

THE DOCTRINE OF CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

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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.

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 the 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 forever. Amen (Rom. 11:33-36).

I. From Sinner to Saint.

We treat 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.

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.

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).

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 Cor. 5:19).

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).

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" (Rom. 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" (Rom. 5:1,2).

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).

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" (Rom. 1:16). Speaking specifically of the Word, our Savior prayed: "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 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 Peter 1:23). Paul likewise, when he writes: "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 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" (John 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. . ." (Titus 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," (Luke 22:20) and that it bestows forgiveness of sins ("which is shed for many for the remission of sins," (Matt. 26:28) thus comforting, strengthening, and preserving the Christian in true faith (cf. also John 8:31,32; John 17:20; John 14:23-26; John 15:3,7)."

Through the continued proclamation 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" (Deut. 32: 47).

Two things which 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" (John 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 Tim. 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.

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 Cor. 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.

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.

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 like him have been justified by faith through the power of the Holy Spirit in the gospel. God himself establishes this unity between Christians (Eph. 4:3-6).

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.

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 fullness 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" (Rom. 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 Tim. 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).

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" (Matt. 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" (John 10:27,28).

III. Locating Other Christians for Church Fellowship.

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 Cor. 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 John 3:2). The halo with which artists surround the heads of the saints reflects merely our charitable belief" (Pieper, III, p. 409).

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 (Ap. VII, 28; German version; *Triglotta*, p. 236).

Christians are to acknowledge and exercise here on earth the church fellowship which 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 Cor. 10:17). Christians are to acknowledge and exercise the church fellowship which 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 which 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 which 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 an 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" (Matt. 18:15-17).

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 (Is. 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.

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.

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. And that brings us to our next point, namely:

IV. The Basis for Acknowledging and Exercising Church Fellowship.

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.

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 acknowledgment 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.

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. 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).

Dr. Samuel McCrea Cavert, a leader in the WCC for many years, proclaims subjective faith to be the basis for the acknowledgment 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.

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 acknowledgment and exercise of church fellowship. We all need the admonition contained in Thesis 11 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).

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 acknowledgment and exercise of church fellowship with other Christians here on earth.

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).

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-LCMS 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.)

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. (Ap. 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. (Ap. 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. (Ap. 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." (Ap. XII, 29-30, pp. 185-186, Tappert).

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. (Ep. 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.” (Ep. 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 (SD 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.” (SD X, 31, p. 616, Tappert).

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.

Perhaps this would be the place to mention the issue often raised among Lutherans regarding 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 nonfundamental 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 teachings, not confessional Lutheran teaching, which makes some doctrines of Scripture non-fundamental for church fellowship.

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. Rom. 14 and 15). But this is something other than saying that certain doctrines of scripture are expendable, or than agreeing to disagree.

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” (Is. 8:20). What *does* the Bible say regarding the demands for church fellowship? It says:

Ephesians 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.

Ephesians 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 Corinthians 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, 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" (John 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

Galatians 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.

The errors of the Judaizers might have seemed to be small and of little consequence since they dealt with certain aspects of the ceremonial law – circumcision, etc. – but they became soul-destroying, and Paul will not tolerate any departure from apostolic teaching. Let the false prophet be damned.

Matthew 16:6,12: Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees . . . Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.

Matthew . 7:15,20: Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. . . Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

Romans 16:17,18: Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; (appetites, NIV); and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.

Suffice it to say that "the doctrine" here is the doctrine of the apostles; those causing divisions and offenses contrary to such doctrine are to be avoided.

1 John 4:1-3,6: 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: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. . . We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

Much could be said here about what it means to confess "that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh," namely, to confess the correct doctrine of Christology. For our purposes in this paper we note only this, that the testing of true preachers and false preachers is to be done on the basis of whether or not they hear or accept apostolic doctrine. In other words, the pure marks of the church. (On the topic treated above, cf. also these passages: 1 Tim. 6:3ff.; 2 Tim. 1:13; 2:2; 1 Pet. 4:11.)

It should be noted that there is no difference between a confession of Christ and a confession of the Word, since it is in the Word that Christ is revealed to man. To confess Christ is to confess the Word, and to confess the Word is to confess Christ. Jesus told the unbelieving Jews: "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me" (John 5:39). The entire Scriptures, both Old and New Testament, must be taken into account in one's confession of Christ, and not only the four Gospels. Jesus used all of the Old Testament in speaking of the necessity of his suffering and death to the two Emmaus disciples. Luke states: "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27).

Perhaps this would be the place to say a few words also about love for Christ as it is related to the keeping of his word. There may be those who are very indifferent towards false doctrine, but who talk much about love for Christ, perhaps even using love as a reason for their unconcern about truth and error, claiming that love is the higher, the better way. This is not right. Exactly the opposite is true. Love for Christ, if it be true love, will prompt one to hold dearly to the word. Jesus himself says: "If a man love me he will keep my words. . . . He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings" (John 14:23,24).

There are related matters still to be noted in this paper, and undoubtedly still others will be brought out in the discussion of it. However, on the basis of what has already been said, and especially on the basis of the Scripture set forth above, we are constrained to say already at this point that *essentially* there isn't anything more to be said about the doctrine of church fellowship. The whole issue revolves around the pure means of grace, the pure marks of the church. Through the pure means of grace the Holy Spirit brings the Christian to faith, and preserves him in faith. The same means of grace serve as marks of the church, enabling the Christian to locate other Christians for purposes of church fellowship. On the basis of the pure marks of the church Christians unite to acknowledge and exercise church fellowship.

If we all agree on the doctrine of church fellowship we can profitably consider and discuss its application, which we readily grant can at times be perplexing to a faithful, dedicated pastor. A person

can go a long way in agreeing to applications of this doctrine in exceptional situations if there is the firm assurance through word and deed that there is on the part of the pastor or teacher or church member making the application the wholehearted acceptance of the Scriptural principle of the pure marks of the church as the basis for church fellowship.

If we do not agree on the doctrine itself, as stated above, then it will be most difficult, in fact, impossible, to discuss profitably its applications because we will not proceed from the same starting point. Then it would be far better to confine ourselves to a discussion of the principles and become agreed on them first.

V. Applications.

A. Regarding Terms Pertaining to the Doctrine of Church Fellowship.

I. "Pulpit, altar, and prayer fellowship."

The above expression has a history in our circles and in other synods of the former Synodical Conference. The Overseas Brethren, in their theses of 1961, in keeping with their emphasis on the marks of the church, the Word and sacraments, distinguished between pulpit and altar fellowship, on the one hand, and prayer fellowship on the other hand, but not in such a way as to set a different standard for the one or the other. For example, in Thesis 12 they state:

The fellowship created by Word and sacraments shows itself in many ways, some of which, like prayer and worship and love of the brethren, the church cannot do without, others of which, like the holy kiss or the handshake or the reception into one's house, vary from place to place and from time to time.

But they do not place a different requirement for the exercise of the one or the other, for they go on to state:

In whatever way the fellowship created by the Word and sacrament shows itself, all visible-manifestations of fellowship must be truthful and in accordance with the supreme demands of the marks of the church. The "sacred things" (*sacra*) are the means of grace, and only by way of them is anything else a "sacred thing" (*sacrum*).

In Thesis 13 they state:

Prayer is not one of the marks of the church and should not be coordinated with the Word *and* sacrament, as though it were essentially of the same nature as they.

But they then go on to say of prayer:

As a response to the divine word, it is an expression of faith and a fruit of faith, and when spoken before others, a profession of faith. As a profession of faith it must be in harmony with and under the control of the marks of the church. (1961 ELS Synod Report, pp. 41.42).

Regarding the term "pulpit, altar, and prayer fellowship" we also want to say that we do violence to the scriptural principles of church fellowship when we restrict it to pulpit and altar fellowship, and then only to that little spot in the front of a church building around the altar and in the pulpit. Pulpit fellowship, for example, involves preaching and teaching the Word, whether this is done in the church service, the Bible class, the religion class in church school or synodical college or seminary. The matter of proclaiming the Word in a pulpit or classroom of the heterodox apart from the setting of church fellowship will be discussed later.

2. "Unionism."

The definition of unionism as it appeared in *The Concordia Cyclopedia*, 1927 edition, accords with the Scriptural principles of church fellowship. It reads:

Religious unionism consists of joint worship and work of those not united in doctrine (p. 774).

The revised definition, as it appeared in J.H.C. Fritz's *Pastoral Theology*, Second Edition Revised, 1945, does not accord with those principles. It reads:

Joining in religious worship or in religious work or in both by such as are not in doctrinal agreement, or, in other words, joint work or worship by which the truth is either denied or the appearance of denial, or at least of indifferentism, is given, is religious unionism (p. 211).

The ELS accepts the former and rejects the latter. (On the whole matter of unionism we recommend that you read or reread the chapter, "The Great Divide," by Prof. G. O. Lillegard in the Synod's 1953 anniversary volume, *Faith of Our Fathers*, pp. 153-162.)

3. "Separatism."

In laying great emphasis on the pure marks of the church as the basis for acknowledging and exercising church fellowship here on earth, we must keep before our eyes not only the "ism" of unionism but also that of separatism. Both are a sin.

We cannot as Christians be indifferent to the spiritual condition and welfare of others beyond our own circles. Wherever the marks of the church are taught in conformity with a pure understanding of them we are in duty bound to acknowledge and exercise church fellowship with such. Distance and other earthly matters may determine somewhat the extent of the exercise of that fellowship, but earthly considerations, even churchly considerations such as church rites and ceremonies, must never keep us from the acknowledgment and exercise of church fellowship where true unity in doctrine prevails.

B. Offense and Weak Brethren.

A Christian, and especially a Christian pastor or teacher, must always take into account the matter of offense and weak brethren in making decisions regarding church fellowship. (cf. p. 11, Par. 38).

It is true that there is both a giving and a taking of offense. But a Christian, and especially a pastor or teacher, even though he can with good conscience see his way clear to exercise church fellowship with someone in an unusual situation, will be concerned about the implications of his actions on others, and in Christian love he may at times find himself compelled to forego his intended action for their sakes.

While the same Biblical principles of church fellowship apply to the individual Christian in his personal life as in his congregational and synodical life, the attending circumstances may vary considerably. For example, the danger of giving offense ordinarily is much greater in that which takes place in public, e.g., in the congregation or synod or other assembly, and for this reason a pastor or teacher will have to give extra weight to this concern in such situations.

C. Church Fellowship in Congregation and Synod.

The Christian judges whether or not a congregation or church body has the pure marks of the church by comparing their formal confession of faith with the pure marks of the church. A church's formal confession of faith consists not only in what is stated in their constitution but also in what is actually taught in their pulpits, schools, church paper, and practiced in their church life.

If a church's formal confession of faith is in accord with the pure marks of the church the Christian will acknowledge and exercise church fellowship with them through such things as joint worship, communion, preaching, teaching, church work, etc. If a church's formal confession of faith does not

accord with the pure marks of the church, the Christian will withhold the acknowledgment and exercise of church fellowship in obedience to God's Word.

It might sometimes appear from this that church fellowship is being decided simply on the basis of church membership. We have to remember, however, that we confess our faith by our church membership and that it is really on the basis of that confession rather than church membership as such that the question of church fellowship is decided.

What about the individual church member? Is he responsible for his church's teaching? Is one to withhold church fellowship from him because of what his church teaches? The individual's confession of faith may be better (or worse) than that of his congregation or synod. In these days when church membership doesn't always mean adherence to the confession of one's church's, a Christian pastor will want to deal very carefully with individuals. We shall treat of this later. Here we want to stress that the individual church member is most certainly responsible for what his church teaches. God himself has given him that responsibility. Furthermore, it is the church member who by his church attendance, church work, and church offerings makes the continued preaching and teaching of a false prophet in a congregation or synod possible. He holds up the hands of the false prophets in his church, and is thereby partaker of their evil deeds. True, our Lutheran Confessions speak of those who are ignorant of the false teaching, and we shall treat also of this, but here we want to recognize and underscore the matter of an individual's personal responsibility for what is taught in his congregation and synod.

D. Religious Organizations.

There are any number of religious organizations and associations today which do not call themselves churches and have no direct congregational or denominational ties. To list but a few: Billy Graham Crusade; Oral Roberts Crusade; Campus Crusade for Christ; the Navigators; Bill Gothard's Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts; the various "Jesus" groups or rallies; the Charismatic groups, etc.

These groups use the means of grace, preach the gospel, instruct in the Word, and therefore have a duty to the supreme demands of the marks of the church even as you and I. The question of whether or not one should worship or work with or otherwise support such groups must be decided on the same basis as other questions of church fellowship, namely, on that of the pure marks of the church. While there are various doctrinal differences between these groups mentioned, most, if not all, are of Reformed background and doctrine. They do not confess the pure marks of the church.

One can well understand how some of our people may be drawn into worshipping and working with such groups, especially because of the fundamentalist nature of many of these organizations. As pastors and teachers we should be fair in our criticisms of these groups, and patient with our people. But we are not to be false shepherds by ourselves participating in or encouraging our people to participate in such heterodox ventures.

E. Witnessing for Christ.

The Christian is to be a witness for Christ at all times by word and deed. It is, however, a distortion of both the concept and duty of witnessing to insist that witnessing requires one to attend and speak and otherwise participate in whatever assembly or group he has the chance to do so, even if it puts one in a compromising position or gives offense so far as the doctrine of church fellowship is concerned. One can and does also witness, and sometimes powerfully, by one's formal confession of faith through church membership, and also by one's silence and one's absence from other assemblies.

For a Lutheran pastor to stand before a Roman Catholic altar, or to invite or allow the Roman Catholic priest to stand before his, that is, the congregation's altar, and to conduct jointly a wedding service, as has become quite common in many Lutheran circles, is crass unionism and cannot be defended or excused on the basis of one's duty to witness. We are not to take what God has not given. The disregard of the pure marks of the church by such a joint service and the offense it causes to others, especially the weak and the "little ones" of all ages, children and young people in particular, is staggering to the heart and mind.

It must be granted that personally proclaiming the Word to those with whom one is not in doctrinal agreement, whether by preaching or teaching, may not always involve one in church fellowship and

hence unionism. On rare occasions such an opportunity may present itself through an invitation—from the heterodox or even unchristian group and one would accept and proclaim the Word in the hope that the Holy Ghost through the Word would so work and draw the hearers to accept the truth, thus making future church fellowship possible. Such occasions are fraught with many dangers of giving offense and would require 1) that the situation be so clearly enunciated to both those he serves and those he would reach that it is clear to all that he is not extending the hand of church fellowship by his acceptance and 2) that the individual involved must be so anti-unionism in doctrine and practice generally that again it is clear to all that he is not extending the hand of church fellowship, and 3) the individual must himself know what he is talking about, i.e., know truth and error, and especially as it pertains to those he addresses, and 4) the individual must then in all kindness but also in all faithfulness and clarity proclaim the truth so that he actually does witness for Christ and the truth, the meanwhile refraining from participating in their worship. Such situations are rare indeed. On that basis few heterodox will ask for your testimony.

F. Co-operation in Externals.

There is such a thing as a co-operation in externals which does not involve one in church fellowship. For example, pastors in a town or city may get together to meet with public school officials to work out certain arrangements for school and church schedules. Other examples could no doubt also be given, such as joint translation work, etc.

A word of caution is in place, namely, that often the cooperation sought is not in externals at all, but comes under joint worship and church work, and under the circumstances is unionism.

Somewhat akin to this matter of co-operation in externals is the seeking or giving of one's expertise in church methods or technical knowledge in biblical matters, e.g., ancient languages, etc. This does not necessarily involve one in church fellowship, but it must be clearly laid out for all to see in order that no offense be given.

G. Dealing with the Peculiar Situation.

The highly individualistic spirit of the times and the abandonment in practice of formal confessions of faith by many church bodies have resulted in many individuals being put in a state of flux regarding their religious convictions and confession. They may not necessarily join to the present day position of the church body to which they belong. They may be open to religious instruction, willing to "learn the way of God more perfectly."

When such individuals come to us we must not deal with them simply on the basis of the formal confession of faith which they make by their formal church membership. Neither are we to ignore it or say that here we have an exception to the biblical principles of church fellowship. Church fellowship with such an individual, too, if it be exercised, must be in accord with the supreme demands of the pure marks of the church, but in considering his confession to the pure marks of the church, we will consider the informal confession of faith which he makes to us as well as the formal confession made by his church membership. We believe that the statement adopted by the doctrinal committee of the WELS and ELS on this a year ago may be helpful to us. It reads:

A reply to the WELS Commission on Inter-Church Relations and of the ELS Board of Theology and Church Relations based on their synods' public confession on the doctrine of church fellowship to a question regarding church fellowship raised by pastors from the Conference of Authentic Lutherans.

Do we hold that the exercise of church fellowship, especially prayer and altar fellowship, can be decided in every instance solely on the basis of formal church membership, that is, on whether or not the person belongs to a congregation or synod in affiliation with us?

No. Ordinarily this is the basis on which such a question is decided since church fellowship is exercised on the basis of one's confession to the pure marks of the church, and ordinarily we express our confession by our church membership. There may be cases in the exercise of church

fellowship where a person's informal confession of faith must also be considered. This is especially true regarding the weak. But whether one is guided by a person's formal or informal confession of faith, in either instance it must in principle be a confession to the full truth of God's word. In addition, special care must be exercised so as not to cause offense to others or to interfere with another man's ministry. Further, we are not to judge harshly concerning the manner in which a brother pastor after much agonizing handles such difficult cases. (*Lutheran Sentinel*, Vol. 59, No. 14, July 22, 1976, pp. 220-221).

In a way, the problem discussed above is not at all peculiar to our times. The problem of confessing the pure marks of the church by "condemnations, censures, and rejections of false and adulterated doctrine" and at the same time helping those who err innocently and in child-like simplicity confronted the Reformers in the 16th century also. This is what they said in the Preface to the Book of Concord:

With reference to the condemnations, censures, and rejections of false and adulterated doctrine, especially in the article concerning the Lord's Supper, these have to be set forth expressly and distinctly in this explanation and thorough settlement of the controverted articles in order that everybody may know that he must guard himself against them. There are also many other reasons why condemnations cannot by any means be avoided. However, it is not our purpose and intention to mean thereby those persons who err ingenuously and who do not blaspheme the truth of the divine word, and far less do we mean entire churches inside or outside the Holy Empire of the German Nation. On the contrary, we mean specifically to condemn only false and seductive doctrines and their stiff-necked proponents and blasphemers. These we do not by any means intend to tolerate in our lands, churches, and schools inasmuch as such teachings are contrary to the expressed Word of God and cannot coexist with it. Besides, pious people should be warned against them. But we have no doubt at all that one can find many pious, innocent people even in those churches which have up to now admittedly not come to agreement with us. These people go their way in the simplicity of their hearts, do not understand the issues, and take no pleasure in blasphemies against the Holy Supper as it is celebrated in our churches according to Christ's institution and as we concordantly teach about it on the basis of the words of his testament. It is furthermore to be hoped that when they are rightly instructed in this doctrine, they will, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, turn to the infallible truth of the divine word and unite with us and our churches and schools. Consequently the responsibility devolves upon the theologians and ministers duly to remind even those who err ingenuously and ignorantly of the danger to their souls and to warn them against it, lest one blind person let himself be misled by another. (Preface to the Book of Concord, pp. 11-12, Tappert ed.).

Conclusion:

In conclusion permit me to say only that the doctrine of church fellowship as set forth in the body of this paper, namely that the Christian is to acknowledge and exercise church fellowship on the basis of the pure marks of the church, is the truth, and, in the words of the Lutheran Reformers, any teaching to the contrary "cannot be tolerated in the church of God, much less be excused and defended" (SD Rule and Norm, p. 503, Tappert ed.).

May God give us grace to declare in the words of the Lutheran Reformers that this too "is our teaching, belief, and confession in which by God's grace we shall appear with intrepid hearts before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ and for which we shall give an account," and also that ". . . we intend through God's grace to abide by it" (SD XII, p. 636, Tappert ed.).

ADDENDUM

In answer to a question raised in the discussion of the paper on the floor of the General Pastoral Conference, namely:

What is the relationship between faithful adherence to the marks of the church and the Great Commission to preach the gospel to every creature?

Since God has commanded both we cannot say or assume that if we are faithfully to adhere to the pure marks of the church we cannot preach the gospel to every creature. There is no contradiction between God's commands. We therefore cannot make this an "either-or" proposition.

But this is not to say that a Christian, and especially a Christian pastor, will always find it easy to do both, or that he will not at times have to ask himself, and perhaps also his brethren: "Now what should I do?" There is a tension between faithful adherence to the pure marks of the church and diligently seeking to carry out the Great Commission and one has to learn to live with it. We might add that along with the tension there is also a lot of sorrow and heartache.

Pat answers on either side of the question do not always do justice to the matter. In papers and discussions on church fellowship we should not expect answers to every conceivable situation which might arise, but rather look for the principle above all else. As stated earlier in this paper one can go a long way in accepting how another person, and especially a pastor, deals with a certain situation if only one has the assurance that he accepts the biblical principle of church fellowship and honestly wants to follow it in practice.

We must strive to avoid a shallowness, formalism, or narrowing down of theological principles and instead seek to be well-grounded in Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. For example, as pointed out earlier in this paper, Scripture teaches that the Christian is to have church fellowship only with those who confess the pure marks of the church. Ordinarily a person confesses his adherence to the pure marks by his church membership. From this follows the practice of having church fellowship only with those who belong to the same church, or to a sister church. But this is not the principle of church fellowship, as such. The principle is that of confession to the pure marks of the church.

The joint statement of the Doctrinal Committees of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and the ELS in answer to a question raised by brethren of the Conference of Authentic Lutherans, which deals with the matter of formal and informal confessions of faith (cf. Par. 2, p. 34), is an attempt to deal in a practical way with the tension which can arise between these two principles or commands—to reach out without forsaking the principles of adherence to the pure marks of the church.

In speaking of the relationship between faithful adherence to the pure marks of the church and to the Great Commission, we should be careful that we do not fall into thinking that the Great Commission is a positive matter while the doctrine of church fellowship is a negative doctrine. This is not so. Church fellowship, too, is essentially a positive, joyful thing, and we should keep this aspect of it before our eyes. It is true that it does have its negative aspect, the "avoid," but we should not immediately think of "avoid" when we hear the term "church fellowship." We should also remember that even the "avoid" is a positive thing in this that God has put it there to protect those in the truth and to warn and to call back those who may stray from the truth.

In considering the relationship between faithful adherence to the pure marks of the church and the Great Commission we should also take a closer look at the Great Commission, especially the "preach the gospel to every creature." The adherence to the pure marks of the church comes into consideration more in regard to having fellowship with the heterodox than in reaching out with the gospel to those who do not have it. When a pastor is said to be unionistic it usually is because of his spiritual association with the heterodox rather than because of his going out as a shepherd to seek the lost sheep, that is, in doing real mission work, as we might call it. This does not mean that we are not to be concerned with the heterodox or that we should not seek to help them, especially those who err innocently. (Cf. what has been said earlier in a quotation from the Lutheran Confessions; Par. 2, p. 35.)

We are to be concerned about the heterodox, and this may even be said to be a part of the Great Commission in that Jesus said: ". . . teaching them to observe *all* things whatsoever I have commanded you." We are limited, however, in what we can do to help the heterodox back to the truth. The heterodox themselves have put a limit on us by their church membership. We have to respect another man's ministry even in heterodox churches. This, of course, must not be carried to an extreme. For example, anyone who has been a pastor in a rural or small-town parish knows about the "dead timber" to be found

in the community, people who were baptized and perhaps confirmed in a certain church but who for years, even decades, have not been active in hearing the word or using the sacrament, yet are generally considered to belong to a certain church. We can and should approach such people with the law and gospel.

While limited in what we can do to help the heterodox, we can do something, and we should be alert to every proper way to help. For example, we can be a good friend and neighbor to the heterodox, and as pastors teach our members to be good friends and neighbors to them also. It is in the personal touch and setting that both mission opportunities and opportunities to testify to the truth open up. When the heterodox approach us in spiritual matters we can speak to them of spiritual things without being a meddler or busybody in other men's affairs. Where the fine custom still prevails, as in rural and small towns, of friends and neighbors gathering for funerals, there is a wonderful opportunity for the orthodox pastor to reach the heterodox with the word without doing violence to the pure marks of the church. But the orthodox pastor must then work hard to preach the law and the gospel, sin and grace, repentance and faith. In this way one can give the heterodox a real spiritual meal and treat, and strengthen them spiritually. And they will appreciate it too. The same holds true regarding weddings where an orthodox pastor has an opportunity to reach any number of people with the gospel in accordance with the Great Commission. But then he must preach the law and the gospel; in the setting of the occasion, to be sure, but still, the word. Is that not why the bride and groom have come, to sanctify their marriage by the word of God and prayer?

These are some of the things that should be taken into account in a consideration of the relationship between faithful adherence to the pure marks of the church and the Great Commission to preach the gospel to every creature.

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