

to appear the justification and downfall of a once-union church is not a plain, logical responsibility or even to accuse a church body with which one has been affiliated and whose fellowship one has enjoyed and measured over a period of years. To do so merely for the purpose of justifying oneself would not only be a self-righteous act but would as well be unworthy of anyone who still nourishes love for those from whom one has been separated. However, out of love for the truth, it is a thing necessary as a confessional act in order that those who wish to know, may be informed of the reason why we remain separate from those who were formerly our brethren. If indeed we remain as a separate church body for the sake of personal reasons or because of animosity or for other than doctrinal differences then we should have to plead guilty of schism and separatism which is just as serious an aberration as sinful unionism. Those who claim that there are no doctrinal reasons separating us would in all honesty have to accuse us of the former sin, namely the sin of separatism.

In order that we may be certain in our day that our present stand in doctrine and practise is sound and scriptural it will ever be necessary to examine our position to make sure that we have not inherited a schismatic stance which cannot be supported by the Holy Word of God. It is furthermore necessary to engage in such a study for our own warning and admonition lest we fall into the very trap which, by the grace of God, we have avoided. To say that we are immune from such danger would not only be arrogance on our part but would also be a first step toward our own ultimate downfall and defection from the truth. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall," I Cor. 10:12. It is well that we take to heart the farewell admonition of Joshua who, when he had waxed old and stricken in age, addressed all Israel, their elders, their heads, and their officers with these words: "Be ye courageous to keep, and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left," Joshua 23:6. It is ever a danger for those who have passed through controversy that they over-react either by becoming liberal and lax due to fatigue and weariness or by becoming more stringent than the Word of God directs.

Now our assignment calls for examination and consideration of doctrinal differences between the Church of the Lutheran Confession and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. To detail all of the historical events which preceded the separation from the former brethren of WELS would require a tome of considerable proportions and would hardly serve our present purpose of setting down in concise form the current situation and the doctrinal difference such as it prevails today. Suffice it to say that the deterioration of a church body does not take place in a moment of time. Signs of a breakdown of confessional loyalty appear on the scene before the ultimate downfall of an entire church body, when it becomes clear that doctrinal discipline is not exercised and that loyalty to God's Word is no longer maintained then the time for separation has arrived. To remain in fellowship with such a church body for any time at all is a clear case of disobedience to God's Word and anyone who disregards the call for separation such as God gives us in passages such as Romans 16:17,18 is exposing himself to an erosion of his own faith. He is furthermore a partaker of a confessional disloyalty which will spread as a cancer and will work as a leaven of which our Lord says in warning that it will leaven the whole lump.

It became apparent that the WELS was headed in a wrong direction on the subject of church fellowship when it had come to the conviction that the observations of the LCMS called for the application of Rom. 16:17,18 but then postponed any action (held in abeyance the carrying out of the scriptural directive to "avoid") because of what it considered a ray of hope that things would change possibly at the convention of the carrying church body. In "collective" hope was expressed that some admission would bring about a change and reversal of commitments to an unscriptural principle and practise. A new principle found acceptance in WELS namely that continuation of fellowship is not called for so long as there is hope that some

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may be heeded. While, according to the flesh, this seemed to be an adequate reason (and a charitable one at that) for holding the application of Rom. 16:17 in abeyance, it was in fact a departure from the principle of separation given by the Lord in that Scripture text.

It is true, of course, that WELS did finally separate from the LCMS by a majority vote of its convention. (Here it may be asked in passing: "What action was ever taken with regard to those who voted against the resolution to separate?" Our observation is that those who have once committed themselves to a false principle on the doctrine of church fellowship will not be equipped to deal effectively with such protesting voters. This is not just a matter of human judgment or of timing but a matter of doctrine, namely the doctrine of church fellowship.) Now the question arises "Did WELS's action of separation from the LCMS in 1961 signify a reversal of its former false position on the matter of termination of church fellowship?" If that had been the case then certainly we of the CLC would be remiss if we refused to accept this as a return to the correct principle of church fellowship as it is laid down for us in Scripture. Sad to say, however, this is not the case. The false principle regarding the termination of fellowship, as WELS had been upholding it prior to the 1961 separation from LCMS, was still being defended.

At the last meeting between the Board of Doctrine of the CLC and the Commission on Doctrinal Matters of WELS in 1972 the difference existing between us on the doctrine of church fellowship was clearly demonstrated. On the one hand the WELS representatives held to the view that conditions may call for a delay of termination of fellowship from a church body infected with error. This they called a condition of being in "statu confessionis." One of the purposes of continuing in such a state was said to serve in extricating those brethren who were protesting against the errors of their church body. On the other hand, the CLC representatives insisted that when it has become evident that a church body is infected with error then God's Word calls for separation and allows for no delay. To temporize in this matter on the basis of the argument that separation should be postponed, until it is evident that admonition is no longer heeded or received, places the whole matter into the area of human judgment instead of letting the Word of God speak to us and then acting in obedience to it. This is indeed an act of love to the erring as well as a protection against the leavening influence of error which would infect us if we did not separate when God calls upon us to do so.

Here permit me in conclusion to append certain propositions which were drawn up by the CLC Board of Doctrine in connection with its meetings with the WELS Commission. This should be helpful in drawing the proper distinction between "weak brethren" and "false teachers" which is a subject very pertinent to the controversy:

1. A person within the fellowship who through lack of knowledge or weakness falls into an error but does not proclaim or propagate it, is not to be considered a false teacher but is to be regarded and dealt with as a weak brother. Rom. 14-15:1; Gal. 6:1-10; I Cor. 8:9-13; Heb. 12:12-24. These passages call for patience, forbearance and continuing admonition.

2. A person who teaches and propagates error or identifies himself with those who do the same is to be considered in the category of false teachers and is to be dealt with in accord with the Scriptural injunctions which pertain to false teachers. Jer. 23:25ff; Matt. 7:15ff; Matt. 23:23-26; I John 4:1-6; II John 6-11; Jude 17ff; II Cor. 6:14-18; Rom. 16:17,18; Tit. 3:10. Those who arrive in the fellowship as false teachers ~~and/or~~ have by their false doctrine and/or unscriptural practice

severed from the fellowship and have placed themselves into the category of division matters and are so to be dealt with. The passages call for prompt and decisive action and leave no room for temporizing or for the exercise of human judgment with regard to persistence or possible rays of hope.

3. Admonition within the fellowship is proper and right in the case of the above specified weak brethren and should be continued with patience and Christian forbearance. This action is carried out for the purpose of ~~separating the brother from his error~~ separating the brother from his error and is not carried on for the purpose of ascertaining whether or not he is a false teacher for false teaching is something which the person involved demonstrates by his own action.

4. Admonition outside the fellowship is indeed a proper action with regard to a false teacher or those following false teachers (Tit. 3:10) , however, this action does not and must not carry with it any implications of fellowship relations whether by pulpit, altar, prayer relations or joint church work; charitable, educational, mission, promotional or other such activities. By its very nature this type of admonition does not have the purpose of ascertaining whether or not he may after all be a weak brother but has the purpose of bringing him to repentance, of causing him to repudiate his false teaching and to accept and confess the truth in word and spirit.

