

## CLC THESES AND ANTITHESES ON THE ROLE OF ADMONITION IN THE TERMINATION OF FELLOWSHIP WITH CHURCH BODIES

Romans 16:17-18 has always been considered a *sedes doctrinae* among us. We affirm that this passage is a word of God which teaches clearly the separation principle. We herewith set forth that which we affirm and believe, as well as that which we reject, with regard to the role of admonition in the termination of fellowship with church bodies.

- I. We regard fraternal (in-fellowship) admonition as a continuing function of Christian love among brethren in the exercise of their fellowship relations, also and particularly when there is concern that brethren may have strayed into error. (Compare Ezekiel 33:1 -9; Romans 15:1 - 14; Ephesians 4:1-6; Colossians 3:12-17; 2 Timothy 4:2.) Such admonition directed to a sister church body and the response thereto play a proper role in ascertaining whether that synod has the status of weak brethren or whether it is causing divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine of God's Word.
- II. We fully believe in dealing patiently and lovingly with brethren who have the status of weak brethren (Fellow-Christians lacking in understanding of Scripture, or who may have misspoken, or erred inadvertently). In the case of such, God's Word teaches us to "reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Timothy 4:2).

We also believe it is contrary to God's will, and a violation of Christian love, to treat weak brethren as though they were false teachers. In Christian love, we will carefully inquire to ascertain exactly what is being taught before making a charge of false teacher.

In the context of Romans 16:17-18, *skopein* ("keep on watching out for") is an activity whereby believers in Christ are constantly on watch for causers of divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine of God's Word. However, *we reject* the idea that *skopein*

in Romans 16:17-18 specifically, directly, or by implication enjoins admonition. We most assuredly object when the teaching and admonishing function becomes part of the process of separating from false teachers.

- III. When it has been ascertained that a church body is causing (*tous poiountas*) divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which "ye [we] have learned," the directive to avoid (Romans 16:17-18) is as binding as any word addressed to us by our Savior God in Holy Scripture. The apostle's peremptory *ekkline* ("avoid") is the voice of the Good Shepherd Himself, as He lovingly protects His sheep and lambs from the deception of error and as He graciously gives warning to the false teacher. Continuing in fellowship with those who are causing divisions and offenses exposes Christians to the dangerous leaven of error (Galatians 5:9) and is contrary to the Lord's saving intent as well as to His commission to teach "them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:20).

*We reject* any interpretation of Romans 16:17-18 which, under the guise of Christian love, would make the avoiding of causers of divisions and offenses contingent upon the subjective judgment that admonition is of no further avail and that an impasse has thereby been reached.

*We also reject* any interpretation of Romans 16:17-18 which in effect states that when a person or church body with whom we are in fellowship causes divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which we have learned, we mark them immediately, then admonish, and if this proves fruitless, avoid them.

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Church of the Lutheran Confession  
501 Grover Road  
Eau Claire, Wisconsin 54701  
[www.clclutheran.org](http://www.clclutheran.org)

“Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you, but *that* you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Corinthians 1:10).