

Church Fellowship: Working Together for the Truth

Abiding Peace Lutheran Church, Elgin, IL

Summer/Fall 2010

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Lesson One: Introduction to Church Fellowship

Church Fellowship, pp. 7-22

Goals

1. To briefly review the doctrine of the church as a necessary background to the discussion of church fellowship.
2. To define terms necessary for the discussion in the following lessons.
3. To become motivated to give careful attention to this important study.

Topics of Discussion

1. Introduction to Church Fellowship

Scriptural Principles:

2. Working Together for the Truth
3. Romans 16:1-19
4. The Unit Concept
5. Preserving and Extending Fellowship

Practice of Fellowship:

6. Guidelines and Basic Applications
7. Situations Dealing with Our Own Services
8. Working with Others

History of Fellowship:

9. The Early Church; WELS and LCMS Relations
10. WELS and CLC Relations; the CELC

- List any questions or issues you wish to discuss or ways in which you would like to see this outline expanded or contracted.

Introduction

- Read **1 Corinthians 2:2** and **Romans 3:28**. What is the most important doctrine of the Bible? Why?
- Read **2 Timothy 3:16-17**. What is another very important teaching of Scripture? Why?
- Some people outside the Wisconsin Synod consider the teaching of church fellowship to be its special trademark. Have you ever experienced this perception? Why do you think people think this?

The teaching of church fellowship is important for several reasons.

1. Church fellowship is a scriptural doctrine.
2. This doctrine is necessary to preserve the other doctrines of Scripture.
3. It was an important doctrine in the shaping of WELS.
4. It is a doctrine that is under heavy attack today.
5. It is a doctrine that often causes emotional reactions in members and prospects alike because it often affects their relationship with family and friends.

What is the invisible church?

- Read **1 Peter 2:9** and **Galatians 3:26**. Define the term *Church*. How does one become a member of the Church?
- Read **Acts 4:12**. Why do we say there is only one Church?
- Read **2 Timothy 2:19**. Why do we call this one Church the Invisible Church?
- Read **Isaiah 55:10-11**. How can we recognize the presence of this one Church?

What is a visible church?

- Read **Revelation 1:10-11**. What do we mean by the term *visible church*?
- Read **Colossians 3:16**. Make a list of reasons why Christians want to join a visible church.

Definition of church fellowship

Fellowship refers to friendly relationships between people and activities in which they work together to advance common goals.

Because of our membership in God's invisible, holy Christian Church and our membership in visible congregations and denominations, we enjoy various kinds of fellowship.

- Read **1 John 1:3**. What fellowship do we enjoy as members of the Invisible Church?

In an ideal world, every Christian would be able to express fellowship with every other believer. In our sinful world, however, we are not able to do this. Many visible church groups cling to teachings that contradict God's Word. For this reason we will want to keep our discussion of the spiritual fellowship we have with God and with all Christians through faith distinct from our discussion of the fellowship we have with other visible churches and their members.

Church fellowship is the term we use when we speak about fellowship between Christians in different visible church groups.

Church fellowship refers to

1. the doctrinal fellowship we have with all Christians who confess all the teachings of Scripture
2. the expression of this fellowship through joint activities

Definition: *Church fellowship* refers to every activity in which members of visible churches join together as an expression of their unity of faith and doctrine.

This is the topic of this study. On the basis of Scripture we will want to explore with whom we may practice church fellowship, how much agreement is necessary for church fellowship, and what constitutes an expression of a shared faith.

Summary

Through faith in Jesus Christ people become members of the one holy Christian Church. In this Church they enjoy fellowship with God and with every other true believer. Christians join together with fellow Christians in activities that promote faith and the spread of God's Word. The term *church fellowship* refers to every activity in which members of visible churches join together as an expression of their unity of faith and doctrine.

During the week

1. Read 1 John, 2 John, and 3 John. As you read, note how many times the words *love* and *truth* are used. Begin thinking about how these words are related.
2. Read Revelation 2,3. Notice how concerned Jesus is that truth in doctrine and life prevails in these churches.
3. Suggested Additional Reading: *Church Fellowship*, pages 7-31.

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Lesson Two:

Scriptural Principles – Working Together for the Truth

Church Fellowship, pp. 23-31

Goals

1. To see that contending for true doctrine is a dominant concern of Scripture.
2. To learn what attitudes we should have as we practice the scriptural principles of fellowship.
3. To grow in our willingness to practice this teaching faithfully in our church and personal lives.

Review

- What fellowship do we enjoy as members of the one holy Christian Church?
- Why does God want his people to gather together in Christian congregations and synods?

Church fellowship refers to every activity in which members of visible churches join together to express their unity of faith and doctrine.

Truth and love—the two pillars of the practice of church fellowship

- Read **Romans 5:8, 1 John 4:10-11, and Romans 13:9-10**. How does the Bible define love?
- Read **1 Corinthians 13:6 and Romans 12:9**. Given the fact that God's Word makes us wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, what is the most unloving thing we can do to a person?

- What is the most loving thing we can do for a person?
- Why must truth and love always be kept together in the church?

Working together for the truth

Read **2 John**.

- How many times does John mention the two pillars of church fellowship – faith and love?
- Why not show love by welcoming a false teacher into your home?
- Is it wrong to let Jehovah's witnesses or Mormons come inside?

Read **3 John**.

The recipients of 3 John were practicing church fellowship. They had helped fellow Christian brothers. John praises them for this and encourages them to continue.

- **3 John 8** provides an excellent definition of God-pleasing church fellowship. Using that verse, complete this sentence: God-pleasing fellowship is . . .
- According to **3 John 5,6,8,12**, how did John and his friends work together for the truth?
- Read **2 Corinthians 13:8**. The opposite of working for the truth is working against it. What are some ways in which Christians may become guilty of working against the truth?

The Lord gives us the principles of church fellowship to help us continue working for the truth and to keep us from working against the truth.

Opposing false teachers and doing so in a spirit of love

- Read **2 Timothy 3:1-9** and **2 Timothy 4:2-5**. Why are false teachers so popular today?
- Read **2 John 9-11** and **1 John 4:1,5,6**. How do we recognize enemies of the truth?
- How must we react to them?
- Read **1 Timothy 1:3-5**. What is always our goal when we oppose false teaching?
- Read **2 Timothy 2:23-26**. Describe the manner and spirit with which we should oppose error.
- Read **2 Timothy 2:14**. What is meant by avoiding word battles?
- How can a pastor prepare to battle against false teaching?
- How can his members help a pastor in the battle against false teaching?
- In our day many Christians claim that showing love and speaking against false teachings are opposite activities. Have you ever experienced this attitude? Why is it common in our day?

- Read **3 John 9-10** and **1 Timothy 1:20**. When it came to naming false teachers and false teachings, what practice did Paul follow in the above verses?

- Why must we oppose specific false teachings and specific false teachers by name, rather than simply speaking against false teaching in general?

Summary

Churches join in fellowship to work together for the truth. Fellowship is built on truth, for without the truth of Christ no one can be saved. Fellowship is also built on love, for unless Christians love others they will not speak the gospel to them. True love speaks the truth, defends it, and warns against anything that goes against the truth, always desiring the salvation of all.

During the week

1. Read 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. There is much instruction in these books on speaking for the truth and against falsehood. Paul displays the attitude pastors and people should have as they do this work.
2. Suggested Additional Reading: *Church Fellowship*, pages 40-42.

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Lesson Three: Scriptural Principles – Romans 16:1-19

Church Fellowship, pp. 40-42

Goals

1. To examine church fellowship on the basis of Romans 16:1-19.
2. To look closely at the meaning of Romans 16:17.
3. To further develop our understanding of church fellowship principles and our desire to practice them.

Review

- What are the two pillars of the practice of church fellowship? How do they apply to dealing with false teachers and their teachings?
- How is *working together for the truth* (3 John 8) a good definition of God-pleasing fellowship?

Church fellowship in the congregation at Rome

Read **Romans 16:1-16**.

- What word recurs throughout this section?
- Note the many times the phrase “in Christ” or “in the Lord” appears in this section. How do those expressions emphasize the close bond of fellowship Paul enjoyed with his readers?

- List some of the ways Paul and the congregations at Rome were *working together for the truth*.
- List some of the words of commendation Paul has for those he is greeting. What lesson does that teach us about how we should live and work together for the truth?
- List some of the words of affection Paul has for those he is greeting. What does this tell us about the depth of feeling Paul had toward those with whom he enjoyed fellowship in Christ?

The congregations at Rome are to protect the fellowship they have in Christ

Read **Romans 16:17-19**.

- What phrases in verse 17 stand in sharp contrast to the word “greet” that was used so often in the previous verses?
- Who are the people the Romans were to watch out for and avoid?
- What are some examples from Scripture where people were causing divisions in the congregation?
- What are some examples from Scripture where people were doing things that caused people to fall into sin?
- The Greek verb rendered “are causing divisions” describes an action that is continuous and habitual. What does this tell us about the errorists Paul has mind? How does this insight help us apply this passage?

- Agree or disagree: We must know exactly what situation in Rome caused Paul to issue this warning before we can apply it to ourselves.
- Evaluate: The “teaching you have learned” is the doctrine about saving faith in Christ. It does not include other doctrines such as Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, or the inspiration of Scripture.
- Whom does the world blame for dividing the church? Who is the real cause of division in the church?
- Examine each of these two statements about the meaning of verse 18 and tell which one is true: (1) We can identify false prophets by determining who is serving their own appetites and using smooth talk and flattery. (2) Anyone who departs from the apostle’s teaching is serving his own appetite and using smooth talk and flattery.

Should Christians judge others?

When Christians are called on to watch out for and keep away from false teachers, they must be clear on what the Bible says about judging.

- Read **Matthew 7:1-5,15-16,21-23** and **Acts 17:11**. What principles do we learn in these passages?

Summary

Fellowship among Christians based on a common confession of faith is one of God’s great gifts. It is a blessing when Christians share the truth and work together on behalf of it. The congregation at Rome furnishes a wonderful example of church fellowship. If Christians are to continue to be united in the truth and work together for the truth, they must separate themselves from any who teach error.

During the week

1. Try to find some passage(s) in the Bible that divide(s) church fellowship into levels or parts.
2. Suggested Additional Reading: *Church Fellowship*, pages 33-50.

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Lesson Four: Scriptural Principles – The Unit Concept

Church Fellowship, pp. 33-50

Goals

1. To teach the two main principles of the unit concept.
 - (a) Church fellowship requires agreement in all doctrines.
 - (b) All expressions of church fellowship require complete agreement in doctrine.
2. To study the abundant scriptural evidence for these two principles.

Introduction

Scripture teaches two principles.

Agreement in *all* doctrine is necessary for church fellowship.

Church fellowship includes *all* expressions of a shared faith.

We call this the unit concept. The term *unit* stresses the fact that doctrine cannot be divided into two categories: those which require agreement in all doctrine and those which do not. And it stresses that fellowship activities cannot be broken up into two categories: those we cannot practice with Christians who are not in fellowship with us and those we can.

Agreement in *all* doctrine is necessary for fellowship

- Read the following passages, and list some of the errors the apostles treated as divisive of fellowship:
 - Galatians 1:6-8; 3:2
 - 1 John 2:18,19; 4:2-3
 - 2 Timothy 2:16-18

- Jude 3-4
- 1 Timothy 4:1-3
- Titus 3:8-11
- Read **Revelation 22:18,19**. What amount of deviation from Scripture brings a person under God's condemnation?
- Discuss the following quotation from *Church Fellowship: Working Together for the Truth*: "It is true that, just as some doses of poison are more deadly than others, the loss of certain doctrines, such as the doctrines of justification or the deity of Christ, is more deadly to faith than the loss of other doctrines, such as a correct understanding of the doctrine of the Antichrist. But just as we want no poison in our food, not even the unintentional inclusion of small amounts of cancer-causing substances, so we can tolerate no poison in our spiritual food, that is, the teachings of Scripture that feed our faith" (p. 34).

Scripture makes no exceptions on doctrines. For fellowship, complete agreement in doctrine is necessary. Mark phrases in the following passages that underscore this truth.

- **Matthew 28:20** Teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.
- **Ephesians 4:3,11-15** Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.
- **Acts 20:27-31** I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

- **1 Corinthians 1:10** I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.
- **Revelation 22:19** If anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.
- **1 Timothy 1:3,4** As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God's work—which is by faith.
- **1 Timothy 6:3,4** If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, he is conceited and understands nothing.
- **John 8:31** To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.
- **1 Peter 4:11** If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.
- **Romans 15:5,6** May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- In the light of the above passages, discuss this quotation from *Church Fellowship: Working Together for the Truth*: "None of these passages nor any of the many other similar passages in the New Testament offers even a hint of support for the idea that any doctrine of Scripture can be dispensed with or that any doctrinal error can be accepted as harmless" (p. 39).

Some differences among members of God's church are not divisive of fellowship. Read **Romans 14:1-3**. **Adiaphora** are things neither forbidden by God nor commanded by him. Examples are different liturgies, moderate use of alcohol, and method of baptism.

- Why are differences in *adiaphora* not divisive of church fellowship?
- Read **2 Thessalonians 2:3** and **1 John 4:3**. Demonstrate from these two passages that it is not necessary for Christians to agree in the **exact words or terminology** which they use in expressing the doctrines of Scripture.

Other differences that should not be a cause of division in the church are loyalty to certain personalities or economic, racial, and cultural differences.

All ways of expressing fellowship are a unit

- Read the following passages, and list some of the various ways Christians express fellowship:
 - Hebrews 10:24-25
 - Colossians 3:16
 - 1 Corinthians 10:16-17
 - Galatians 6:6
 - 1 Corinthians 9:11,14
 - Philippians 1:4,5; 4:15
 - 2 John 10-11
 - Galatians 2:8-9
 - Acts 15:1-2
 - Romans 16:16
- In the light of the above passages, discuss this statement from *Church Fellowship*: “There is no scriptural basis for dividing the various expressions of fellowship into different levels that require different degrees of doctrinal agreement. Different forms of fellowship are simply different ways of expressing one and the same unity of faith” (p. 49).

Summary

The unit concept is drawn from the clear testimony of Scripture. We must be in agreement in all doctrines of Scripture to have church fellowship. All ways of expressing church fellowship require complete agreement in doctrine.

During the week

1. Suggested Reading: *Church Fellowship*, pp. 51-58.
2. Think about the fellowship you enjoy with the members of your congregation and others who share the same confession. What are some things you can do to preserve that fellowship? to extend it?

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Lesson Five: Preserving and Extending Fellowship

Church Fellowship, pp. 51-58

Goals

1. To discuss things we are doing to preserve and extend Christian fellowship.
2. To consider ways in which they and their congregation can improve in this important aspect of Christian living.

Introduction

- Read **Psalm 133**. What is one of the great joys of being a Christian?

- Read **Ephesians 4:3**. What responsibility does this place upon each Christian?

Ways of preserving and extending fellowship

Read **John 13:35** and **1 Peter 1:22**.

- What are some ways in which we can show love for the members of our congregation?

- What are some ways in which our congregation members are good at showing their love? What are some areas in which we could do better?

- Read **Galatians 6:10**. How do we as a congregation help people with their physical needs? How do we do this as a synod? What are some ways in which we could do this better?

- Read **Ephesians 4:11-16**. How do we build up the church's defense against error? What are some ways in which we could do this better?
- What are some of the main dangers against which we must build up our defenses?
- Read **1 Thessalonians 5:11-13** and **1 Timothy 5:17**. What are some ways in which we show respect and support for faithful preachers and teachers? Are there areas in which we can improve in this regard?
- How do we work to extend our fellowship as a congregation? as a synod?

Preserve church fellowship by practicing church discipline

- Read **Matthew 18:15-17**. How should we practice church discipline as individuals and as a congregation?

Read **Jude 18-23**.

- What is the difference between a *weak brother* and a *persistent errorist*?
- How can we determine in which category a person belongs? How do we deal with people in each category?

There is a distinction between *excommunication* and *termination of fellowship*.

We excommunicate people who are persisting in a sin even though they know that God's Word condemns it, people whose doctrinal error destroys the foundations of saving faith, and people who hold to a position even though they recognize that their view is contrary to Scripture. Such people have excluded themselves from salvation. Excommunication is a warning that the person will be damned unless he or she repents.

We use the term termination of fellowship when people hold to a false doctrine in spite of our admonition and are convinced that their position is actually the position of Scripture. Since this error may be a matter of ignorance and weakness that does not destroy saving faith, we do not feel we can conclude that they have excluded themselves from salvation; however, their error prevents us from remaining in fellowship with them. With church bodies and congregations as a whole, we use only termination of fellowship because we cannot deal with every individual to determine if he or she supports that church's error consciously and maliciously or as a result of ignorance or weakness.

- Read **2 Thessalonians 3:6,13-15**. How do we deal with people whom we have had to excommunicate or with whom we have had to break fellowship?

Summary

Fellowship with those who are united with us in faith is one of the most wonderful blessings members of God's church enjoy. Church fellowship is extended and maintained when Christians grow in the faith, show love for each other, honor those who preach and teach, give help to the needy, and practice church discipline.

During the week

1. Suggested Additional Reading: *Church Fellowship*, pages 105-115.
2. Thank God for the fellowship you enjoy with the members of your congregation and others who share the same confession.
3. Pray for ways you can help to preserve that fellowship and to extend it.

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Lesson Six:

The Practice of Fellowship I:

Guidelines and Basic Applications

Church Fellowship, pp. 103-115

Goals

1. To briefly review the principles of church fellowship.
2. To study guidelines that will help us apply the principles of church fellowship in an evangelical way.
3. To examine some basic applications of the principles of church fellowship.

Review of church fellowship principles

- What do we mean by church fellowship?
- How do we determine with whom we may practice church fellowship?
- In what two ways must church fellowship be dealt with as a unit?

Guidelines for applying the teaching of church fellowship

- Why must we make a thorough study of the scriptural principles before we discuss specific fellowship situations?

- Why must we study each situation in the light of scriptural principles, rather than simply relying on precedents or rules?
- A *case of casuistry* is a difficult case in which two equally valid scriptural principles may apply and suggest contradictory actions. Why must we be careful in judging such cases?
- What should we do when we are faced with a difficult case?
- What two responsibilities must we keep in balance?
- What attitudes do we need as we carry out this two-fold responsibility?
- What knowledge should give us comfort and assurance as we seek to practice the scriptural principles of church fellowship?

Basic applications

The remainder of this lesson discusses clear-cut applications that are very similar to situations discussed in Scripture.

- The most obvious examples of activities that are expressions of fellowship which require complete agreement in doctrine are altar fellowship and pulpit fellowship. What do these terms mean, and what is wrong with these terms?
- Read **Philippians 1:5; 4:15;** and **2 John 11**. What does Scripture say about financially supporting religious teachers or institutions?

- Why can't we work together on doctrinal projects with heterodox churches? What is the one exception to this?
- Why can't we agree to divide mission fields with false teachers?
- Why don't we send greetings and congratulations to the meetings of heterodox churches? For what purposes may we attend their meetings?
- Read **2 Corinthians 9:12-13**. Why don't we engage in joint Christian charity with those who are not in fellowship with us?
- Read **1 Peter 3:12**; **Ephesians 3:12**; and **Romans 16:17**. Why does joint prayer always require agreement in doctrine?
- Read **1 Timothy 2:1-2**. What is the difference between prayer *for* someone and prayer *with* someone?

Summary

In this lesson we have reviewed guidelines for applying scriptural principles of church fellowship. We also studied some applications that are easily decided on the basis of New Testament principles and closely parallel applications presented in the New Testament.

During the week

Read *Church Fellowship*, pp. 117-136.

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Lesson Seven:

The Practice of Fellowship II:

Situations Dealing with Our Own Services

Church Fellowship, pp. 117-136

Goals

1. To apply the principles of church fellowship to some difficult cases.
2. To learn to apply the principles evangelically.

Introduction and review

The most basic purpose behind the principles of church fellowship is that they serve the good of people's souls by protecting them from false teaching.

This can be broken down into four goals.

1. Warn the one in error of the danger to his faith.
2. Warn others against the danger of his error.
3. Avoid giving the impression that we go along with his errors or think they are no big deal.
4. Protect ourselves from his errors.

Underlying all of these goals is love—love for God's Word and love for all who are endangered by false teaching.

Hard cases: situations dealing with our own worship services

Closed Communion

Closed (or close) Communion is the practice of normally giving Communion only to members of our congregations and of other congregations in fellowship with us. Read Saint Paul's words on the meaning of the Lord's Supper and fill in the blanks below to focus on five qualifications a person must possess to properly receive Communion in one of our congregations.

Read **1 Corinthians 10:16-17** and **1 Corinthians 11:25-29**.

1. Communicants must believe in _____. (11:25,26)
2. They must be _____. (11:27)
3. They must be able to examine _____. (11:28)
4. They must recognize the presence of Christ's _____ in the Sacrament. (11:29)
5. They must be united with us in _____, so we can be “one body” as we attend the Lord’s Supper together. (10:16,17)

The word *communion* does not refer only to participation in the body and blood of Christ, which are united with the bread and wine. There are three communions, the third of which has special application to church fellowship.

- 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
- Why do we exclude some people from attending Communion in our churches?
 - Discuss ways to help prevent misunderstanding of our practice of closed Communion.
 - Sometimes it becomes clear that a situation is exceptional. How would we justify such exceptions? (Note: This and the next two questions apply to exceptions in the other categories that follow.)
 - What is the danger every time we allow an exception to our normal practice? What is the danger in not allowing any exceptional cases?
 - What should the pastor do in exceptional cases?
 - What unusual circumstance might lead to an exception to our normal practice that we commune only members of our congregations?

Funerals

- Why do we normally provide a Christian burial only for members of our congregations?
- If we are concerned that unchurched friends or relatives will not be able to have a Christian burial when they die, what is the best thing we can do for them?
- What situation might lead to an exception to our normal practice that we bury only members of our congregations?

Participation in services

- Why do we permit nonmembers to be present in our worship services?
- Why do we normally not permit nonmembers to participate in our services as choir members and musicians?
- What should be our primary consideration in choosing musicians for special services, such as weddings?
- How can we help prevent misunderstandings and hurt feelings about this matter?
- Why might we allow children who are enrolled in our schools or VBS to sing with their classmates in our services? Under what circumstances would we not do this?
- Can people who are not WELS or ELS members serve as sponsors? What is the difference between being sponsors and being witnesses?

Receiving gifts

- What principles would we follow in receiving gifts from nonmembers?

- What is our chief concern in all the situations we have been discussing?

Summary

In this lesson we studied some of the areas of congregational life where Christians are called on to apply church fellowship principles. While there may be exceptional cases in which two or more principles of Scripture come into play, Christians will want to remain faithful to and give a clear testimony to the truth of God's Word.

During the week

Suggested Reading: Read *Church Fellowship*, pp. 137-162.

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Lesson Eight:

The Practice of Fellowship III:

Working with Others

Church Fellowship, pp. 137-162

Goals

1. To apply the principles of church fellowship to some difficult cases.
2. To learn to apply the principles of church fellowship evangelically.
3. To conclude with a review of the principles of church fellowship.

Working with others

- With whom may we worship?
- Why might an orthodox Lutheran be present at the services of a heterodox church?
- What precautions should a person take at such services?
- What are the dangers in attending a school run by another religious denomination?
- What practices must orthodox Lutherans avoid if attending such schools?
- Can a Christian be employed by a heterodox organization?

- Under what circumstances would we present theological lectures to nonorthodox groups?
- What limitation would we have to observe in attending such meetings?
- What further precautions should we observe if we attend such meetings?
- What should we do if we hear that fellow Christians have participated in such a meeting which we would not have attended?

Family and friends

- What principles of fellowship cover our relationships with family and friends?
- What one difference may there be between our private relations with such people and our public relations with them?

Civic religion

- Why don't we participate in civic religious ceremonies?
- What pitfalls do we have to avoid in belonging to political action groups that have religious overtones?
- Under what circumstances should the church lobby the government?

Miscellaneous items

- Following the principles of church fellowship, what advice can we give to those who invite lecturers from outside our fellowship to speak at events sponsored by organizations of our church?
- What principles should organizations within our fellowship (for example, Northwestern Publishing House or the Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary faculties) follow when asked to participate in publication projects with those not in our fellowship?

Conclusion

- What is the goal we have whenever we practice the principles of church fellowship?
- What two scriptural principles give us good guidance whenever we are making a decision concerning the practice of fellowship?
- What are some “bad attitudes” that we must guard against as we practice church fellowship?
- What are some of the blessings we enjoy as a result of practicing the principles of fellowship?

It gives us great sorrow whenever we lose members, pastors, or congregations because they no longer are one with us in doctrine, but their departure or removal is the only way our unity can be preserved.

Summary

In this lesson we have applied the principles of church fellowship to several hard cases. When Christians find themselves in these situations, they have the twin responsibilities of patient admonition, followed by separation from those who persist in their error. In all cases, the practice of church fellowship must be dealt with as a unit: fellowship requires agreement in *all doctrines*; *all expressions of fellowship* require full unity of doctrine.

Church Fellowship: Working Together for the Truth

Abiding Peace Lutheran Church, Elgin, IL

Summer/Fall 2010

*Adapted from "Church Fellowship: A Bible Study Course for Adults,"
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Lesson Nine:

The History of Fellowship I:

The Early Church; WELS and LCMS Relations

Church Fellowship, pp. 61-86

Goals

1. To see that our fellowship practices are not a new invention but follow the example of the early church and the church of the Reformation.
2. To understand the process that led to the establishment of fellowship between the Wisconsin Synod and the Missouri Synod and to the termination of that fellowship.
3. To understand the differences that still separate the Wisconsin Synod from the Missouri Synod today.

Church fellowship in the early church

- How would you respond to people who claim that the WELS fellowship and Communion practices are different from those of most other churches?
- Describe the Communion practices of the early church.
- What degree of doctrinal agreement did Luther believe was necessary for church fellowship?
- What were Luther's Communion practices?
- What was the belief of the orthodox Lutheran teachers of the 1600s concerning joining in worship with people with whom they were not in doctrinal agreement?

The Wisconsin and Missouri Synods

- What doctrinal controversy has had the greatest impact on the Wisconsin Synod?
- What were the early fellowship practices of the Wisconsin Synod?
- What were the early fellowship practices of the Missouri Synod?
- What enabled the Missouri Synod and Wisconsin Synod to establish church fellowship in 1868?
- What was the Synodical Conference?
- What degree of doctrinal agreement did the Synodical Conference require for church fellowship?
- What degree of doctrinal agreement was required by the Lutheran churches that are now part of the ELCA?
- What was the practice of the Synodical Conference concerning prayer fellowship?
- What change in the Missouri Synod was the first indication that they no longer held to the former fellowship practices of the Synodical Conference?
- What practical situation led to the Missouri Synod's desire to compromise its fellowship principles?

- How did the Missouri Synod attempt to escape from its earlier position that prayer fellowship requires the same degree of doctrinal agreement as any other form of church fellowship?
- What was “The Statement of the 44”? How did it contribute to the decline of the Missouri Synod?
- What were some of the further fellowship issues that created friction between the Wisconsin Synod and Missouri Synod?
- How long did the Wisconsin Synod work to resolve the doctrinal differences with the Missouri Synod?
- What finally led to the break of fellowship with the Missouri Synod in 1961?
- Define the difference in doctrine of fellowship between the Wisconsin Synod and Missouri Synod.
- What course did the Missouri Synod follow in the 1960s?
- What improvements were made in the Missouri Synod’s position during the 1970s and 1980s?
- What are the fellowship principles and practices of the ELCA?
- What differences continue to separate the Wisconsin Synod and the Missouri Synod?

Summary

The Wisconsin Synod and Missouri Synod shared a common confession of the scriptural principles of church fellowship during most of the years they were in the Synodical Conference. When the Missouri Synod began to depart from their former position, the Wisconsin Synod patiently worked with them for some 25 years, urging them to abandon certain unionistic practices. After this failed, the Wisconsin Synod severed fellowship with the Missouri Synod. Although in recent years the Missouri Synod has taken some positive steps, there remain unclarity in doctrine and errors in practice that make it impossible for the Wisconsin Synod to reestablish church fellowship with the Missouri Synod.

During the week

Read *Church Fellowship*, pp. 87-102.

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Lesson Ten:

The History of Fellowship II:

WELS and CLC Relations; the CELC

Church Fellowship, pp. 87-102

Goals

1. To understand the break in fellowship between the Wisconsin Synod and the CLC.
2. To understand the differences that still separate the Wisconsin Synod from the CLC today.
3. To understand the process that led to the formation of the CELC.

The Wisconsin Synod and the CLC

- What is the CLC?
- What difference of opinion existed in the Wisconsin Synod concerning the termination of fellowship with the Missouri Synod?
- Why did the Wisconsin Synod have a hard time deciding to break fellowship with the Missouri Synod?
- Which WELS convention was the first to consider the break of fellowship with the Missouri Synod? Which WELS convention broke fellowship with the Missouri Synod? What was the basic reason for this delay?
- What hope caused the 1953 convention to delay a break? the 1955 convention? the 1956 convention? the 1957 convention?

- What was the basis for the CLC's condemnation of the Wisconsin Synod for failing to break fellowship with the Missouri Synod sooner?
- What is the other interpretation of the actions of these WELS conventions?
- What is the WELS judgment of those who left the Wisconsin Synod because of its failure to swiftly break with the Missouri Synod?
- Why did the CLC not return to fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod after the Wisconsin Synod broke fellowship with Missouri?
- What apparent weakness does the Wisconsin Synod see in the CLC's position on church fellowship?
- Why does the Wisconsin Synod maintain that there is no doctrinal difference between the Wisconsin Synod and the CLC?
- Why did the 1987–1990 efforts to reach a reconciliation between the Wisconsin Synod and the ELS on the one hand and the CLC on the other fail?
- What is the main principle the Wisconsin Synod was trying to uphold in its discussions with the CLC?

The CELC

- What is the CELC?
- List some of the WELS efforts to preserve and expand our fellowship since the break with Missouri in 1961.
- What problem did the Wisconsin Synod face as a result of its 1961 break with Missouri?
- How did the Wisconsin Synod try to solve this problem? What was the result of these efforts?
- What are the member churches of the CELC? Locate them on a world map.

Summary

In the late 1950s a group of congregations separated from the Wisconsin Synod because they believed the Wisconsin Synod did not separate from the Missouri Synod soon enough and that the Wisconsin Synod was in error regarding its interpretation and application of Romans 16:17. This group called itself the Church of the Lutheran Confession. Efforts to restore fellowship with the CLC have so far been in vain.

A worldwide organization, the CELC, has recently been formed to extend fellowship among confessional Lutherans.