seem advisable to describe what we believe fellowship is. At least, in summary form we will list the basic tenets of fellowship. Definitions of fellowship have usually come fairly close to repeating what the essay on church fellowship in our synod’s doctrinal statements booklet of 1970 says. “Church fellowship is every joint expression, manifestation, and demonstration of the common faith in which Christians are united with one another.”^v We can say it in less precise, but simpler words. Church fellowship is the oneness of faith that Christians have and practice together. The following is a list of some of the basic principles that form our understanding of Christian fellowship.

1. All Christians are united in faith before God and are members of the one, true Christian Church. (John 17:20,21; I Corinthians 1:9; 12:12,13; Galatians 3:26; Ephesians 4:3-6; I John 1:3,7; 3:1.)

2. Since we can not read hearts (I Samuel 16:7; II Timothy 2:19) and God expressly forbids us from judging the hearts of others (Matthew 7:1; 13:28-30), Christians are to determine oneness of faith with other Christians on the basis of a person’s confession of faith and how that faith is practiced. (Romans 10:10; John 13:17; I John 4:1; Matthew, 7:16).

3. God directs Christians to practice fellowship with other Christians on the basis of agreement (oneness) in their teaching and practice so that unscriptural teachings and practices do not divide our unity and harm faith. (Deuteronomy 4:2; Matthew 28:20; I Corinthians 1:10; Ephesians 4:3; II Thessalonians 2:14,15; Hebrews 10:23; Revelation 22:18,19).

4. God directs Christians to avoid the practice of fellowship with unbelievers whose ungodly teachings and ways undermine and destroy faith. (Matthew 24:11,12,23-25; Romans 12:2; I Corinthians 5:9-13; II Corinthians 6:14-17; Ephesians 5:1-10,11).

5. God directs Christians to avoid the practice of fellowship with other Christians whose confession and practice of faith are not in agreement on the teachings of God’s Word, (there is not oneness or agreement in the confessions and practice of faith) lest those disagreements divide the unity of the church and harm faith. (Matthew 7:15ff; Romans 16:17; Galatians 1:6-9; 6:1; 11 Thessalonians 3:6,14,15; II Timothy 2:(14-16)17-19; Titus 3:9,10; I John 4:1; II John 9-11).

(or, similarly)

6. God directs Christians to avoid the practice of fellowship with those who allow doctrinal error to stand in company with the truth, or whose confession and practice of faith

reveals that error in any form is taught or tolerated, lest faith be undermined and destroyed. (same passages as point 5).

7. God directs Christians to preserve and make use of the fellowship of faith which we enjoy with other Christians (on the basis of agreement in confession and practice) for our spiritual encouragement and strengthening. (I Corinthians 12:25,26; Galatians 2:9; Ephesians 5:19; Hebrews 10:23-25).

8. Church membership is a person's clearest and most binding confession of faith. It unites him with other Christians who confess and practice the same faith. (I John 1:19).

The Blessings of Fellowship

With these basic tenets of fellowship understood we will now elaborate on what is our main focus in this discussion: the blessings of fellowship. With this kind of expression, the blessings of fellowship, we do not mean to imply that the negative side of fellowship with its God directed restrictions and limitations are not blessings for our faith. It is a great blessing to faith to be kept safe from error so that it is not weakened or destroyed by false teaching. It is a great blessing to faith to defend the truth from error so that the Holy Spirit can work without the hindrance of false teaching to nurture and build up Christian faith. It is God who has said, "watch out for, avoid, warn, have nothing to do with." And whatever God says is good and a blessing to faith.

Professor Carl Lawrenz wrote, "It would not be wholesome to think of Christian fellowship too exclusively in terms of what we might call its negative side. In carrying out our assignment we have, therefore, treated it in its wide scope that we may again be reminded what a glorious blessing is involved in Christian fellowship, that we may be deeply constrained by the abundant encouragements of holy Writ."^{vi} Even with such encouragements, however, we sometimes fail to appreciate fully how greatly our faith is blessed in a positive way when Christian fellowship is practiced and enjoyed as God directs it to be. Here are what I would summarize are the blessings of fellowship when it is practiced as God wants.

Preserves the Word

One of the intended results of practicing fellowship is preserving the teachings of God's Word from the corruption of error. Here the many passages of Scripture which speak of holding faithfully to the word of God and avoiding error could be cited. "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful" (Hebrews 10:23). Also in Old Testament times God had warned His people, "Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you" (Deuteronomy 4:2). By preserving the Word we also mean defending and holding on to the teachings and confessions of Christians that are clearly based on God's Word. Martin Luther said, "But if you hold that Luther's teaching is evangelical ...you must not utterly cast Luther aside, or you will cast his teaching aside, which you regard as the teaching of Christ."^{vii}

Preserving the Word of God can be easily seen to be the direct result of practicing the limitations and restrictions of fellowship, but the blessings are altogether positive. Wherever the preaching of God's Word is found there Christian faith is nurtured and extended. "Faith comes through hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). Every aspect of our life as Christians when we use the Word of God is affected in a positive way by the proper practice of fellowship. The confidence we have as Christians that our pastors, teachers and Sunday school teachers are teaching us what God Himself wants us to

know is a benefit of preserving the Word. When we practice church discipline and admonish a fellow Christian that has fallen into impenitent sin, this is a positive thing to save a soul that God tells us to do. “Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction” (II Timothy 4:2). One can only imagine the hollow feeling and the uncertainty that must result from not being confident that it is what God says that is being taught and practiced.

How much it means to Christians to have the Word of God and the fellowship of those who hold to that Word is sometimes not appreciated until we don’t have it. “I did not really appreciate what it meant to have a church and to belong to a congregation. We just took those things for granted. You’ll never know what it has meant to me after three years without a church to worship once more in company with fellow Christians.”^{viii} What a tremendous blessing it is to us and to our people to be confident that God has preserved for us His pure Word. We can, and should, remind our people of how good God has been to us by preserving His Word in our midst.

Preserves Unity

How ironic it is. Christians who practice fellowship as God directs and have nothing to do with those who preach or tolerate error are often the ones who are accused of dividing the church. And those who would promote practicing fellowship and working together with other Christians despite differences in teaching applaud themselves as the ones who are promoting unity and harmony in the church. Yet, the opposite is true. It is departing from God’s Word that divides and separates Christians. Those who tolerate different teachings side by side are the ones who “cause divisions and put obstacles in your way contrary to the teaching you have learned” (Romans 16:17). And those who hold to the truth of God’s Word without condoning any diversity of doctrine are the ones who are preserving unity. “I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought (I Corinthians 1:10).

This has always been the position of those who believe the Bible. Diversity of doctrine is not unity. It is diversity. Diversity of doctrine is not healthy, approving of differing paths to the same God. It is approving of many different paths only one of which may lead to God. All the rest of which lead away from God, which is decidedly unhealthy. Agreeing to disagree is an admission of defeat that there is not unity. It is simply the mistaken hope that God will accept us all anyway despite the fact He says in His Word, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). There is only one way of salvation. And that is through Jesus and the Word which He has spoken to us.

Nor can the use of carefully crafted words to which two or more differing convictions can subscribe be called attempts at unity either. They are attempts to gloss over division with the appearance of unity. Francis Pieper wrote, “Agreement in words with disagreement in meaning is altogether contrary to the unity God calls for, and to seek such “a unity” (“we agree to disagree”) is immoral, a trifling with sacred, divine things, which is unseemly for Christians.”^{ix} Our understanding of what constitutes unity is not new. It is what has always been recognized as unity; it is logical; and most importantly of all it is Scriptural.

What a blessing being united is. It is difficult to separate being united from being in harmony and more able to do things together in harmony. And that will be the point of the next section. But for now, just consider some of the immediate benefits of being united in the convictions of one’s faith. When we accept members, we can tell them that their fellow members

are united with them in the same convictions of faith, and there is not controversy among us about the teachings of our faith. When we transfer members we can assure them that they will be going to a church which teaches and practices the same faith as they do in their present congregation. When we visit our sister congregations we can do so looking forward to a service where we will hear God's Word and nourishment for our faith, not something else which we must be concerned about as a danger to faith. There is a spirit of unity and harmony in our church, and in our church meetings, which is often lacking in other church bodies. I distinctly remember on a couple of occasions the comments made by pastors who have come to the WELS by means of colloquy from other churches. They greatly appreciated the spirit of agreement and harmony which they experienced among us as opposed to the controversy and lack of unity they had experienced before. In the WELS you can find unity, not separation and divisiveness. This is a blessing which we not only need to appreciate, but communicate to our people.

Promotes the Work of the Church

As was mentioned in the previous section, it is difficult to separate in the practice of our faith the blessing of being united, with the blessing of being able to work together for the truth in harmony and peace. One Christian author says this about working together as fellow Christians to do God's work: "Still another purpose of (outward) Christian fellowship is the extension of God's kingdom throughout the world."^x Fellowship does have to do with working together as Christians: to build each other up, to admonish and encourage one another, to carry out God's mission together. Paul says, "I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith" (Romans 1:11,12). This is what the real life practice of our fellowship is all about. We can quote at length from the article on church fellowship from *The Abiding Word* to which we have referred several times earlier.

Christians like to visit together and talk things over. They have much to tell one another. In the Church of our Savior events are continually occurring that are of intense interest to its members. The Church is daily winning victories. New souls are added to the Church daily, and new territories are being occupied. That a church had been founded in Rome and that this church was making good progress was a matter of conversation among Christians all over the world. Paul writes, "Your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world" (Romans 1:8). In a similar manner today children of God look forward to meeting with their fellow believers and discussing the forward march of the Gospel here at home and on all the continents of our world and on the isles of the seas. The Church continually has problems to overcome. Often it is beset by foes from without and disturbances within. Christians meet to discuss these problems and to prepare themselves with the help of God's Word and His Spirit to meet the foes and to quiet troubled waters. They encourage one another, and they come away from such meetings and discussions refreshed in spirit, even as the first Christians returned from the conference in Jerusalem with new courage to carry on the Lord's work.

Being united certainly promotes working together in a common cause. When husband and wife, parents and children, employer and employee, government and those being governed are in agreement on the issues affecting them, then there is peace and harmony. Life is more enjoyable, work is more possible and goals are more attainable. In the church, where there is

unity of confession in faith, the same things are true. The church is able to work together for the truth in harmony and carry out its mission more readily. When there is lack of unity both outside and inside the church, there is friction and disharmony. Relationships are unpleasant; work is hindered.

The practice of fellowship in the WELS would be a good demonstration of how unity in a church promotes working together in harmony. Though we are still sinners who let sin hinder the activity of our faith, Christian fellowship enables us to get work done with a minimum of disagreement and friction. There is no argument over what doctrines should be preached and taught in our pulpits. There is no disagreement on the religious content of what our teachers teach in the classroom. There is no fighting on the conference or convention floor over what we stand for and proclaim as a church. There may be differences of opinion on how best to do that teaching, and how best to advance the cause of what we believe. But even then, unless we let our old Adam get in the way, there is unity of spirit and harmony as we meld our differences of opinion into a consensus on what to do. Mission boards, on the home and world level, do not argue over what it is we are trying to accomplish in our mission fields: spread the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ. In all honesty, it is truly remarkable what God has enabled us to do as individual congregations and as a church body with the resources He has made available to us. There is a lot of “bang for the buck” accomplished because of good church fellowship.

A Foretaste of Heaven

A blessing of fellowship we ought not ignore is the beauty and peace that goes along with being one in faith with one another. This is another facet on the diamond of unity to appreciate. In one way you could say that being at one with God and with each other is what God has had in mind all along with the Christian faith, the re-establishment of the oneness that was lost in the Garden. That’s what the word “atonement” helps us to grasp. As Jesus struggled mightily with the tensions and pressures, which accompanied the great work of redemption, He looked forward to that oneness being realized once again. He talked about giving us His peace, and He prayed for His disciples and for us, “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world” (John 17:20-24).

Even before we get to heaven, as much as it is possible in a sinful world, God wants us to have—and to enjoy—that peace and harmony that comes through oneness of faith. “How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity” (Psalm 133:1). And the end result of that oneness of faith, which we have with each other, and oneness with our God, is to be able to enjoy life at one with our God forever. “For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore” (Psalm 133:3).

We have already been implying and incorporating the benefits of that oneness in previous sections: the harmony, the peace, the togetherness, the friendship, the helpfulness, the working together that is part of being in true fellowship. Here on earth that fellowship is still tarnished to some degree by the affects of sin. We shall not overcome that completely in this life. But in heaven it shall not be so. In heaven there will be no diversity of doctrine. In heaven there will be

no disagreements on what to do together. In heaven there will be no denominations, separated by sin and error from a right understanding and practice of our fellowship with God. “For the old order of things has passed away” (Revelation 21:4). In heaven there will be only complete and perfect harmony and oneness with God and with each other forever.

To the extent that we let the Holy Spirit help us overcome sin and error, and lead us to remain at one with God and His Word, we can enjoy that harmony and oneness also here on earth. This is a blessing that we have in the WELS through true Christian fellowship. Let us never fail to appreciate, yes let us proclaim unashamedly, the beauty of what God has given us to enjoy in the WELS in the oneness of our faith. It is a foretaste of heaven.

Conclusion

As we bring to a conclusion our thoughts on the blessings of fellowship what are the thoughts that remain to be expressed? For one, let us not view fellowship as just another doctrine of the church, derived from a few passages of Scripture. Brug writes,

Any attempt to summarize the scriptural basis for the doctrine of church fellowship is faced with an immediate difficulty. The abundance of the biblical material makes it impossible to begin to cover the topic adequately in a short book. At least half of the letters of the New Testament were written primarily to preserve a fellowship that was in jeopardy. Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and the three letters of John would be prime examples of this category. Several other letters were written to celebrate or strengthen an existing fellowship. Romans and Philippians fall into this category. The pastoral epistles emphasize Paul’s directions to young pastors for strengthening and preserving fellowship.^{xi}

To this we could add that practicing fellowship was an integral part of the way God directed His people to live in Old Testament times. Practicing fellowship as the WELS does is certainly not a peculiarly WELS notion. The Church has long practiced fellowship as described in the Bible.

We can say that Christian fellowship touches every aspect of our lives as God’s children. Even as the Word of God is the basis for everything that we believe, fellowship permeates every aspect of how we live and practice that faith with one another. It’s activity is carried out in the way we gather around the Word for the nourishment of faith, celebrate the Lord’s Supper together in oneness of the confession of our faith, proclaim the Word together, pray together, work together, encourage one another, admonish one another, help each other walk the path of faith together until we get to heaven; help others to find that way of life. Christian fellowship, properly practiced is a tremendously positive influence on the lives of God’s children.

Have we who claim to hold to the true practice of fellowship done a good job of practicing fellowship? Perhaps, as He did in His letter to the seven churches of Asia Minor, God might extend to us some word of commendation for having a little strength and holding on to His Word. At least in the negative, or restrictive, aspects of how fellowship needs to be applied we may have been diligent in trying to safeguard truth—and the practice of faith—from error. But driving a car well does not just consist in learning how to avoid crashes. That’s important, and we need to be always on the alert of potentially dangerous situations. But as we practice defensive driving we are going somewhere. We are going to different destination, and carrying about our family, and running errands, and doing things in that vehicle. So it is with fellowship.

It is a spiritual vehicle, so-to-speak, that is intended to accomplish positive things for our lives of faith.

Have we always done a good job with this aspect of fellowship? Perhaps so, perhaps not always. Man's sinful nature still shows itself in WELS also. Every time we have a member become inactive in church, and we do little or nothing to try to admonish and encourage that individual in his faith, maybe even just remove him from membership without any further ado, we are not practicing good fellowship. Every time our congregation, or synod, resolves on a course of action to build, preach, meet, relocate, amalgamate, or carry out some other activity together, and we balk and resist and don't participate willingly, we are not practicing good fellowship. Every time our high school plans a course of action which includes a building fund drive, or debt retirement, and we pay only minimal attention and fail to participate heartily, we are not practicing good fellowship. Every time we meet at a conference or convention, and we really have no good reason not to be present to encourage, strengthen, and support one another, but instead isolate ourselves from our brothers for only earthly reasons, we are not practicing good fellowship. We could go on, but that is enough admonition of law for now.

The point is, we who have God-pleasing fellowship practice on paper, and to a certain degree in the practice of the negative limitations, need to remember that fellowship is intended to be positive influence and blessing for us as we practice our faith. In a sense Scriptural fellowship truths may be summarized by three words: faith, confession, and action. These three words would indicate a) Invisible Church; b) confession of faith in the visible church, and c) joint expression of faith in action. It is in all of these dimensions that we recognize and strive to put into practice Scriptural fellowship.

There are many blessings to fellowship. The ultimate blessing is the preservation of the Word, and practice in keeping with that Word, so that Satan's attacks against saving faith may be resisted, and God's blessing of oneness of life with Him may be enjoyed. Satan shall not gain the victory over Christ's Church. May he never gain the victory over us. He will not if we practice fellowship properly to preserve the Word, and then faithfully and sincerely use that Word to let the Holy Spirit guide and strengthen us in faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior.

Fellowship is a tremendously positive blessing for the Christian Church. There are many blessings to be enjoyed when we practice fellowship as Scripture directs. Let's not be defensive about its practice, and meekly refer to it in a defensive way to try to explain it to those who don't understand. Let's let God help us to use it positively and boldly as an identity for the WELS that is a true source of blessing for those who would fellowship with us.

"How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity" (Psalm 133:1).

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ⁱ *The Northwestern Lutheran* September 1997, p. 30 ff

ⁱⁱ John Brug, *Church Fellowship—Working Together for the Truth*, NPH p. 7

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid.*, p. 7

^{iv} *Ibid.*, p. 24

^v CICR, *Doctrinal Statements of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, Essay on Church Fellowship, p. 15.

^{vi} Carl Lawrenz, The Scriptural Principles Concerning Church Fellowship, *Our Great Heritage: Volume III*. Lyle Lange, editor, NPH, 1991, p. 444.

^{vii} *The Abiding Word, Volume Two*. Church Fellowship (quoting from St. Louis edition, XX:90ff), CPH, 1947, p. 524.

^{viii} *Ibid.*, p. 517.

^{ix} Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics, Volume III*, CPH, 1953, p. 246.

^x *The Abiding Word, Volume Two* Church Fellowship, CPH, 1947, p. 534.

^{xi} John Brug, *Church Fellowship—Working Together for the Truth*, NPH, p. 23