

Review of ccc position over against
Wisconsin Synod.

Presented at ccc Circuit Meeting by
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In the last few years we have withdrawn from our former fellowship in the Wisconsin Synod and the Synodical Conference, some sooner, others later, some in one set of circumstances, others in another set of circumstances. In view of the Wisconsin Synod's suspension of fellowship with the Missouri Synod and the possible dissolution of the Synodical Conference, it would be wise for us to reexamine our position. Are we walking according to the Scriptures in our separated state, or have we lost our right to exist separately? Let us be willing to inform ourselves on these matters, studying the Scriptures and the facts in the case in order to reach a God-pleasing conviction.

WHY DID YOU WITHDRAW FROM THE WISCONSIN SYNOD?

1. Why did you withdraw from the Wisconsin Synod in the past? There may have been more than one God-pleasing reason. Your called pastor, whom the Holy Ghost placed over you, may have been convinced by the Word to take this step and therefore instructed you according to the Word of God to withdraw from the Wisconsin Synod. You knew, as a Christian, that you were not simply to trust your pastor in these matters; in Acts 17:11 the people of Berea are praised by Scripture because they "searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things (which the apostles preached) were so." You are to beware of false prophets; you are to try the spirits whether they are of God. Since you could not find Scriptural grounds to oppose your called pastor and since you could not accuse him of false doctrine, you followed the Word of God, Hebrews 13:17, which says: "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you." God has called pastors to guide us, for our profit; of these pastors our Lord has said: "He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me." Unless our pastors proclaim false doctrine or take a false position or adopt a false policy, we have every reason to follow them. It was surely God-pleasing, safe, and profitable for you to follow your pastor and not reject his Scriptural testimony.

2. You may have withdrawn from the Wisconsin Synod for another reason. You may have witnessed the unscriptural practices of the Missouri Synod: their support of Boy Scout troops, which promote Pharisaical good works without repentance and Gospel motivation; their support of the government chaplaincy, which enables the state to regulate the work and services of a servant of the church; their participation with false-teaching Lutherans, Protestants, and even Catholics (in extreme cases) in joint prayer and other church activity; their toleration of flagrantly unscriptural and un-Christian teaching at their seminaries and schools - and considered the word of John: (2 John 10-11) "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." You saw the evil deeds, the false doctrines, in the Missouri Synod, officially defended, and you did not want to be partaker with them in their evil deeds, and you did not want to bid them God speed by fellowship with them, even through the Wisconsin Synod. So you withdrew from the Wisconsin Synod, which still fellowshiped with the Missouri Synod. Your step was certainly God-pleasing.

3. There may still have been another reason that influenced you to take this step. You saw the list of divisions and offences that the Wisconsin Synod had drawn up against the Missouri Synod already in 1953; you recognized, along with the floor committee in Saginaw in 1955, that the Missouri Synod was "a causer of divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine we have learned," and you were bound in your conscience to obey Romans 16: 17-18 and avoid the Missouri Synod. Yet, even though you personally avoided the Missouri Synod for conscience' sake, you witnessed your brethren in the Wisconsin Synod postpone a final decision, and openly violate the vigorously protesting fellowship they had declared. You began to be concerned about the Scriptural position of the Wisconsin Synod, for you heard their leaders defend their hesitation and postponement of obedience on the grounds of patience and love (as though disobedience to God's Word could ever be love). You saw how the leaders of the Synod were beginning to uphold and practice an unscriptural position in regard to termination of fellowship, some saying we were already avoiding by inclining away from the Missouri Synod, some saying we could not separate from them as long as they were listening to our admonition, others saying we must terminate fellowship when we reach the conviction that our admonition is of no further avail, confusion reigning and contradictory teachings tolerated. You saw pastors protest in writing and in person in convention debate. Finally you saw some withdraw from the Synod, and you began asking yourself: "What should I do?"

Then you studied the Scriptures and the facts in the case and reached the conviction that the Missouri Synod was indeed causing divisions and offences contrary to God's doctrine; that the Wisconsin Synod had recognized this fact but had failed to carry out God's command concerning such; that the Wisconsin Synod defended its hesitation, postponement, and (yes) disobedience by an unscriptural doctrine of its own: namely, that the course of admonition determines the time of termination, rather than the continuation of the offences in spite of admonition; that the Wisconsin Synod defended its unscriptural doctrine on termination of fellowship in spite of protests, memorials, and admonitions, and thus became guilty of causing divisions and offences of her own contrary to Scriptures; and that finally God was asking you to withdraw from the Wisconsin Synod because of the continuation of these offences.

WE ARE NOT PERFECT

If for any of the above reasons or for a combination of these reasons or for related reasons you withdrew from the Wisconsin Synod, you have nothing to repent of nor any reason for a guilty conscience, no matter what the Wisconsin Synod does now. You withdrew for God-pleasing reasons, and your conscience was bound in God's Word to withdraw. Although we need not repent of the action itself, because of our fleshly imperfection we all must repent of any bitterness and lack of love which may have accompanied it, as well as pride on our part. The spirit within us wanted simply to obey in love a God who loved us and follow His Word which has been written for our good and for our protection. But we still have the flesh and must continually battle against it.

THE REAL QUESTION AT PRESENT

So much for the past; now what about the present and the future? Now we find ourselves in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession. If the Wisconsin Synod by its action of suspension righted its wrongs and is now an orthodox, correct-teaching church body, the C.L.C. still has a right to exist separately in an organizational way, but it has no right to withhold fellowship from the Wisconsin Synod or its members. This then is the question we must ask to determine our present course: Is the Wisconsin Synod at this time an orthodox church body? Has the Wisconsin Synod at this time stopped causing divisions and offences contrary to God's doctrine, or not? If the answer is yes, then there is no barrier to fellowship, and the C.L.C. should make public the fact that it is now in fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod. If the answer is yes, the only barrier would be a man-made barrier that is not God-pleasing. If the answer is no, then of course we in the C.L.C. must continue to withhold our fellowship from the Wisconsin Synod and its members for our own good, according to God's Word.

The question may be asked in another way: Was the failure to suspend fellowship with the Missouri Synod the only unscriptural teaching or practice the Wisconsin Synod was guilty of? If the answer is yes, then now the Wisconsin Synod position is correct, and we should not refuse fellowship. If the answer is no, if there were other false practices and false doctrines upheld by the Wisconsin Synod, then those other false practices and false doctrines must be corrected before there can be God-pleasing fellowship. These are the questions that we must seek to answer according to the objective facts in this controversy. When we have answered these questions, our course of action according to God's Word will be clear. For it is a clear teaching of Scripture that when men are causers of divisions and offences by teaching contrary to God's Word, they must be avoided and isolated lest the false teaching spread and simple Christians be deceived.

LET US DROWN FLESHLY CONSIDERATIONS

Let us say right here that it would be a symptom of disease on our part if we ourselves did not truly desire a God-pleasing fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod (as well as with all other Christian church bodies), and if we did not pray for true unity with them. We should be on our guard lest our flesh introduce unscriptural reasons for withholding fellowship, such as personal enmity, hard feelings, jealousy, and the like. Consideration as to what we could do with our young institutions, new buildings, committees, etc., should not enter the picture either. Such fleshly considerations cannot answer the question, whether we should or should not fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod.

On the other hand, we should be on our guard lest our flesh introduce unscriptural reasons for resuming fellowship, such as personal friendships, feelings of lonely frustration, discouraging growth, the ridicule and misunderstandings of questioners, and the like.

Not should we resume fellowship now in the hope that unity of doctrine will soon be established. This is the error of the Missouri Synod that it practices fellowship with church bodies with which it is desirous of establishing unity of doctrine in the future. As great as our hopes may be (and they should be great, for God's Word is powerful), hopes in themselves are not the basis for resuming fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod. Whether we should now resume fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod must be determined by objective facts, not sentimental considerations or subjective hopes.

THE WISCONSIN SYNOD'S FALSE TEACHING ON CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

Now then, what are the facts? How should we answer the questions above? Although many members of the Wisconsin Synod feel that suspension of fellowship with the Missouri Synod is the only issue between the C.L.C. and the Wisconsin Synod, the facts do not bear that out. For the Wisconsin Synod not only postponed its suspension with the Missouri Synod in 1955; since that time it has justified and defended that postponement. That justification and defense introduced a new principle in regard to termination of church fellowship; namely, that "Termination of church fellowship is called for when you have reached the conviction that admonition is of no further avail and that the erring brother or church body demands recognition for their error."

This statement falsely introduces the course of admonition as the criterion for termination of fellowship, rather than the continuing of the offences.

Appt. by Lawrence, Jr. 1/19/59
to the pastor

It can be shown that the Wisconsin Synod changed its position at this point. In 1955 the only reason proposed for breaking fellowship with the Missouri Synod was correct and Scriptural, namely: "because of the divisions and offences that have been caused, and which have until now not been removed." THEN the only Scriptural basis for severing of fellowship was given: "the causing of divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine we have learned." According to the NEW principle, more is necessary before a break in fellowship can take place. They believe we must come to the conviction that admonition is no longer useful before we can break fellowship. In 1955 no mention was made that such conviction was necessary. THEN the Synod declared that when divisions and offences continue, it is time to avoid. That is correct and Scriptural. The Wisconsin Synod has CHANGED its position and by its change has itself contributed to the confusion in the Synod and HAS CAUSED ALSO DIVISIONS AND OFFENCES among us.

Although the Wisconsin Synod suspended fellowship with the Missouri Synod on the basis of Romans 16: 17-18, and they maintain "that the reason for the action is to be found solely in the reference to the Scripture passage from Romans 16," eyewitnesses of the Wisconsin Synod convention noticed that much of the argumentation for suspension of fellowship with Missouri was in line with the false principle mentioned above. At any rate, this false principle has not been annulled or retracted. Certainly this matter of church fellowship must be cleared up before there can be any doctrinal unity and God-pleasing fellowship between the C.L.C. and the Wisconsin Synod.

OUR DOCTRINAL STATEMENT REJECTS THIS FALSE TEACHING

This false principle of the Wisconsin Synod is called false doctrine in the CLC statement "Concerning Church Fellowship". We read on p. 48: "We further reject the teaching that errorists and their followers are to be avoided only when they no longer listen to admonition, or that we are to remain in fellowship with errorists as long as there is hope that they might give up their errors. Though the teaching Church is ever an admonishing Church, we reject the opinion that separation from errorists is dependent upon the course of admonition." As long as this false principle is upheld and unretracted within the Wisconsin Synod, the Wisconsin Synod is not a correct-teaching church body. p 28
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The correct doctrine according to Scriptures is confessed on ^{p. 22 P 46} p. 25 of "Concerning Church Fellowship": "We further believe, teach and confess that established fellowships or existing fellowships are to be terminated when it has been ascertained (made certain) that a person or group through a false position is causing divisions and offences in the Church."

THE TESTIMONIES OF OTHERS

Pastor Paul Nolting, in "The Deepening Wedge of Error", writes as follows in regard to this false principle of the Wisconsin Synod: "We are exhorted to avoid when we see someone causing divisions and offences in the church, not after we arrive at the conviction that the process of admonition has failed. Then is too late, as the Lord tells us and the history of the church confirms." Again he writes: "It is this continuing as a supporter and teacher of error, this continuing to cause divisions and offences contrary to the Word, that is the apostolic sign and signal for recognizing whether or not a person is or isn't an errorist who is to be avoided. In brief, the apostolic instruction is: Use your eyesight and keep anyone who has fallen into error in focus. If he continues in his error, avoid him. When? Immediately, for the glory of God and the preservation of your faith is at stake!"

President Paul Albrecht, in the Lutheran Spokesman of January, 1962, writes as follows: "Wisconsin continued to practice church fellowship with Missouri long after she had recognized as a causer of divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine, under the plea that she had not yet reached the conviction that further admonition would be fruitless." Again he writes: "If we see people who, by the unscriptural position which they actually hold and proclaim, cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine, then the Lord's injunction is 'Avoid them,' not tomorrow or next year, but at once. When God has spoken, then delay is disobedience."

Prof. E. Reim, in the Journal of Theology of December, 1962, writes as follows: "Wisconsin ... has also carried the continuation of fraternal admonition into the 'marking' as something that must be done 'until the full debt of love has been discharged.' Then, and not until then, will it apply the 'avoid'. ... Making such admonition an essential part of the 'marking,' a determinative part that fixes the time when the 'marking' must cease and the 'avoiding' begin - this is again something that obviously defeats the plain purpose of the procedure. It offers talk where Paul calls for energetic action. It prolongs the period of inactivity and indecision while the error continues to do its destructive work, and while men battle over the question whether the final point of admonition has actually been reached, whether the 'debt of love' has been fully paid. And it leaves men hopelessly divided in their opinions because the factor of human judgment has been invoked where Scripture alone should reign."

Again Prof. Reim writes: "To call for further admonition (after someone has been marked as a causer of divisions and offences) would be like a surgeon calling for further tests after he knows that he is dealing with a ruptured appendix, like postponing isolation measures when the plague spots have plainly erupted. With such evi-

dence before us, we know with what we are faced. We know what to do. We know why it should be done: for the prevention of error's spread, for the sake of the simple, and yes, even for the sake of these who are the causers of the offence. So let us mark, let us avoid. To demand still more evidence, still further admonition can only make a mockery of the entire procedure."

THE PRESENT CONFUSION IN THE WISCONSIN SYNOD

Let us not draw the inference that every member or every pastor of the Wisconsin Synod consciously upholds the false principle on church fellowship. On the conven- (961)
tion floor some delegates spoke like the C.L.C. On the other hand, other delegates spoke far worse than the false principle discussed above. Both views seem to be tolerated. There is a great deal of confusion within the Wisconsin Synod today, both in doctrine and in practice.

Nor should we believe that because the Wisconsin Synod suspended fellowship by a majority vote in August, 1961, all pastors and members of the Wisconsin Synod are no longer practicing fellowship with members of the Missouri Synod. The joint effort of mission work in the Synodical Conference continues. Almost all the joint projects in the Milwaukee area are still joint, although we are told that efforts are being made to stop these joint endeavors. It is over a year since the vote was taken. These efforts should not take so long if this is a matter of conscience with Wisconsin Synod members. Although efforts were made to establish silent prayer instead of joint devotions at the recent meeting of the Synodical Conference in Chicago, the matter did not come up for vote until the end of the meetings; meanwhile, an eyewitness reports that delegates from both the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods rose together in prayer and devotion, giving every evidence of fellowship in spite of their suspension of fellowship with the Missouri Synod.

To rejoin or resume fellowship with a synod whose position is in such confusion, whose errors have not been retracted, a synod which one has had to leave in the past for conscience' sake, is a very serious matter. God has given us a very precious gift in the current doctrinal unity and obedient spirit evident in the C.L.C. We should not want to give up that precious gift by resuming fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod before doctrinal unity is a fact.

Let us continue to support the truth as it is confessed in the C.L.C. and let us pray that God in His wisdom will find a way to unite with us also on earth His dear children in the Wisconsin Synod, as we are united even now by faith in Christ Jesus in the invisible Church, and as we shall be united forever in the Heavenly Church everlasting.

A SECOND ISSUE: THE CLARITY AND AUTHORITY OF THE SCRIPTURES

In order to attain doctrinal unity and God-pleasing fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod, agreement will have to be reached not only on the Scriptural doctrine of church fellowship. The C.L.C. Floor Committee on Doctrine at the Spokane convention mentioned other issues also, namely: "deviations from the Scriptural doctrine of the Clarity and Authority of the Scriptures, as well as instances of violation of the sanctity of the call."

In regard to the clarity and authority of the Scriptures, Pres. Albrecht wrote as follows: "The orthodox Lutheran Church has always believed and taught that the Scriptures are clear, that their meaning is not obscure but easily intelligible to a devout child of God." ... "The orthodox Lutheran Church has always accepted the divine authority of the Scriptures and taught that since they are God's Word we owe them unconditional obedience." ... "The manner in which Wisconsin has these past years dealt with Romans 16: 17-18 is a clear deviation from the above teaching of Scripture."

A THIRD ISSUE: THE SANCTITY OF THE DIVINE CALL OF PASTORS

In regard to this issue Pres. Albrecht has written: "No congregation can, without grievously sinning against God, reject its God-given shepherd unless he has made himself unfit for the high office by persistent adherence to false doctrine, a scandalous life, or willful neglect of duty. In the very recent past, however, Wisconsin has, through its elected officials and appointed representatives, taken the position that a congregation has the right to reject its pastor whenever he ceases to be a member of the Wisconsin Synod." Later he writes: "Again and again, Wisconsin has given its official sanction to the actions of congregations which rejected their pastors for no Scripture-approved reason, and has helped fill the pulpits thus sinfully vacated."

A SUMMARY OF THE PRESENT C.L.C. POSITION

We summarize our discussion as follows. That the C.L.C. is now separate indicates that its members are convinced that both the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods are not at present orthodox, that is, rightly teaching and rightly practicing church bodies. What are the charges against these church bodies?

As far as the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod is concerned, we agree with the list of departures from the word of God set forth in 1953 by the Wisconsin Synod. All of these departures have since been aggravated.

1. Cooperation and joint prayer with heterodox, false teaching church bodies, whereas God says: "Avoid them."
2. Toleration of Scouting in the church (beginning in 1944), although Scouting demands a pledge implying that a person can do his duty to God on his own honor, contrary to Scriptural teaching.

3. Acceptance of the military chaplaincy, in which the chaplain as a servant of the government is compelled to carry out duties contrary to the Scriptures.
4. Toleration of flagrantly unscriptural teaching at seminaries and schools, and in publications, etc.

As far as the Wisconsin Synod is concerned, we must say that there are three areas in which that church body has taught and acted contrary to the Scriptures.

1. Although the Wisconsin Synod recognized the divisions and offences in the Missouri Synod contrary to the Scriptures, it refused to avoid them, or suspend fellowship with them, in 1953, 1955, 1956, 1957, and 1959. The Wisconsin Synod justified postponement of action on the grounds that continued admonition as brothers was still useful, and that as long as it was still useful fellowship could not be terminated. In 1961 the Wisconsin Synod formally suspended fellowship with the Missouri Synod by majority vote, but it has not yet been able to carry it out in practice in many cases. Nor has the Synod admitted that its justification of past postponements is wrong and contrary to the Scriptures.
2. By refusing to obey the clear Word of God in Romans 16: 17-18 in former years and still today to a certain extent, the Wisconsin Synod has undermined the authority and clarity of the Bible.
3. By assisting in the removal of faithful pastors and filling their vacancies, pastors whose only error(?) was disagreement with the Wisconsin Synod or withdrawal from that Synod, the Wisconsin Synod has in certain instances been guilty of violating the divine call of faithful pastors.

ATTEMPTS TO REESTABLISH UNITY WITH WISCONSIN

There have been attempts to reestablish unity on the basis of God's Word between the CLC and the Wisconsin Synod. The Lutheran Spokesman of November, 1962, reported briefly on the meeting of Nov. 10th. Pres. Albrecht reported on this meeting at the Eau Claire convention. This is what I wrote in a personal letter soon after hearing Pres. Albrecht's report:

"Pres. Naumann (of the Wisconsin Synod) in his early correspondence with Pres. Albrecht had agreed to an open, frank discussion of all the issues that lie between us (the three mentioned above). As the meeting time drew nearer, however, the purpose of the meeting changed. Now Pres. Naumann wrote that the meeting would be for the purpose of determining whether there was in the C.L.C. ~~an~~ evident and express desire for reconciliation. (These are not exact quotations, but I am sure that this is the sense.) When Pres. Naumann was asked on Nov. 10th why the purpose of the meeting had been changed, he said that sometimes one does not express himself as he ought to; in other words, he should never have agreed to an open, frank discussion in the first place. Consequently, the issues we believe divide us were never discussed at all in this meeting.

"The Wis. Synod representatives felt that their only purpose at this meeting was to give an oral interpretation of the resolutions by which they suspended fellowship with the Mo. Synod. That was the contents of the entire discussion.

"In earlier correspondence Pres. Naumann had said that our criticism of the Wisconsin Synod resolution was invalid and was based on a misunderstanding of the resolutions. Pres. Albrecht therefore asked that the Wis. Synod might give in writing the true interpretation of their resolutions and also the points in which our men had misinterpreted their resolutions, so that this might be studied by our men before the meeting. This request was not granted; there was no official interpretation of the resolution made, nor any listing of our misinterpretations. Only an oral interpretation was given.

"At the end of the discussion an attempt was made to bring the matter to a head by our men. Therefore someone from the C.L.C. tried to summarize the position of the Wisconsin Synod from the discussion. He read his summary and asked the Wis. Synod men if that was their position in regard to church fellowship. Their answer was "Not quite." ... "The C.L.C. wanted to get at the issues, wanted to set up some kind of listing of differences so that there could be some progress made. The Wis. Synod men did not want to be pinned down to any position at all at this time. Apparently they feel that their resolutions are clear in themselves and the C.L.C. is purposely misinterpreting them for their own advantage.

"The C.L.C. was ready to meet again, but the Wis. men made no promises. They said the larger committee must decide that issue. So the whole thing is now about where it started.

"Just as the Missouri Synod refuses to recognize that there are any differences between them and the Wis. Synod and constantly tells its people that we are all united in the Truth, even so now it seems that the Wis. Synod is refusing to recognize the differences that lie between the C.L.C. and Wisconsin and gives the impression we are one, ignoring the three points that we have mentioned. As soon as we agree on these matters or prove them to be based on misunderstanding, we shall be reconciled. I still firmly feel that these issues are issues still."

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF SCRIPTURAL DOCTRINE CONCERNING THE CHURCH

In conclusion, I shall try to outline what it means that we are not in fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod. What is our relationship to members of the Wisconsin Synod?

First of all, let me stress the wonderful truth of the Holy Christian invisible Church consisting of all those sinners who put their trust in Jesus Christ, God's Son, who hung on the cross in payment of all our sins and rescued us forever from the power of Satan, death, and hell.

This Church is INVISIBLE, because we cannot read men's hearts to tell who believes and who does not. The Lord knows them that are His.

Men all over the world in every church body who believe they are sinners saved by the blood of Christ belong to the UNIVERSAL Christian Church and will be carried to heaven to enjoy the presence of God forever.

Wherever the doctrines of sin and grace are still taught to some extent, although they may be beclouded and confused with much error, there Christians are to be found who in their hearts cling to Jesus Christ as their Savior. IT IS NOT THE ERROR THAT MAKES THEM CHRISTIANS BUT THE TRUTH WHICH IS STILL MINGLED WITH THE ERROR.

Also on the other hand there may be external members of a strictly orthodox and correctly teaching church body who are not members of the invisible Church but UNBELIEVERS AT HEART AND HYPOCRITES.

But we cannot read hearts and so we regard as Christians ALL THOSE WHO PROFESS FAITH IN THE GOSPEL AND DO NOT DENY THAT PROFESSION BY A GODLESS LIFE. Therefore it is obvious that by breaking fellowship with another synod, we do not declare its members to be unbelievers. We do not say that of members of any Christian church body, Catholic, Presbyterian, Baptist, or Lutheran. On the contrary, we are UNITED IN THE INVISIBLE CHURCH WITH ALL BELIEVERS IN ALL SECTS AND CHURCHES AND COUNTRIES AND HOMES, AND IN THE DAY OF THE LORD THIS INVISIBLE CHURCH WILL BECOME VISIBLE IN HEAVEN, WHEN MANY SHALL COME FROM THE EAST AND THE WEST AND SIT DOWN IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

Now it is natural for Christians saved from sin to unite with each other in prayer, worship, mission work, and other charitable works. Everything that Christians do together in their religious life is CHURCH FELLOWSHIP.

Our Lord, however, HAS PLACED RESTRICTIONS ON OUR CHURCH FELLOWSHIP FOR OUR OWN GOOD. We cannot worship together and pray together with all men whom we believe might be Christians. We cannot recognize Christians on the basis of their personal faith, because we cannot read their hearts. Therefore we worship together and pray together with those Christians only WHO HOLD THE SAME CONFESSION THAT WE DO, in other words, those that profess Christ as their Savior AND continue in His Word. Jesus said to His disciples, John 8:31: "If ye continue in my Word, then are ye my disciples indeed."

Ceremonies in the churches may be different, order of service may be different, but the TEACHING MUST BE THE SAME BEFORE CHURCH FELLOWSHIP IS GOD-PLEASING. So the Formula of Concord states: "The churches will not condemn one another because of dissimilarity of ceremonies, provided they are otherwise agreed with one another in the DOCTRINE and ALL its articles."

God's Word tells us we cannot practice church fellowship with those whose public profession and confession reveals that they believe, teach, or support doctrines or practices contrary to God's Word. Paul says, 1 Timothy 6:3ff.: "If any man teach otherwise and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ from such withdraw thyself." Also Paul says, Romans 16:17: "Mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them." Therefore, WHEN A MAN'S CONFESSION IS IN ACCORD WITH THE "TEACHINGS WE HAVE LEARNED", WE RECOGNIZE HIM AS A CHRISTIAN BROTHER IN ALL WAYS AND WORSHIP TOGETHER WITH HIM, PRAY WITH HIM, WORK JOINTLY WITH HIM IN MISSIONARY WORK, ETC. BUT WHEN A MAN'S CONFESSION IS NOT IN ACCORD WITH THE "TEACHINGS WE HAVE LEARNED", WE DO NOT WORSHIP WITH HIM, PRAY WITH HIM, SUPPORT HIM, ETC. This is God's method for counteracting false teaching, and it is because men have neglected these instructions that there is so much confusion and heresy in the Christian churches. As soon as men stray from God's clear Word (as we have experienced in the Wisconsin Synod), then there are differences of opinion, human ideas, and no theologian is smart or clever enough to solve these problems. God's Word alone must guide; where God's Word is guide, there is clarity; where God's Word is disregarded, there is confusion and uncertainty. God's Word is a lamp unto our feet and does not cause confusion if we only listen to it and follow it.

What should our relationship be to members of the Wisconsin Synod? We have left the Wisconsin Synod because it has taken a false position in regard to church fellowship and has retained this false position in spite of correction. They still support the Wisconsin Synod. That is their confession. Therefore, although we may feel that there is no difference between them and us, although we may believe that they believe in the same Savior from sin and accept the same Word of God, yet, as long as conditions are as they are, we cannot worship with them and pray with them as long as their confession supports the Wisconsin Synod, which has taken an unscriptural position. This brings great sadness to our hearts, but it cannot be otherwise. Any other action would be hypocritical and meaningless.

Dear brethren, search the Scriptures, whether these things are so. Try the spirits, whether they be of God.