

# Church Fellowship—Our Term, God’s Teaching

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Any discussion of church fellowship extends beyond the scope of a single conference paper. Evidence is quickly adduced when one looks at the vast amount of material that must be read. The existence of this material is due in no small measure to the impasse between our Synod and the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. The doctrine has been studied by both sides and the opposing positions are well documented. In view of the recent Missouri Synod convention that showed a conservative tendency we should remember that it was the doctrine and practice of church fellowship which caused the termination of our association. The topic was assigned to bring our attention again to a doctrine that needs continued careful study. The topic was assigned to one who was not involved in the events that ended our fellowship with Missouri. I believe it was assigned with two questions in mind: 1) Have we been moved to change our mind on this doctrine and its practice and 2) Do those who have not been tried in the fires of controversy adhere to the official position of the Synod? The second question might better be encompassed by asking if we are still committed to the Scriptures and against error.

The paper may be divided into four parts. I. Church Fellowship is exercised by the visible church. II. Church Fellowship must be exercised on the basis of confession. III. Church Fellowship is to be exercised in Christian love, and IV. Termination of Church Fellowship is termination of all activities that would yield an unclear confession. By this division it should be clear that we are treating Church Fellowship as the activity by which Christians demonstrate their common faith and their aversion to error.

## I. Church Fellowship is exercised by the visible church.

A discussion of church fellowship must be undertaken in the context of an understanding of the Church. If we do not understand the “*una sancta*” and its manifestations in visible churches, then we will proceed with difficulty in our discussion. The Church is nothing more and nothing less than the assembly of all believers in Christ. We refer to it as the communion of saints; it is people who believe in Jesus Christ. The only requisite for membership in the Church is faith in the Savior, for through faith we become children of God and heirs according to God’s promise. (Gal 3:26-29) We note the concept when we are told that believers were added to the Lord in Jerusalem at Pentecost and afterward, “The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.” (Acts 2:27; Cf. also Acts 5:12-14) Unbelievers were contrasted with the believers and are not part of the Church. (Eph. 2:1-7)

The characteristics of this group of believers are most frequently expressed by describing the Church as “one, holy, and Christian.” It is Christian because all its members believe in Jesus and it is founded on the Savior’s work of redemption, It is holy because the members of the Church, as believers, receive the forgiveness of sins. They are saints before God through the forgiveness of sins. Of particular importance for us is the term “one.” The church is undivided. It is the assembly of all believers of all times, in all places.

We can say with the Apostle, “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,” (Eph, 4:4-6) The Scriptures give other clear references to its unity with Ro 12:5 and Acts 4:32 among them. This union is based on nothing external. It consists of the common faith in Jesus, its one head, and the common hope of its members and their reciprocal love. All individual members of the Church share the great blessings freely provided by God’s grace. They all have felt the presence of the Holy Spirit, who has called, gathered, enlightened and sanctified them. The unity of this assembly of all believers is without schism, and it exists on the same level as their faith—a spiritual one.

Therein is the great difficulty, The one, holy Christian Church is an entity that is beyond our human powers to perceive. It is invisible. Because we, as human beings, observe only the outward appearance: we cannot know with certainty those who belong to the Lord. God alone can peer into the heart where faith resides. (I Sam. 16:7) While we do not know for sure which people belong to the Lord, He does. (11 Tim. 2:19) Even

our estimation of the membership of the Church may be entirely incorrect, (I Kings 19 and Romans 11) Therefore the Church is invisible to us.

Although it is invisible, we can detect its presence. The Holy Spirit has promised to work in the hearts of men through the means of grace. Where the means of grace is in use, the Holy Spirit works and we postulate there will be Christians. The means of grace are the visible marks of the church. Therefore believers will gather around the Word and Sacraments and will form visible assemblies. They are discernable to the human senses. Yet as the Savior's parable of the tares among the wheat reminds us, there will be hypocrites among the believers. As soon as we are dealing with fallible human understanding and perception we can no longer deal with the invisible holy, one, Christian Church. The presence of visible churches assembled around the marks of the Church reveals the presence of the "*una sancta*." We dare never identify any visible church organization with the "*una sancta*." This would be presumption on two fronts. First it would presuppose the ability to look into the heart and see faith. It is the Lord who knows those who belong to him. No human can see the faith or lack of it in the heart. Secondly it would suggest a limit to the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will operate wherever the message of the Savior is proclaimed. (Is 55:8-11) This presumption becomes human arrogance in matters where there is no warrant for such pride.

The assembly of Christians together in visible groups was a natural phenomenon. When Jesus ascended, we find the Church assembled together awaiting the gift of the Holy Spirit. After Pentecost we again find the believers assembled together and growing in number. They all believed in the Savior; their common faith drew them together and resulted in a visible assembly. Christians have always come together for worship and mutual edification. (Heb 10:23-25) With the Savior's words still in their ears (Matt 28:19-20 "Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations...."), they needed to be about the task of spreading the Gospel message. This effort could be done together.

The congregation at Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey with their prayers and blessings. (Acts 13) The Savior's words had encouraged them to join in spreading the Gospel. He used the plural, "Go ye" and "Ye shall be witnesses...." (Acts 1:0)

The Christian had been redeemed by the blood of Jesus. He had been sanctified by the Holy Spirit. The Word of God that was the tool of the Holy Spirit is precious to him. In their missionary activity believers were to teach "all things whatsoever I have commanded you." The Savior's high regard for the Scriptures was to be a part of them too. (Matt, 5:18., "For verily I say unto you till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass, from the law, till all be fulfilled.") The Word was their lifeline, their assurance of the great blessings of God's grace. Faithful disciples were to continue in that Word (John 8:31). The task before every Christian is to adhere to the Word of God faithfully and to proclaim its whole truth powerfully.

The Savior at another time had prayed that the believers would be joined together in one, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." (John 17:20-21) The desire expressed in this prayer is a heartfelt desire for unity on the part of every Christian. They were to join together for worship, mutual edification and implementation of the task given by the Savior himself. Jesus, however, directed his sheep to be careful as they sought out fellow Christians with whom to worship and carry on his work, "Beware of false prophets which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." (Matt, 7:15) It surely was not to be a gathering together of all who appeared to be His sheep. It was to be a careful assembly of believers who knew what the Word of the Lord said and turned away from that, which was false.

There were false teachers, and they were always trying to gain adherents for their views. The Savior had warned them about the false teachers. His warning did not cause the false teachers to disappear nor did it keep them from infecting the Christian assemblies. Yet the unity for which Jesus prayed was not a phantom, It was exhorted by the Apostles and experienced by many of the early Christian congregations. The expression of such unity was nevertheless often difficult and frustrating. Even in congregations that the Apostle Paul established, false teachers could be found. (Cf. the letters to Galatia and Colossae.) Christians were to be "wise as serpents

and harmless as doves” for the Savior had sent them out as sheep among the wolves. (Matt. 10:16) They were not to have fellowship with the wolves and were regularly encouraged to avoid such. It should be clear that the discriminating Christian could exercise fellowship only on the level of the visible church. The spiritual bond of union was present but invisible and for all practical purposes impossible to be of value in expressing union.

The term Church Fellowship is used to apply to the uniting with fellow Christians and the avoiding of false teachers. The use of the term reflects the injunctions found in the Scriptures. It reflects the “*koinonia*” of the “*una sancta*” but it is not exactly that “*koinonia*.” It surely is a Scriptural principle as the above and following demonstrate. It is our term—a term used by the church throughout its history. It gives us a grasp of a teaching of the Scriptures which asks us to be selective and discriminating when we come to join with others as Christians or when we are called upon to refuse joining. In order to understand the term we must have this background in the invisible church. We can never presume to exercise church fellowship in the context of the “*una sancta*.” It is always exercised in the visible realm of visible assemblies of believers.

## II. Church Fellowship must be practiced on the basis of confession.

We first turn to the case of Ananias and Saphira to reveal the importance of confession. By their public confession Ananias and Saphira were members of the church. They professed faith in the Savior by their membership. They sold some of their land and gave to the church. The action that they took was intended to reveal their faith. Others had done exactly the same thing, but with these two it did not reveal the heart. There was deceit in the heart. Peter was allowed by the Holy Spirit to see the deceit. We do not have such divine knowledge of each heart we encounter. We can only act on what we perceive—a confession. The advice that the Apostle John gave to his readers is of importance to us, “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the spirit of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God,” (I John 4:1-2) Notice that the key to recognition is confession. This is something that we as human beings can understand and comprehend. Faith is expressed by the words of the mouth. While no one through normal observation is permitted to see the faith that lives or does not live within the heart, we can perceive and understand the confession that is spoken and written.

Elijah, who was unable to see the hearts of Israel, could only know of one heart which was faithful to the Lord—his own. The Lord reminded him that 7000 had not worshipped Baal. The Lord knows those that are his. We can only tell by the outward confession. Confession reveals the attitude of the heart. This simple truth is expressed by the Apostle Paul, “For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness: and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” (Ro 10:10) We must note that hypocrites will hide behind a good confession. This should not be a surprise. The visible church is composed of believers and hypocrites and we deal with them only on the basis of what we can understand—their confession. Confession is an outward expression of the heart or an outward facade that covers the false heart. The outward union or fellowship that existed among the twelve disciples was not broken by the false heart of Judas. The Lord knew the heart of Judas, but the other disciples did not. Only after his heart was clearly revealed did the bond of fellowship cease. Judas withdrew from the bond of Christian love to perdition. Yes, we may be totally in error about the heart of an individual, for we cannot see the heart or what lies in it. We ought not be in error as to an individual’s confession, for that is something we can see and understand. If any should decide to react to an individual because of what is in his or heart it is only a presumptuous impossibility.

A confession may be spoken or written. We confess our faith in the words of the accepted creeds. As Lutherans we confess our beliefs in the Lutheran confessions. As Wisconsin Synod Lutherans we confess our beliefs also in the pamphlet, “This We Believe.” These are public statements of what lies in our hearts. So is every other public statement that expresses the hope that resides in our hearts and the trust in the Word, which the Holy Spirit has engendered. Peter’s confession of the Savior’s deity is an example of the words that reveal faith in the heart. The Savior encouraged his confession, since it revealed what Peter thought about Jesus of Nazareth. (Matt. 16:13-17)

We have learned from experience that words are often not enough. It can be only a series of words. Confession is also made by what a person does. Actions should correspond to an oral confession. Jesus warned of wolves that came in sheep's clothing and indicated we are to recognize them by their deeds. (Matt. 7:16-20) The case of the man in Corinth is an example. (1 Co 5) His public confession was that of a Christian. By word he acknowledged faith in Jesus, the Savior, but his actions revealed a different heart. Confession of the mouth must be complemented by and consistent with confessions of deed. Whatever then that is done or said is a confession to those who hear and see it.

God is beyond the power of the human intellect. He is too great and wondrous for our limited powers to understand. He must remain infathomable unless he reveals himself to the inhabitants of this terrestrial sphere. He has communicated to us and where he has revealed himself in his word, he can be understood. Those words and the concepts which they communicate are clear to all who wish to understand them, for the Holy Spirit has been sent to enlighten our blind natural hearts. Through the Gospel the Holy Spirit has produced faith and imparted knowledge. Since God reveals himself to us in his word it will require our diligent study to know his truth and to be able to speak it.

The confession, which Scripture enjoins, is faithfulness to the whole counsel of God not only to part of it. The Word of God is the key. We dare speak and do nothing more than God gives us a right to say and do. We dare never withhold a part of what God has communicated to us in his word. As Peter put it so clearly, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God..." "The canon of the New Testament closes with the solemn warning not to add or subtract anything from the words God inspired. (Rev 22:18,19) Those who have the Word of the Lord are to speak it faithfully, "And he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord." (Jer. 23:28) The Christian is therefore to be totally committed to the Word of the Lord. We are to adhere to it strictly.

There are not any unimportant truths that God revealed to us. There may be primary doctrines, which relate to our eternal salvation, and secondary doctrines, which do not, but when God speaks, everything is important. We are bound to consider everything important, Where the word speaks there are no open questions. We cannot allow what is contrary to his Word to stand unchallenged or unopposed. The importance of this matter is brought to us in the destructive power of error. When Paul spoke of the error of Hymenaeus and Philetus, he said, "And their word will eat as doth a canker." (2 Tim 2:17) False doctrine is as dangerous as gangrene. If left unchecked, it will destroy all life. Even a little is intolerable. The Scriptures compare false doctrine with yeast. The effect of yeast on dough is well known; "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." (Gal 5:9) There can be little argument that false teaching is poison to the soul. It cannot be tolerated even in what may be considered secondary or non-fundamental doctrines. Even there it will eventually destroy. The confession of the Christian is to be one of faithfulness to the entire Word of God. He will not want to confess acceptance of any false doctrine. We are encouraged, "Therefore, brethren stand fast, and hold the traditions which have been taught whether by word or our epistle." (2 Thess 2:15) The Apostle speaks a curse on those who would come and speak a doctrine that would corrupt the Gospel of Christ. (Gal 1:6-9) False doctrine robs us of the blessings that God has freely provided by his grace. Our confession is to be sound and uncorrupted. The Scriptural injunctions to adhere to the truth imply that such a confession is possible even in our age.

The desire of each Christian should be faithfulness to the Word of God. If that is in his heart, it will show itself in his confession. He will be careful to speak only what God has communicated. He will also avoid every manifestation of falsehood. He must react to those who proclaim falsehood and confess it. The Scriptures direct us to avoid those whose confession reveals acceptance of false doctrine. The classic passage is, of course, Romans 16:17, but we must indicate clearly that this passage is not one isolated passage which directs us to avoid the poison of falsehood. Other passages are just as clear, "A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition, reject." (Titus 3:10) "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." (2 John 10,11) "And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company

with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.” (2 Thess 3:14-15)

In the day to day world of the visible church what a Christian does and says is to reveal what is in his heart. If a group of Christians join together, we can only perceive that they are joined together in their faith and adherence to the Word of God by their confession. This will be found in what that group of Christians teaches. If it subscribes to certain tenets or principles, it serves notice that it believes them. Public pronouncements by officials serve as its confession unless those officials are repudiated or otherwise disciplined. Groupings of Christians can only deal with other Christian or non-Christian groups on the basis of what is the confession of the group. Individuals, who belong to certain groups, profess acceptance of what the group confesses. It has, of course, happened that an individual may belong to a group and hold to only some of the teachings or principles of the larger group. Then membership in the larger group must be weighed. If belonging to a larger group means acceptance or approval or financial support of something which is contrary to the will of God, it is syncretism even if there be no expressed approval on the part of the individual, Even if there is vocal denial of acceptance of what is wrong with the larger group, the actions, here specifically the action of continued membership, speaks louder than words. We do not presume to judge the heart, but we react to the confession of words and deeds.

Adherence to false doctrine terminates the unity with which Christians can deal. Adherence to false doctrine is expressed in a confession either in word or deed or both that leads a faithful Christian to avoid the individual or group who espoused it and confessed it. There can be no church fellowship in these cases. Church fellowship exists between Christians who have a uniform confession. Since there is no uniform confession, there can be no expression of uniformity. We want to express our fellowship or unity with those who believe as we do. We are urged to speak the same thing and to be perfectly joined together. (1 Co 1:10) We are to continue in the Lord’s Word with its admonitions to avoid falsehood. When we continue in his Word we are faithful disciples of our gracious Lord (John 8:13) Being faithful servants of our God is all that matters. It is better to serve God and have nothing in this life than to receive all the acclaim of the world and not have his blessings. He alone has the words of eternal life. (John 6:66-68)

One final item should be understood. Because we are dealing with the confession of a Christian and cannot know what is in the heart, we are not allowing anyone into nor are we excluding anyone from the “*una sancta*” by the practice of church fellowship. It is possible that those who cannot practice the outward unity required by God’s Word will be united finally in the Church triumphant. We pray for the salvation of all mankind, including the errorist. We trust the power of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel message wherever and whenever the Gospel message is proclaimed. This does not suddenly remove all the restrictions that God has given concerning church fellowship. We must abide by them for we are not permitted to deal with one another on the basis of what is in our hearts, only on the basis of confession.

### III. Church Fellowship is to be exercised in Christian love.

Each Christian is aware of his own frailty. He is a sinful creature who even after conversion retains the old Adam. The truth of God’s Word has been the tool of the Holy Spirit to create faith or the new man. Truth in doctrine is received and retained by the Christian after the new man. The Christian longs to keep the word of God pure and without spot. It is his joy and delight (Psalm 119). While the Christian desires the pure Word, he also knows that he is no more than a word from false doctrine because of the old Adam. Satan, the Father of Lies, of course, is behind all false doctrine, and his strongest ally is an internal one—the old Adam. False doctrine is received by the old Adam as he tries to reassert himself in the life of the Christian. The old Adam seeks to destroy the work of God’s Spirit. The new man seeks to consolidate it. Here there is a battle for supremacy. Often times the old Adam will suggest a compromise between the true and false doctrine, and the new man is called to repudiate such a compromise as a poison that will eventually prove fatal. The combination of false and true doctrine is a mixture that always gives the advantage to the leaven of error. The truth and error cannot be measured as equals.

It has often happened that Christians have been trapped by false ideas. Here we learn a wonderful truth of the activity of church fellowship. It is always exercised in the spirit of Christian love. Christians are concerned for one another. We are concerned about each other's physical dictates. Perhaps more importantly we are concerned about the spiritual well being of our fellow Christians. The purpose of coming together is to exhort one another, encourage one another and strengthen one another. Matthew 18 is one such expression of concern for the spiritual welfare of our fellow Christians. Our concern for the souls of our fellow Christians yes, of all men, is an adopted concern. It first resided in the heart of the Savior who had come to seek and to save the lost. Because we are his adopted children we too have an evangelical concern for souls.

When we see danger in the form of false doctrine invading the life of a Christian, we see the object of the Savior's and our concern for souls. Paul's letters to Galatia and Colossae are a Christian concern for those confronted with error. Paul says, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness considering thyself lest thou also be tempted." (Gal 6:1). The Apostle encouraged the first and second admonition for heretics. (Tit 3:10) The Christian is not to be a child tossed about by every nuance of doctrine. He is to be mature and speak the truth of God's Word. Each Christian at times may need the admonition of spiritually stronger Christians to help us avoid error and spiritual harm. As pastors we regularly are called upon to perform that task for our fellow Christians. There may be times when we too will need the gentle evangelical approach of a fellow believer.

Christian concern leads to admonition of brothers and sisters in Christ. The purpose is shown us in 1 Timothy 4:6. "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine: continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee." Patient evangelical admonition comes from concern for souls. When, however, the admonition is refused and after its patient application, the error is not repudiated there comes a time to separate. Weakness of faith and ignorance are not cause for suspension of fellowship and separation. Suspension follows when an individual persists in error. We are not to associate with persistent errorists. The time when the separation is to take place may result in a painful difference of opinion. We would not want to press the second admonition suggested to Titus to a legalistic rule. We would want to extend ourselves in Christian love to the point where there is no question of any other course. This then also comes from concern for souls. Just as excommunication is the last act of Christian love to call the unrepentant back to God's grace, so the suspension of church fellowship, the "avoid" of the Scriptures, is the last act of Christian love to call the erring to God's truth. It is a recognition of the error persisted in. It is a confession as to the infectious and fatal character of any and all error. It serves witness that Christians committed to the truth will have nothing any longer to do with the error and those who support it wittingly or unwittingly.

IV. Termination of Church Fellowship is termination of all activities that would yield an unclear confession.

The suspension of church fellowship announces that there is no longer a common confession. It has in view the edification of the saints as it shows a concern for what the Lord communicated in his Word. It is never to be done in conceit and pride but with meekness of heart. (Gal 6:1) The Gospel of Christ alone can build up the Church of Christ. The Gospel is to be retained with all diligence in its truth and purity, The proper application of church fellowship has internal blessings, for Christians are led by the Spirit to retain God's truth and keep it pure for themselves, their fellow believers and their children. It also has external blessings. It is a public announcement of the commitment to the truth and the desire to avoid all that is contrary to the Word of God.

The termination of church fellowship must be a termination of all activities that would yield an unclear confession. This is the simple concept of the Scriptures. We are to "... mark ... and avoid..." (Ro 16:17) "Be ye not unequally yoked together..." (2 Co 5:14); "...reject..." (Tit 3:10) "... have no company with him..." (1 Th 3:14); "...Receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed..." (2 Jn 10). All these directions support what has come to be called the unit concept of church fellowship. This is simply stating that every joint expression of faith with those who teach differently is to be avoided. We may classify different expressions as to their activity such as altar fellowship, pulpit fellowship, prayer fellowship or fellowship in church work. Nevertheless, they are all outward expressions that confess our faith and involve worship with other or work in

the Gospel with others. The above exhortations do not know a difference between these activities. All of these activities yield a confession of agreement and cooperation in religious matters, when they are exercised by more than one party or group. When there is no agreement on the teachings of the Bible we must not enter into these activities with those with whom we have no agreement in doctrine, We are, of course, speaking of religious separation, not social separation.

Surely an unclear profession exists when pulpits are exchanged between those who are not agreed in doctrine. It is clearly against the Scriptural injunctions to avoid the false teacher when the teacher is invited to speak to the assembled congregation. This seems to be nothing less than what Paul indicates to Timothy, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine: but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears: and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." (2 Ti 4:3-4) The practice of Communion with those not one in teaching obviates the unity expressed by participation of the Sacrament. (1 Co 10:17) Communion practices that make light of doctrinal differences evident by confession make the distinction between truth and error unclear or even nonexistent. Another area that yields an unclear confession is cooperation in church work between those who teach differently. When those who teach differently become involved in cooperative projects in missions, education, works of charity or other church work, it yields an improper expression of what is believed. How can Christians be yoked together with errorists in the work of the church? Again it destroys the distinction between truth and error. We have the example of the Lord's faithful remnant when they rebuild the temple to give us direction in this area. (Ezr 4:1-3)

The area that has caused the most difficulty is that of joint prayer. Scripture gives prayer a special place in the life of every Christian. It is the conversation of a believing heart with his heavenly Father, For those who do not know Jesus prayer is impossible, for we pray to our heavenly Father only through the Savior. The Scripture speaks of the prayer of those who do not adhere to the Scriptures, when it says, "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination." (Pr 20:9)

The unity of the early church was expressed in its prayer life. "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren." (Ac 4:24) There was no question of the confession of these Christians. Those that were not part of the church did not join with them. (Ac 5:12, 13, and 14) The others were all like minded and expressed their unity even in their prayers. Their witness was clear. The confession was clear, and the Lord blessed the expression of fellowship with the addition of new souls to the Church.

The Scriptures do not know of a progressive concept of fellowship. There is no warrant to permit joint prayer and other forms of worship while refusing to commune together or to exchange pulpits. In fact there is the opposite direction implied in the words, "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." Some efforts to support such a view of progressive fellowship have done strange things with prayer. It appears as if some would consider prayer a means of grace whereby it would become a way to preach Christ. The Savior is careful to tell us prayer is a private thing carried on by a Christian in privacy and it is not to be made a public spectacle at football games, civic activities and on other street corners. (Mt 6:5-8) When carried on together prayer reveals those who pray believe the same truths about the same God. It is an unclear and confusing testimony if the participants do not agree in doctrine. If there is disunity and disagreement on the teachings of the Scripture, joint prayer is a facade for error. Prayer is the voice of the heart ascending to God. It is not the voice of the heart only expressing something to those around us. Those who join their hearts in prayer to God should have a joint confession that permits such an expression of union or fellowship. Those who have no joint confession to the entire Scriptures cannot know whether their hearts are joined together. It is presumption to profess such a union by prayer when the other aspects of the confession point out adherence to false doctrine.

We must reject any subjective standard for the practice of church fellowship. Subjective standards achieve only the loss of our sensitivity to error and our appreciation of the truth. Selective fellowship has, in my belief, contributed to the weakening of the confessional conscience in Lutheranism. It has placed the emphasis on something other than agreement on the doctrines of the Word. We see the religious world seeking to base

fellowship on good intentions, fine character, the brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God regardless of the religious opinions and beliefs expressed. Unclear expressions of fellowship confuse. The term for such unclear expressions is unionism. By joint worship and work with those not united in doctrine we make light of doctrinal differences and error. Unionism attempts to remove the only standard for making a judgment, i.e. by confession and substitute something else that is suppose to be on a higher plane. Since it involves hedging on the doctrines of the Bible it can hardly be a higher plane, It can yield no clear confession because it is based on an unclear concept and a false premise. The charismatic movement cuts through all confession and announces them to be immaterial. This is selective fellowship carried to the final stage. Whatever else a person may confess concerning the Sacraments, the return of Christ, the operation of the Holy Ghost or any other doctrine of the Scripture is unimportant. Those who retain some conscience in fellowship matters but espouse a selective type are involved in a similiar procedure.

The exercise of church fellowship takes place in the visible church. It can only be practiced properly on the basis of the confession of an individual or church body. It can judge the heart only in so far as the confession of an individual reveals the heart. It would be error for us to claim that there were no Christians but in the Wisconsin Synod. It is a misrepresentation of our position and the Scriptures to say that we have made such a claim by terminating fellowship with others. We ought *not* set aside certain aspects of an individual's confession and consider them unimportant. We need to deal with the objective total of a confession, not a subjective rationalization. We hope to have left a clear confession about what we believe are the dangers of false doctrine. We hope only to have exercised our Christian knowledge within the scope that God permits.

Carrying out the demands of the Scripture is never easy. It will produce difficult family situations. It will put us on the spot in groups. It has placed us squarely against the popular idea that we all believe the same things about the same Supreme Being. When God's people returned to Palestine to rebuild the temple and re establish their land, they took a stand that resulted in hardship.

They refused the offer of the Samaritans to help them rebuild the temple, "Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye do and we do sacrifice unto him since the days of Esarhaddon," (Ezr 46:2) The Samaritans then proceeded to make as much trouble for the Jews as they could. They "weakened the hands of the people of Judah." We can expect nothing better.

The Lord indicated that he would allow false prophets among us to prove us, "Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams: for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul" (Dt, 13:3) The exercise of church fellowship is to cause us to look toward our heavenly hope and the Gospel message which speaks to us of it. Our concern for the blessed hope of eternal life will lead us to scrupulous adherence of the truth of God's Word. Without the Word of God we have no assurance of salvation. By study and evangelical application of fellowship we want to preserve the clear Word of God free from error for ourselves and our children. If, by God's grace, we preserve this treasure and adhere to it resolutely, we possess all that really matters here.

Not only do we preserve the pure Word among us and voice our opposition to the errors that would rob us of eternal life and God's Word; we also make clear testimony to our faith and the promises of God's Word. It is a proclamation that is desperately needed in our world today. We know there are some ideas that are contrary to what God says. We know there are some dangerous lies being spawned even in the theological institutions of our land and the world. We know there is only one way to eternal life and that is through faith in Jesus Christ. May the Holy Spirit always grant us his presence so that we may always know, believe and clearly confess the truth of the Scriptures, "He that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully." Jer 23:28

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