



Popular Version of
*Concerning
Church Fellowship*



Church of the Lutheran Confession
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Preface

At the General Pastoral Conference of the Church of the Lutheran Confession in 2013 one of the topics for discussion was the 1960 confessional statement of the CLC entitled *Concerning Church Fellowship*. It became evident at that time that some readers of this document, both inside and outside of our church body, have had difficulty understanding certain terms and expressions used in the document. Therefore the pastors of the Pacific Coast Conference of the CLC made a list of certain expressions that could be improved for a clearer understanding. The CLC Board of Doctrine was asked to condense *Concerning Church Fellowship* by reducing each section to three sentences. Daniel Fleischer, chairman of the Board of Doctrine, succeeded in doing just that, and his condensation has been published by the CLC Board of Education and Publications in a pamphlet with the title *Summary of Concerning Church Fellowship*.

David Lau, another member of the Board of Doctrine, decided to reword the entire document in an attempt to alleviate the concerns of the Pacific Coast pastors. He was assisted substantially in this effort by Richard Kanzenbach, Paul Naumann, and the CLC Board of Doctrine. The pastors of the Pacific Coast Conference made a thorough study

of this reworded version of *Concerning Church Fellowship*, approved of its contents, and asked that it be submitted to the General Pastoral Conference of the CLC in 2015. The 2014 CLC convention agreed with this proposal.

The 2015 General Pastoral Conference recommended that this document, entitled *Popular Version of Concerning Church Fellowship*, be made available. In response the 2016 CLC convention resolved “that the *Popular Version of Concerning Church Fellowship* be made available on the CLC website and in the CLC Book House after final editing.” At the same time the convention stated that this new document “is not a replacement for *Concerning Church Fellowship*,” and that it “does not alter by addition or subtraction any of the doctrines or principles of *Concerning Church Fellowship*.”

It is to be noted that in this version the original Epitome of *Concerning Church Fellowship* is retained exactly as it was adopted in 1960. Only the elaboration has been changed. In this elaboration the Bible passages, quoted according to the New King James Version, are in bold face. The confessions of the CLC contained in the CLC Constitution, as well as their contents, are printed in italics.

May our gracious Lord make use of this attempt to glorify His name in accordance with His gracious will.

CLC Board of Education and Publications, October 2016

Popular Version of *Concerning Church Fellowship*

Foreword

The organizing convention of the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) in August of 1960 adopted a document entitled *Concerning Church Fellowship* as a statement of its doctrinal confession. This document was the end result of an intensive study of the Bible's teaching on church fellowship on the part of pastors, teachers, and delegates who were troubled by false doctrines and practices that had arisen in the synods of the Synodical Conference from 1938 to 1960. Before a new church body could be organized, it was determined that there must be unity in what we believe and confess the Bible to say on this matter. By God's grace *Concerning Church Fellowship* was adopted and included as an official part of the CLC Constitution, together with the *Book of Concord* of 1580, the *Brief Statement* of 1932, and some theses on the doctrine of church and ministry. Since that time *Concerning Church Fellowship* has served well to present the CLC's teaching and practice concerning church fellowship to its own members as well as to anyone else who has desired to know what we teach and confess.

The original need for such a document arose because of the influence of the ecumenical movement on Christian church bodies, including American Lutheran church bodies. Instead of necessary agreement on Bible truth, there was an emphasis on union without confessional agreement. Lutheran church bodies were merging and working together in Gospel work without agreement in what the Bible says. The foreword to the first edition of *Concerning Church Fellowship* declares: "It is true that the trend of our times is toward union, particularly also among Lutherans, and the great mergers of the current century seem to testify

to its effectiveness. ... Then there are the wider associations of the National Lutheran Council (NLC) and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), as well as the official participation of many of these groups in the interdenominational National Council of Churches of Christ, and even the World Council of Churches. All this creates the appearance of progress—until one remembers how many doctrinal issues were left unresolved in these unions.”

This alternate version of *Concerning Church Fellowship* is not intended to replace the original document, which stands as the official doctrinal position of our church body. Nor does it intend to alter by addition or subtraction any of the doctrines or principles asserted in the original document. In fact, the epitome of the original document remains exactly as it was in the original document. Only the elaboration of the epitome has been rewritten in an attempt to make our confession as clear as it can be.

In this alternate version the text of the *New King James Version* has been used (except in the *Epitome* where the *King James Version* is used, as in the original *Concerning Church Fellowship*). The confessions of *The Book of Concord* have been quoted according to the wording given in the edition of 2000 edited by Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert. Perhaps this alternate version may prove to be useful in certain congregations in certain circumstances. If so, may the Lord of the Church and the Holy Spirit work with it and through it, to the glory of God alone.

We reiterate what was written in the foreword to the original document: “We have not tried to cover the entire field of the doctrines of Scripture, nor do we see any need for attempting this. We have not even touched on all the points that are in controversy today. But in addressing ourselves to certain specific issues which, as we firmly believe, are at the root of most if not all of the evils which are troubling our beloved Lutheran Church in our time, we are appealing to the precedent established by the confessors of 1580, who in their opening paragraphs stated: Necessity, therefore, requires us to explain these controverted articles according to God’s Word and approved writings, so that every one who has Christian understanding can notice which opinion concerning the matters in

controversy accords with God's Word and the Christian Augsburg Confession, and which does not. And sincere Christians who have the truth at heart may guard and protect themselves against the errors and corruptions that have arisen. (Foreword to Thorough Declaration, *Formula of Concord, Concordia Triglotta* 849:10)

"We harbor no extravagant notions as to the impression which this our little confession will make. Yet we venture to dedicate it to a great and noble purpose, one stated so clearly and masterfully in the closing statement of the Formula, so that we can only repeat:

"From this our explanation, friends and enemies, and therefore every one, may clearly infer that we have no intention of yielding aught of the eternal, immutable truth of God for the sake of temporal peace, tranquility, and unity. Nor would such peace and unity, since it is devised against the truth and for its suppression, have any permanency. Still less are we inclined to adorn and conceal a corruption of the pure doctrine and manifest, condemned errors. But we entertain heartfelt pleasure and love for, and are on our part sincerely inclined and anxious to advance, that unity according to our utmost power, by which His glory remains to God uninjured, nothing of the divine truth of the Holy Gospel is surrendered, no room is given to the least error, poor sinners are brought to true, genuine repentance, raised up by faith, confirmed in new obedience, and thus justified and eternally saved alone through the sole merit of Christ. (*Conc. Trgl.* 1095: 95)

"That God may graciously use and bless our halting efforts toward this end, that is our earnest and confident prayer."

CONCERNING CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

or, more specifically,

CONCERNING THE SEPARATION PRINCIPLE

EPITOME

A Summary of the Content of Our Confession

CONCERNING CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

The Principal Question in This Controversy

Three questions have arisen in the Lutheran Church concerning this doctrine.

1. What extent of doctrinal agreement does Scripture require as a basis for fellowship? Some have taught that agreement in all doctrines is required; others, that fellowship is to be permitted though there be less than such complete agreement.
2. Later, a controversy arose among those who taught that complete agreement was necessary as a basis for fellowship. To what extent is fellowship forbidden among those who are not in complete doctrinal agreement? Some have taught that all manifestations of fellowship are forbidden with those who deviate in doctrine; others have taught that there are areas of church work which do not require complete agreement.
3. Finally, a controversy arose among those who taught that all manifestations of fellowship are forbidden with all who deviate in doctrine. What is the Scriptural criterion for termination of fellowship with errorists with whom one has been in fellowship, but

who later deviate in doctrine? Some have taught that the exercise of church fellowship is to cease when it is clear that the error is actually being taught and defended; others have taught that fellowship may be practiced as long as the errorists do not openly contradict the Word of God and do not refuse to discuss the issues involved.

STATEMENT OF TRUE DOCTRINE

1. We believe, teach, and confess that complete doctrinal agreement is the Scriptural basis for church fellowship. “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” (1 Cor. 1:10) (§ 4-7).
2. We further believe that the doctrine which the Church should teach and hold is restricted to the doctrine of the Bible. “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God” (1 Pet. 4:11). (§ 8-9)
3. We further believe that the Word of God (the Old and New Testaments) is inerrant, inviolable, and clear. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16); “...the Scripture cannot be broken (John 10:35); “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Ps. 119:105) (§ 10-13).
4. We believe that all aberrations from the doctrines of Scripture are condemned by God. “Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that use their tongues, and say, He saith” (Jer. 23:31), and “If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:9). (§14-15)
5. We believe and teach that church fellowship is forbidden with all who deviate from the Word of God in their teachings. “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them” (Rom. 16:17). (§ 16-41)

6. We further believe that all manifestations of fellowship are forbidden with those who deviate from the Word of God in their teachings (Rom. 16:17b). (§ 42-45)
7. We further believe and teach that suspension of an established fellowship is to take place when it has been ascertained that a person or group is causing divisions and offenses through a false position in doctrine or practice (Rom. 16:17-18). (§ 46-48)

REJECTION OF FALSE DOCTRINE

1. We reject and condemn any limitations on the extent of the application of the Scriptural injunctions to separate from false churches and teachers. (§ 49)
 - a. We reject the teaching that the application is limited to non-Christian bodies. (§ 50)
 - b. We reject the teaching that the application is limited to those who deny the redemptive work of Christ. (§ 51)
 - c. We reject the teaching that the application is limited to those who err in fundamental doctrines. (§ 58-60)
 - d. 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 we think there is hope that they might give up their errors. (§ 61-72)
 - e. Though the teaching Church is ever an admonishing Church, we reject the opinion that separation from errorists is dependent upon the course of admonition. (§ 73)

2. We also reject and condemn all limitations on the intensiveness of such divinely commanded separation from false churches and teachers.
 - a. We reject as false the teaching which would forbid only joint worship services with errorists. (§ 75-77)
 - b. We reject as spurious the distinction which is made between prayer fellowship and joint prayer, namely, that while the former is indeed forbidden with errorists, an occasional joint prayer would not be displeasing to God. (§ 78-80)
 - c. We also reject the teaching that fellowship with errorists is permitted if there be no complicity with the error itself, or that the errorist may be fellowshipped but not his error. (§ 82)
 - d. We also reject the teaching that one may practice outward or external fellowship with errorists, if one does not embrace the error in his heart. (§ 83-84)
 - e. We also reject the idea of protesting fellowships when they are used as license to practice fellowship with errorists. (§ 85-88) 5
 - f. Finally, we reject the plea of “cooperation in externals” when it is used as license for actual joint church work with errorists. (§ 81)

ELABORATION OF THE EPITOME

STATEMENT OF TRUE DOCTRINE

Thesis One: *We believe, teach, and confess that complete doctrinal agreement is the Scriptural basis for church fellowship.*

“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” (1 Cor. 1:10).

The first thing to be understood about church fellowship is what the Scriptures teach about Christ’s Church. In the New Testament the Greek word translated “church” is *ekklesia*, which is generally used in Scripture to refer to those who are believers in Jesus Christ, either the entire number of believers in Jesus throughout the world in every age, or a portion of them at a certain time and place. The apostle Paul’s letter to the Ephesians presents to us the *sedes doctrinae* for the Christian teaching concerning Christ’s Church, teaching us that Christ’s Church is “one (Eph. 4:4), holy (Eph. 2:21), universal (Eph. 4:6), and apostolic (Eph. 2:20)” (*Nicene Creed, Book of Concord*, Colb and Wengert, 2000 ed., p 23). (From this point on, BC refers to *Book of Concord*).

Consider also these Scriptural references:

Romans 3: 21-24: “But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption

that is in Christ Jesus.” All Christians believe that they are sinners saved alone through Christ’s redemption of all, and through the work of the Holy Spirit, who through Word and Sacrament conveys the benefits of this redemption to us and creates the faith that receives this redemption.

Galatians 3:28: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

John 17: 20-21: “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You.” Jesus’ prayer is fulfilled when the Holy Spirit through the Word brings us to faith in Christ, and we become members of the body of Christ and thus united with every other Christian.

Romans 12:5: “We, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.”

Ephesians 4: 4-6: “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were 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.”

**For more discussion on this matter please refer to
*Concerning Church and Ministry.***

All of our Lutheran confessions insist, with Martin Luther, that Christ’s Church is “*holy believers and ‘the little sheep who hear the voice of their shepherd.’ ... Its holiness exists in the Word of God and true faith*” (*Smalcald Articles*, BC 324-325). Our confirmands learn from Luther’s *Small Catechism* that the Holy Spirit “*calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith. Daily in this Christian church the Holy Spirit abundantly forgives all sins – mine and those of all believers*” (BC 355-356).

In explaining this in his *Large Catechism* Luther defines Christ’s Church as “*a community that is composed only of saints*” and states as his personal confession: “*I believe that there is on earth a holy little flock and community of pure saints under one head, Christ. It is called together by the Holy Spirit in one faith, mind, and understanding. It possesses a variety of gifts, and yet*

is united in love without sect or schism. Of this community I also am a part and member, a participant and co-partner in all the blessings it possesses. I was brought into it by the Holy Spirit and incorporated into it through the fact that I have heard and still hear God's Word, which is the beginning point for entering it" (BC, 437-438).

It is customary for us to use the term "invisible" with respect to Christ's holy Christian Church, and to capitalize the word "Church" when it is used in this context. (The practice of capitalizing the word "Church" when it refers to the "invisible" Church has not been uniform in the past.) We call it "invisible" because the faith in Christ that marks all members of this Church cannot be seen in the sense that we can determine absolutely who believes in Jesus Christ and who does not.

Since the Holy Spirit calls persons to faith in Jesus Christ through the means of grace (the Gospel in Word and Sacrament), it is clear that wherever the means of grace are in use, there the Holy Spirit is creating believers in Christ and thus adding members to Christ's Church.

Therefore "we teach that this Church, which is the invisible communion of all believers, is to be found not only in those external church communions which teach the Word of God purely in every part, but also where, along with error, so much of the Word of God still remains that men may be brought to the knowledge of their sins and to faith in the forgiveness of sins, which Christ has gained for all men" (Brief Statement of 1932, #26).

It is obvious therefore that some members of Christ's Church find themselves in visible church bodies where the clear Word of God has been obscured to a greater or lesser extent. Since false teaching is condemned in Scripture in many places, such false teaching is a danger to those believers in Christ who are wittingly or unwittingly participants in groups where false teaching is tolerated. For this reason God has given His believers clear instructions concerning the practice of church fellowship.

In this connection it is essential for us to distinguish between the spiritual and invisible union that exists between all believers in Jesus Christ, on the one hand, and the practice of church fellowship, on the

other. Thus all believers in Jesus Christ are united with Christ and therefore united also with all other believers in Jesus Christ in the one holy Christian Church. Accordingly, they are one in Christ with a blessed spiritual union, and as such believers in Christ they will be united with Christ and all other believers in Christ in the enjoyment of eternal life. There are many dangers that threaten the faith of these believers, and one of these dangers is false teaching. That is why the Holy Spirit warns against false teaching in many places and teaches believers in Christ that they should separate themselves from all false teaching.

Satan is always attempting to lead believers astray regarding this matter. For he suggests that since there are believers in false-teaching churches (which we happily admit), we should express our fellowship with such believers by worshiping with them, joining with them in their Gospel ministry, partaking of the Lord's Supper with them, and praying together with them, at least to some extent. But, as we shall see, such an expression of fellowship is contrary to our Lord's clear warnings against false teaching.

So the Holy Spirit's teaching concerning the one holy Christian Church is one thing, and we rejoice in this teaching. The Holy Spirit's teaching concerning the practice of church fellowship on earth is another thing, and we rejoice in this teaching also, because in this way our Lord, as the Good Shepherd of His sheep, is steering us away from dangers to our faith in Christ.

Our Lutheran confessions also recognize this difference. With regard to the invisible Church the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* declares: "*The church ... is principally an association of faith and the Holy Spirit in the hearts of persons*" (BC 174). On the other hand, the *Formula of Concord* has this to say on the practice of fellowship: "*We have no intention of giving up anything of the eternal, unchangeable truth of God (which we also do not have the power to do) for the sake of temporal peace, tranquility, and outward unity. Such peace and unity, which is intended to contradict the truth and suppress it, would not last. It makes even less sense to whitewash and cover up falsifications of pure teaching and publicly condemned errors. Rather*

we have a deep yearning and desire for true unity and on our part have set our hearts and desires on promoting this kind of unity to our utmost ability. This unity keeps God's honor intact, does not abandon the divine truth of the holy gospel, and concedes nothing to the slightest error. Instead, it leads poor sinners to true, proper repentance, raises them up through faith, strengthens them in new obedience, and thus justifies and saves them eternally, solely through the merit of Christ" (BC 655-656).

We distinguish between membership in the invisible Church of Christian brotherhood and the practice of church fellowship on earth between visible church bodies and their members. Faith in Jesus Christ in the heart is the mark of membership in Christ's "invisible" Church. But since faith is invisible, these brothers and sisters are not known to us, and we are assured of their existence only by the Word and promise of God. Romans 10:10 - "For with the heart one believes unto righteousness."

Our practice of church fellowship, on the other hand, is not based on the faith of an individual or group, which we cannot see, but on the outward confession that is made by the individual or group, whether by written or spoken words or by actions.

This leads us to our first thesis: "*We believe, teach, and confess that complete doctrinal agreement is the Scriptural basis for church fellowship.*"

The call for unity in teaching is expressed clearly by the apostle Paul in First Corinthians 1:10: "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." Divisions caused by differences in the content of what we speak are condemned. When our churches and schools and public spokesmen are all speaking the same thing and are perfectly joined together in the same mind and the same judgment, then we are in complete doctrinal agreement and we can work together in carrying out our Gospel ministry. This thesis is also supported by Romans 15: 5-6: "Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

It is clear that the spiritual unity we have as members of Christ's invisible Church should move us Christians to speak as one voice in matters of doctrine and practice, to work hard to maintain and protect the unity that the Holy Spirit has already established in our hearts, and to strive to maintain unity of doctrine and practice in our church bodies. Ephesians 4: 1-3: "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Thesis Two: We further believe that the doctrine which the Church should teach and hold is restricted to the doctrine of the Bible.

"If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God" (1 Pet. 4:11).

Since we Christians are all to speak "the same thing" (1 Cor. 1:10), it is important to know what that thing is that we are to speak. The Old Testament prophets generally began their speaking by saying: "Thus says the LORD" (Jeremiah 2:1 and many other passages). So also the speaking of Christian congregations and church bodies today must be the Word of the Lord, that is, "the oracles of God." "If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen" (First Peter 4:11). God is not glorified when Christians teach or allow the teaching of human wisdom in their congregations, or put such wisdom on a par with God's wisdom in Holy Scripture. The united message of Christians is the revelation sent down from heaven through prophets and apostles, and especially by Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God. "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son" (Hebrews 1:1).

Isaiah 8:20: "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."

Although we have no . . . teach, Jesus promised, “The Helper , . . . you: (John 14:26).

Although we have no direct writing of Jesus Himself to give us the content we are to teach, Jesus promised, “The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (John 14:26).

These are the things that we as Christians today are to teach in our churches and church schools, in accordance with Jesus’ words: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28: 19-20).

First Corinthians 2: 12-13: “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches.”

First John 1:3 : “That which we have seen and heard we declare to you.”

Thesis Three: We further believe that the Word of God (the Old and New Testaments) is inerrant, inviolable, and clear.

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16);

“The Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35);

“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Ps. 119:105).

Our CLC Constitution states: “We accept without reservation the canonical Scriptures of the Old and the New Testaments as the verbally inspired Word of God (‘Verbally’ – First Corinthians 2:13, cf. also Second Peter 1:21) and therefore as the sole and only infallible rule of

doctrine and life” (*Constitution of the Church of the Lutheran Confession, Article III*).

As a summary of our belief in the inerrancy of Scripture, we quote the *Brief Statement of 1932*, paragraphs 1 and 3: “We teach that the Holy Scriptures differ from all other books in the world in that they are the Word of God. They are the Word of God because the holy men of God who wrote the Scriptures wrote only that which the Holy Ghost communicated to them by inspiration.”

‘All Scripture is given by inspiration of God (God-breathed), and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness’ (Second Timothy 3:16).

“For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit’ (Second Peter 1:21).

“We teach also that the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures is not a so-called ‘theological deduction,’ but that it is taught by direct statements of the Scriptures, Second Timothy 3:16; John 10:35; Romans 3:2; First Corinthians 2:13.”

‘The Scripture cannot be broken’ (John 10:35).

‘To them (the Jews) were committed the oracles of God’ (Romans 3:2).

‘These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches’ (First Corinthians 2:13).

“Since the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God, it goes without saying that they contain no errors or contradictions, but that they are in all their parts and words the infallible truth, also in those parts which treat of historical, geographical, and other secular matters, John 10:35.”

“We reject the doctrine which under the name of science has gained wide popularity in the church of our day that Holy Scripture is not in all its parts the Word of God, but in part the Word of God and in part the word of man and hence does, or at least might, contain error. We reject this erroneous doctrine as horrible and blasphemous, since it flatly contradicts Christ and His holy apostles, sets up men as judges over the Word of God, and thus overthrows the foundation of the Christian Church and its faith.” We also

believe that this inerrant Scripture is inviolable. The Scripture warns us against any additions to Scripture or subtractions from it.

“You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it” (Deuteronomy 4:2).

“If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book” (Revelation 22: 18-19).

“Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him. Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar” (Proverbs 30: 5-6).

It is also clear that God will allow no tampering with His Word, even in seemingly insignificant details.

“The Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35).

“For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled” (Matthew 5:18).

Thus we are to tremble at the Word of God. Any changes, additions, or subtractions are an insult to our loving God, who has given us truth in His Word.

Along with its inerrancy and inviolability, we confess the clarity or perspicuity of Scripture. Surely our God does not give sinners confused directions regarding the way to heaven. Holy Scripture makes all doctrines and precepts laid down in the inspired Word accessible to every reader. The Bible itself makes this claim.

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105).

“The entrance of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple” (Psalm 119:130).

“The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes” (Psalm 19:8).

“If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8: 31-32).

Christian doctrines are not based on interpretations of Scripture, but on the bare Scripture itself. We need to base our faith on what God says in His Word, not on the interpretations of pope, church councils, or synods. The many differences in the teaching of church bodies and congregations are not due to the unclarity of Scripture, but to human ignorance, misguided teaching, or obstinacy. Human beings, even those in high position in the churches, all too easily desire to be masters over Scripture and refuse to submit to God’s clear Word.

“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (Second Corinthians 10: 4-5).

“Some, desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm” (First Timothy 1:7).

Thesis Four: We believe that all aberrations from the doctrines of Scripture are condemned by God.

“Behold, I am against the prophets,’ says the LORD, ‘who use their tongues and say, “He says”” (Jeremiah 23:31).

“As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:9).

Our Lord Jesus has made it clear that He wants His followers, as spokesmen for God, to teach God’s truth, and nothing but God’s truth. For He says that we are to be busy “teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20).

It was the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah who made this perfectly plain. “The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream; and he who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? ... ‘Behold, I am against the prophets,’ says the LORD, ‘who use their tongues and say, “He says.” Behold, I am against those who prophesy false dreams,’ says the LORD, ‘and tell them, and cause My people to err by their lies and by their recklessness. Yet I did not send them or command them; therefore they shall not profit this people at all, says the LORD.”

The apostle Paul admonished Timothy, his assistant, to “hold fast the pattern of sound words which you heard from me” (Second Timothy 1:13). He also gave Timothy the order to “charge some that they teach no other doctrine” (First Timothy 1:3). Paul warned the Galatians against false teachers who mix error with the truth: “As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:9).

The Lord spoke through the prophet Isaiah: “But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word.” (Isaiah 66:2).

Therefore Christians, in particular Christian leaders, should not dare to tamper with God’s Word or mix error with it. Every sin with respect to God’s Word is a sin against God Himself. It is clear that this holds true for all aberrations from God’s Word, whether they are considered small or great. “A little leaven leavens the whole lump” (Galatians 5:9).

Our Lord has taught us to pray: “Hallowed be Your name” (Matthew 6:9). How is God’s name hallowed among us? *“Whenever the Word of God is taught clearly and purely and we, as God’s children, also live holy lives according to it. To this end help us, dear Father in heaven! However, whoever teaches and lives otherwise than the Word of God teaches profanes the name of God among us. Preserve us from this, heavenly Father!”* (Luther’s Small Catechism, BC 356).

Thesis Five: *We believe and teach that church fellowship is forbidden with all who deviate from the Word of God in their teachings.*

“Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple” (Romans 16: 17-18, one comma deliberately omitted).

This Thesis presents the separation principle that God has laid out in Scripture for the sake of protecting and preserving for us the truth of the Gospel, the sole source of faith, life, and salvation. Scripture emphatically demands that Christians separate themselves from all who deviate in their doctrinal position from the truth of God’s Word.

For a summary of what Scripture teaches concerning this, we quote the *Brief Statement of 1932*, paragraph 28: “*Since God ordained that His Word only, without the admixture of human doctrine, be taught and believed in the Christian Church, First Peter 4:11; John 8: 31-32; First Timothy 6: 3-4, all Christians are required by God to discriminate between orthodox and heterodox church bodies, Matthew 7:15, to have church fellowship only with orthodox church bodies, and, in case they have strayed into heterodox church bodies, to leave them, Romans 16:17. We repudiate unionism, that is, church fellowship with the adherents of false doctrine, as disobedience to God’s command, as causing divisions in the Church [sic], Romans 16:17; Second John 9-10, and as involving the constant danger of losing the Word of God entirely, Second Timothy 2: 17-21.*”

First Peter 4:11: “If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

John 8: 31-32: “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

First Timothy 6: 3-4: “If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing,

but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions.”

Matthew 7:15: “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.”

Romans 16:17: “Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them” (one comma deliberately omitted).

Second John 9-10: “Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him.”

Second Timothy 2: 17-21: “And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some. Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are His,’ and, ‘Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.’ But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.”

As we confess in the *Brief Statement* (adopted by the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod in 1932, and included in the CLC Constitution as a confession of the CLC), visible church bodies (denominations, synods, congregations) are of two kinds: orthodox and heterodox. An orthodox church body teaches the Word of God in its truth and purity without mixing error with it. A heterodox church body teaches things that are contrary to the Word of God or in addition to it, or suppresses the teaching of a portion of God’s Word, or tolerates in its midst those who do these things. Scripture has warned us that there would be such heterodox church bodies. For example, Paul told the elders of Ephesus: “For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will enter in

among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves” (Acts 20: 29-30). So also Paul writes: “For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you” (First Corinthians 11:19).

It is widely believed today that no church body should declare itself to be totally orthodox, since church bodies are made up of sinners. We certainly do not claim perfection for ourselves. Surely there are weaknesses of various kinds also in orthodox church bodies. We submit the following statement of August Pieper as an adequate definition of what we mean by purity of doctrine: “We claim to have pure doctrine only in this sense: that first of all we have set forth the doctrine of Scripture in its purity in our official confessions; second, that no false teaching will be tolerated; and third, that we seek to clean out false practice with all earnestness and patience wherever it shows itself” (*Wauwatosa Theology*, Vol. 2, p.14).

Even though there are many who consider the separation from heterodox church bodies to be an impossible demand and even believe there are benefits in having a variety of teaching among churches, we maintain that God is not pleased when churches permit teaching that is not found in His Word. Although we happily confess that God’s children are to be found in heterodox churches as long as the Gospel is still being proclaimed in them to some extent, we do not have liberty to join heterodox church bodies in their ministry, since our Lord has commanded us to avoid them.

Together with our Lutheran fathers “*we reject and condemn as incorrect, false, heretical, and opposed to the Word of God*” all the errors of heterodox church bodies. “*All upright Christians would and should avoid them if they hold dear the welfare of their souls and their salvation*” (*Formula of Concord*, BC 660).

Likewise: “*We also believe, teach, and confess that no church should condemn another because the one has fewer or more external ceremonies not commanded by God than the other has, when otherwise there is unity with*

the other in teaching and all the articles of faith and in the proper use of the holy sacraments” (BC 516).

This instruction from God’s Word is not intended only for Christian pastors and teachers and church leaders. Our Lord and His apostles are addressing all Christians when they say: “Beware of false prophets” (Matthew 7:15), and: “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (First John 4:1).

Having distinguished between orthodox and heterodox church bodies, Christians are required to act on this knowledge and to practice church fellowship only with orthodox church bodies. We should not become followers of false teachers, but rather we are to flee from them. The reason for such avoidance is plain, for those who cause divisions and offenses by contrary teaching “by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple” (Romans 16:18). Our Lord does not want us to be deceived by lies or to support lies. It is this danger that led John to write: “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds” (Second John 9-10). Obviously we are not even to encourage in any way the purveyors of false teaching, lest we ourselves become guilty of supporting that false teaching.

Scripture teaches a clear difference between truth and error. Listen to Paul’s warning in Second Corinthians 6: 14-18: “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.’ Therefore ‘Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.’ ‘I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty.’”

Orthodox teaching is righteousness, light, in accord with Christ, and promoting faith in Christ, whereas false teaching is lawlessness, darkness, in accord with Belial, and endangering faith in Christ. Just as believers are called on to separate from unbelievers, so it is clear that those who teach God's truth need to separate from those who teach or tolerate false teaching along with the truth. This is expressly taught in Romans 16: 17, which is the *sedes doctrinae* for the separation principle practiced by confessional Christians from the days of the apostles. "Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them" (one comma purposely omitted).

Note that Paul in this passage calls for both distinguishing between truth and error ("Note") and acting on that knowledge ("Avoid"). We are directed to take note of those who are deviating from God's truth by teaching or tolerating false doctrine alongside of the true doctrine, and we are directed to avoid them.

The practice of fellowship cannot be based on whether a person or group has faith in Christ, for God alone can read hearts. "The Lord knows those who are His" (Second Timothy 2:19). What we are to take note of is the doctrine that is proclaimed and confessed by word and deed. On the basis of an orthodox confession we practice fellowship, and on the basis of a false confession we refrain from fellowship. We do not need to make any judgments about the faith of those who are involved in a confession of error. "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts" (First Corinthians 4:5).

Thus our practice of fellowship must be based on the confession in word or deed of the person or group. The apostle John was confronted in his time with a false teaching regarding the incarnation of the Son of God. He advised his readers to make their determination of teachers on the basis of their confession. "By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come

in the flesh is not of God” (First John 4: 2-3). In this same way we are to practice fellowship with those whose confession is in line with “the doctrine which you learned,” but to refrain from fellowship with those whose confession is “contrary to the doctrine which you learned.”

We know that the membership of the Holy Christian Church is not identical to the membership of orthodox church bodies. There are true Christians in church bodies that confess error alongside God’s truth. There are non-Christians or hypocrites in church bodies that have an orthodox confession. The spiritual unity of true Christians in the invisible Christian Church remains as long as true faith in Christ remains, even though for a time such Christians are separated from each other by differing confessions. It is also for the benefit of the believers in heterodox churches that we do not practice fellowship with them. Thereby we are constantly reminding them that they are in the wrong place. By God’s grace some may be led out from heterodox churches to orthodox churches, where their faith will not be endangered by false teaching. Of course there are other factors that endanger faith, but where the orthodox teaching prevails, there the Word of God is at work in full force to strengthen believers in their Christian faith and life.

Every deviation from God’s truth, small or great, endangers saving faith in Christ. Consequently the apostle Paul warns the Galatians: “A little leaven leavens the whole lump” (Galatians 5:9). The false teachers in Galatia still confessed the Gospel of Christ, but they wanted to supplement the Gospel by an insistence on other religious practices as well. Paul warns them against the far-reaching consequences of this “little” deviation from God’s truth.

In his second letter to Timothy Paul discusses a doctrinal error concerning the resurrection and compares it with cancer: “And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some” (Second Timothy 2: 17-18). Even small deviations from God’s truth are dangerous, because one false teaching may lead to another, until the Gospel itself is lost.

There is safety in one rule only: "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity" (Second Timothy 2:19). Those who confess the truth should separate from all error, even as the Israelites of old were to stand apart from the tents of Korah and his partners in rebellion (Numbers 16: 20-24).

This separation principle is often denounced as being legalistic rather than evangelical. But it is a principle which is in complete accord with the heart of the Gospel. For it is the Gospel of universal salvation for all sinners which is at stake. We know that God wants all human beings to be saved. That is why Christ came into the world and carried out His work of redemption. That is why God has this Gospel of Christ's universal salvation proclaimed and explained in the Bible. "Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation" (Second Corinthians 5: 18-19). This Gospel, and this Gospel only, brings hope and comfort and peace to sinners. Any human deviation from this Gospel coming from man's legalistic spirit will inevitably tend to rob the Gospel of its hope and comfort. False teaching is always a threat to the universality and completeness of the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. It is in the interest of the preservation of the true Gospel that God is so explicit in forbidding fellowship with error, no matter how minute or trivial it may seem to be. The reason for avoiding those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to true doctrine is specifically stated: so that the hearts of the simple will not be deceived (Romans 16: 17-18). Our loving Lord does not want the faith of His simple believers to be disturbed or destroyed.

The apostle Paul is our great teacher here. He was certainly concerned about bringing the Gospel of God's peace to every corner of the world. But at the same time, and for the same reason, He waged constant warfare against every effort of man to change, pervert, or mutilate the Gospel. What could be worse than passing on to the next generation a gospel that is no longer the Gospel of universal salvation won by Christ and received by faith alone?

This is not to say that all separation among Christians is a good thing. There is a wrong exclusivism that does not stem from the all-inclusive Gospel. Any separation that is based on pride in one's self or in one's group is sinful, such as the separation practiced by the Pharisees at Jesus' time. Any separation among Christians which is not made in the interest of God's glory and the glory of His Gospel is to be condemned just as much as unionism, the fellowshipping with false teachers.

There are those who claim that separation from all who deviate from God's truth in their teaching is not in keeping with Christian love. The fact is, however, that it is our loving God who gives us the instructions to "avoid" (Romans 16:17) and "withdraw" (First Timothy 6:5) and "reject" (Titus 3:10). Obviously such divine commands cannot contradict His equally divine command to love Him above all others and love our neighbor as ourselves. Since the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth, the Christian knows that it is never safe to follow our ideas of what we think God should have said instead of doing what He says. The time will never come when we can safely relax our efforts and fail to guard against the intrusion of false teachers and their errors, as well as the intrusion of error into our own teaching.

Scripture gives many examples of Satan's attempts to steer believers away from God's truth. In the Garden of Eden Adam and Eve listened to Satan's voice even after it was clear that what he said deviated from God's clear command. Throughout the Old Testament God's people were always being tempted to join with unbelievers in their false beliefs and their false worship. It was because of their failure to separate from false religion that God sent the flood and confused the languages at Babel. God's command to Abraham to leave his family served to separate him and his descendants from false religions. God gave the Israelites the Law to separate them from others so that the Gospel might be preserved among them until the birth of the Savior. Nevertheless, the Israelites often failed to listen to God's warnings against that which was false and thus brought on themselves God's severe judgments. The history of Israel illustrates how compromise with error and the practice of syncretism lead eventually to total apostasy.

On the other hand, when the principle of exclusivism for the Gospel's sake was followed, God blessed His people, giving them full possession of the Holy Land and victory over all their foes. It was only when they became lax in following this principle that they were seduced by the false teachings of their neighbors, whom God then allowed to remain in their midst as snares and traps. In the New Testament the consequence of tolerating errorists is the same. They become thorns in our flesh and cause serious divisions and offenses.

When the Israelites allowed error and falsehood to be mingled with the priceless truth committed to them, it brought ruin and havoc. On the other hand, when they remained faithful to their God and worshiped Him according to His directions, even though they were greatly outnumbered, God's blessings came in bountiful measure.

Thus Scripture teaches by precept and many examples that Christians are to separate from all false religion, from all false teachers, lest the honor of God be violated, His name profaned, and the possession of the Gospel endangered for them and their children; lest they share in their evil deeds (Second John 11).

Thesis Six: We further believe that all manifestations of fellowship are forbidden with those who deviate from the Word of God in their teachings.

“Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them” (Romans 16:17, one comma deliberately omitted).

The strong Scriptural words used in enunciating the separation principle (“avoid” [Rom. 16:17], “beware of” [Mt. 7:15], “reject” [Titus 3:10], “withdraw” [1 Tim. 6:5]) make it obvious that all manifestations of religious fellowship are forbidden with those who deviate in their teachings from the Word of God. But some teachers have made a distinction between various kinds of church fellowship, suggesting that some manifestations of fellowship may be permitted with heterodox church bodies even though other manifestations should be forbidden. For example, some suggest that altar fellowship (fellowship at the Lord's Supper) and pulpit fellowship (a free exchange of preachers) are on a

higher level of fellowship, and that they may be forbidden while lower forms of fellowship, such as prayer fellowship, may be allowed with groups that deviate from the Word of God. But God's directions on any degree of religious fellowship make no such distinctions.

There are many ways in which fellowship may be manifested in smaller or larger gatherings: joining in worship and religious work, praying together at a time of need, joining forces as churches or fellow-Christians in relieving the poor, or sending missionaries to other countries. The book of Acts provides many examples of the exercise of such fellowship. But all of these manifestations of fellowship were based on the fact that the participants "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). As long as they were continuing in God's Word, the basis for fellowship remained. But when doctrine other than the apostles' doctrine was causing divisions among them, the ones causing such divisions were to be avoided. We are not obeying God's Word to avoid them if we are practicing fellowship with them, even in a limited way. Where unity in the confessed faith, unity in the Word, is absent, we are forbidden to practice any fellowship.

Such separation from the promoters of false religion or unscriptural teaching does not involve a separation in secular matters, such as business dealings or cultural, economic, or civic relations. Jesus referred to His followers as being "in the world" but not "of the world" (John 17: 11, 14, confer also First Corinthians 5: 9-10).

Christians are free to associate with unbelievers or errorists without joining in their false worship or promoting their false teaching. But they need to exercise their freedom with great care, lest they be led away from the truth or give others a wrong impression. In some cases certain relationships that would ordinarily be within the bounds of Scripture may be wrong, because of the danger of offense. For a full statement of our confession on this matter, consult the *Formula of Concord*, Article X, BC 515-516, 635-640.

Thesis Seven: We further believe and teach that suspension of an established fellowship is to take place when it has been ascertained that a person or group is causing divisions and offenses through a false position in doctrine or practice.

“Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple” (Romans 16: 17-18, one comma deliberately omitted).

It is a matter of great joy when a Christian group discovers that it is in doctrinal agreement with another group and that full fellowship can be declared and practiced among them. But it is a matter of grief and disappointment when a Christian group finds that it is no longer in doctrinal agreement with a group with which it has exercised fellowship for many years. Nevertheless, as difficult and as heart-rending as it may be, God’s Word is clear that when divisions and offenses are being caused by a person or group through an unscriptural position, it is necessary that fellowship with such a person or group come to an end. Since the only basis for the practice of fellowship is complete unity in doctrine, such fellowship must come to an end when there is disunity in doctrine.

Sometimes it may be difficult to determine whether the unity has been broken, because promoters of false teaching can be deceptive. False teachers array themselves in sheep’s clothing (Matthew 7:15). The apostle Paul warned the Ephesian elders: “For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears” (Acts 20: 29-31). Later Paul instructed these Ephesians that they “should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ” (Ephesians 4: 14-15).

But when it is ascertained, that is, made certain by careful study and investigation, that divisions and offenses contrary to Scriptural doctrine are actually being caused, it is clear that doctrinal unity is no longer present, and the practice of fellowship with those causers of divisions and offenses must come to an end.

We recognize that many Christians through ignorance or previous wrong training may hold erroneous opinions and beliefs on various matters of doctrine. We are happy to give such Christians a fuller instruction concerning Christian truth, as Priscilla and Aquila instructed Apollos (Acts 18:26). But when those who hold erroneous views continue to teach those views openly as God's truth, then they cannot be treated as "weak brethren" but as those who are causing divisions and offenses contrary to God's truth. The very purpose of our Lord's instruction to avoid false teachers is to prevent simple Christians from being deceived by the smooth words and flattering speech of such teachers. That is why they must be avoided.

REJECTION OF FALSE DOCTRINE

Following the pattern of earlier Lutheran confessions, we now point out the flaws in various arguments that have been presented against the Scriptural doctrine presented above. With heart and mouth we reject all teachings and practices that oppose our confession.

A. We reject and condemn any limitations on the extent of the application of the Scriptural injunctions to separate from false churches and teachers.

One: We reject the teaching that the application is limited to non-Christian bodies.

Many Protestant and even some Lutheran church bodies limit the application of the separation principle to non-Christian groups. Full

church fellowship is exercised with those groups and individuals that are willing to confess that Jesus is the Lord, even though these groups do not define what is meant by that confession. This leads to the mingling of truth with error and a lack of interest in doctrinal matters. God's Word, as summarized above, condemns such unionism.

In their desire to practice fellowship with heterodox persons and groups, some teachers have stated that the passages of Scripture calling for separation (including Matthew 7:15, Romans 16:17 and 2 John 7-11) are concerned only with separation from unbelievers, that is, infidels, enemies of Christ, anti-Christian errorists, and reprobates. Since they say that these passages are applicable only to non-Christians, they see no need to prohibit fellowship with professed Christians who promote or tolerate false teaching. Thus they are opening the door for complete church fellowship with all who cannot be condemned as hardened enemies of Christ.

Two: We reject the teaching that the application is limited to those who deny the redemptive work of Christ.

There are groups who suggest that certain doctrines are necessary for salvation, such as faith in the redemptive work of Christ, and try to insist at least on agreement with these doctrines as necessary for Christian fellowship. But as we have seen, Scripture teaches that for the exercise of church fellowship we should have agreement on all doctrines taught by God's clear Word. It is true that when these necessary doctrines are taught, the Holy Spirit may use them to add genuine believers to the Holy Christian Church. Nevertheless, as we have seen, the exercise of fellowship cannot be based on the possibility of saving faith but on the doctrine which is confessed. Therefore we must condemn as unionistic all groups that exercise fellowship on the basis of agreement in some doctrines, while allowing differences in teaching with respect to other Scriptural doctrines.

The argument is made that all those who at least profess faith in Christ as Redeemer should work together in union, in keeping with Jesus' prayer

in John 17:20-21: "I do not pray for these alone (the apostles), but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us." But the unity for which Christ prayed was not an external unity, but a spiritual unity, a unity of faith. This unity was created among Jesus' disciples in those days and the days following, and it is this unity which still binds together all true believers in Christ in the Holy Christian Church throughout the world and in all ages.

The argument is also made that much more good could be accomplished by Christians if they all joined together in their worship and work. In their opinion, a united front among Christians would be more successful in combating the dangers of atheism, materialism, the rise of non-Christian cults, communism, gross immorality, and various other social ills that beset our world and our churches, especially in the context of Christian missions in heathen lands.

However, we need to recognize that the real power among Christians is the power of the Gospel that Christians proclaim and teach. Human numbers and human organizations cannot add strength and effectiveness to God's holy Word. What weakens the Christian cause and hinders the progress of the Gospel is the mingling of human error with God's truth revealed in Scripture. "Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth" (Psalm 124:8). He who gave victory to Gideon with only 300 men and who evangelized the world through a far smaller number does not need large organizations to accomplish His purpose.

Sometimes the secular government in a nation has tried to force or demand an external union among churches for the supposed benefit to the nation. At the present time the secular powers are fostering the idea of tolerance of false religions and immorality and for that reason oppose Christians when they rightly condemn false religions and immorality. But it is a lie of Satan that we serve the national interest by being more tolerant of false religious views and ungodly behavior. When churches give up any part of the Gospel or Bible teaching, they bring down the wrath of God, as we see clearly from the history of Israel in the Old

Testament. We are happy to render to Caesar what is Caesar's and follow our Lord's instruction in Romans 13: 1-7. We thank God for the blessing of religious freedom (First Amendment to the U. S. Constitution) that He has given us for many years in the United States. But as Christians we are not partners in religion with any nation or form of government or political party. Jesus said: "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). "Our citizenship is in heaven" (Philippians 3:20), and as Christian churches we have only one assignment with all that it entails: "Preach the Gospel" (Mark 16:15).

Three: We reject the teaching that the application is limited to those who err in fundamental doctrines.

Christian teachers have labeled certain doctrines of God's Word as fundamental and others as non-fundamental. The fundamental doctrines are those that are absolutely necessary for saving faith. The non-fundamental doctrines are doctrines which are clearly taught in God's Word, but which some believers may be ignorant of or even disagree with without losing their faith in Christ. Although there are good reasons for maintaining this distinction between fundamental and non-fundamental doctrines, the distinction is abused when teachers claim that it is neither necessary nor possible to agree in all non-fundamental doctrines. They then claim that we may rightly practice fellowship with other church groups as long as we are in agreement on the fundamental doctrines. But Romans 16:17 and other Bible passages on separation make no distinction between fundamental and non-fundamental doctrines. We are to avoid all those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine we have learned. Non-fundamental doctrines are not excluded. Hence it is not a small thing when one adheres to an error in non-fundamental doctrines. If adhered to despite ample information, errors in non-fundamental doctrines may become open rebellion against God and His Word, and thus endanger our salvation.

Consider these words from Martin Luther: "One word of God is all the words of God; one article is all the articles and all are one, and when one

article is lost, then by the loss of that one all are lost eventually. For all the articles belong together in one common chain.” (*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 27, pp. 38, 41).

For the sake of clarity, we understand that non-fundamental doctrines are clear doctrines of Scripture, not theological opinions or open questions which are not answered by God’s Word. Therefore to say that we do not need to be of one mind with respect to non-fundamental doctrines is to deny the clarity and inviolability of Scripture, and to grant equal status to error with truth, as well as to give permission to preach and teach unscriptural doctrines. The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy: “Charge some that they teach no other doctrine.”

Four: 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 we think there is hope that they might give up their errors.

Five: Though the teaching Church is ever an admonishing Church, we reject the opinion that separation from errorists is dependent upon the course of admonition.

The question has arisen as to what the proper Christian course should be when groups that have been orthodox in the past have begun to allow or promote false teaching in their midst or have adopted policies that cause divisions and offenses contrary to Scriptural doctrine. At what point should fellowship with such groups be suspended or terminated? Some teachers assert that such existing fellowships should not be suspended or terminated as long as the group in question is willing to discuss the issues involved and listen to admonition from the Word of God.

The criterion for separation given us in Scripture, however, is this: Is the person or group causing divisions and offenses by their teaching or practice contrary to Scripture? When the determination has been made

that that is actually the case, then we are to avoid them, as the Holy Spirit teaches us through the words of the apostle Paul in Romans 16:17. Therefore the continuation of the practice of fellowship with such groups because we are still being allowed to admonish them must be condemned as disobedience to God's Word. By continuing in fellowship with such errorists we are permitting false teachers to advance their teaching, and we are not exercising love towards the simple Christians who are being deceived by the good words and fair speeches of the false teachers and those who are tolerating their divisions and offenses.

The argument is made that since Scripture directs us to bear the burdens of the weak, we should delay separation from such as cause divisions and offenses in the interest of Christian love and patience. We certainly agree with what Scripture teaches about dealing with the weak, as, for example, in Galatians 6: 1-2: "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." No doubt there are weak Christians in every Christian congregation. Each individual Christian may at times be strong, and at other times weak. Christians may be weak in doctrine because they are new Christians who need more instruction. They may not have fully understood some of the things they were taught. They may be confused in their thinking by what they have heard in the world. Christians are continually at work "admonishing one another" (Colossians 3:16) and helping others to become Jesus' disciples by "teaching them to observe" (Matthew 28:20) the things that Christ has commanded.

But these considerations should not be used to weaken or negate Christ's warning to separate from those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to Scriptural doctrine. Teaching the truth, admonishing the erring, edifying the weak, instructing the wayward – all these have to do with disciples, learners, hearers. These learners and hearers may frequently entertain strange notions and erroneous thoughts. That is why they come to be taught the Word of God. The question of separation is totally out of place in such situations.

Of course God does not want us to separate from those who have faulty religious ideas but who are sitting at Jesus' feet, so to speak, to learn God's truth. But Romans 16:17-18 is referring to people who are teachers or promoters of error, persons who are causing divisions by leading a portion of the church away from God's Word by their false teaching or practice. That is why we are to take note of them and avoid them. Church bodies or individual teachers who take a definite position contrary to God's Word, hold to it, and try to influence others cannot be considered weak brothers.

Nevertheless, we must not label a person or group as a causer of divisions and offenses without carefully examining the evidence. A person may express himself in words that are misunderstood. We need to be sure that we are accurate when we judge someone guilty of being a false teacher. We must make careful inquiry so that we can ascertain exactly what the position of a person or group is. Since in these cases we are dealing with brothers or former brothers, we will of course admonish those who seem to be going astray. The Christians in Rome who were instructed by Paul to avoid causers of divisions and offenses were also told by him: "Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another" (Romans 15:14).

There may be years of admonishing a person or group before it can be ascertained that that person or group is causing divisions and offenses by a false position in doctrine or practice. Or it could become clear at one meeting that the basis for fellowship has been removed by adherence to error. But the decision on when to separate is not to be made on the basis of whether admonition is making progress or not, or whether there is hope that it may make progress in the future. The decision to separate must be made on the evidence as to whether divisions and offenses contrary to Scriptural doctrine are being caused on an on-going basis. The argument that separation should be delayed as long as the errorist will listen to admonition does not take into account that he is not only listening, but he is also teaching and promoting his error at the same time and deceiving simple Christians. The devil is happy to have the

errorist listen to endless admonition, if this will enable him to continue to cause divisions and offenses and thus deceive the simple.

Some argue that separation from causers of divisions and offenses should be delayed in the case of those with whom one has been in fellowship in the past, because we owe such persons a special debt of love in view of our past unity. But we cannot disregard any Word of God in order to show “love” to anyone. Our God is a God of love, and He does not ask us to do anything that is not loving. First of all, we are to have love for God, who is giving us the instructions to separate. Then we are to have love for the simple Christians who are in danger of being deceived by the good words and fair speeches of the errorists. If we follow God’s Word, we are also showing love for the errorists, who may come to realize because of our act of separating from them that their teaching and practice is unscriptural. A clear confession of Christ demands that we take action according to His Word, regardless of the arguments of some that our actions give evidence that we are lacking in love. Our vertical ties of love to the Lord supersede our horizontal ties of “love” to others.

There are also those who argue that we should follow the example of Jesus, who did not break off fellowship with the Jewish synagogue and temple worship, even though this worship was governed by false and corrupt teachers, such as the Pharisees and Sadducees. But the sacrificial system of the Old Testament was established by God Himself, to be kept in place until the fulfillment was carried out by the Messiah’s sacrifice, when God Himself tore the curtain that separated the Holy of Holies from the people.

Certainly Jesus’ public words to the Pharisees and the Sadducees indicated that He was no participant in their errors. To these religious leaders Jesus spoke like this: “But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe” (John 5:38). Again He said: “He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know” (John 7:28). Again: “Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins” (John 8:24). Jesus

told His disciples: “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (Matthew 16:11). It was because of Jesus’ refusal to tolerate the false views and practices of these leaders that He was put to death on the cross. Jesus’ example surely should not be used to defend any practice of showing loving patience to false teachers.

It is also maintained by some that since the apostle Paul calls for Christians to preserve the unity in Ephesians 4: 1-3 (“bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”), it is wrong to separate from a church body that can still rightly be called Christian. But according to Scripture the unity is broken by those who cause divisions through their teaching contrary to Scripture. Christian unity is preserved by our faithful obedience to what God has told us to do when such divisions arise: namely, “avoid them” (Romans 16:17). Thus separation from that which is false is the means God has given us for maintaining true unity in the church.

Great confusion has arisen in the church when our Lord’s instruction in Matthew 18: 15-17, rather than Romans 16: 17-18, is used as the basis for dealing with false teachers and heterodox church bodies. The instruction in Matthew is for dealing with an individual sinner who is guilty of some sin that another Christian becomes aware of. First comes the private brotherly admonition, then the warning with one or two others, then the dealing by the whole group of Christians that are involved. The aim throughout is to gain the sinning brother. Patience is called for in this endeavor. Only after a definite refusal by the sinner to confess his sin and repent is the group of Christians directed to pronounce the sentence of excommunication and treat the offending person as an unbeliever. The one concern of the Christians in such a case is the sinner and his forgiveness.

But avoiding a false teacher or a false-teaching group is not at all the same as excommunicating an impenitent sinner. Excommunication is based on the evidence of an unrepentant heart. Avoiding false teachers is based on the evidence of on-going teaching and practice that is contrary to the Word of God. It may happen that an individual false teacher may

show himself to be an impenitent sinner and therefore in need of being declared an unbeliever in order to lead him to repentance. But that is not what ordinarily takes place. The church is not asked to avoid false teachers only after they show themselves to be impenitent sinners, and to permit them to continue as teachers in the church until such time as the church can rightly declare them impenitent. False teachers and groups that promote or tolerate false teaching are to be avoided, because their teaching is dangerous, regardless of whether they are penitent or impenitent. Being patient with false teachers allows them to spread their errors among simple Christians, and that is the very thing that God does not want. That is why God tells us to avoid them.

For this reason it may be misleading to teach that false teachers or false-teaching groups should not be avoided until it can be stated that they are “persistent” false teachers or errorists. As we have said, we should not rush to judgment and declare a person or group guilty of false teaching without very carefully examining the evidence and allowing the teacher or group to explain their meaning. But if the divisions and offenses contrary to scriptural doctrine continue to take place, God clearly instructs us to avoid such a person or group. If the word “persistent” is used to allow a false teacher or false-teaching group to continue its false teaching, because that teacher or group is still willing to listen to admonition and thus may not be “persistent” in its intentions, then the word “persistent” has become an excuse for disobeying the Word of God.

Christians indeed ought to be concerned about the souls of the false teachers and the members of false-teaching church bodies. But our first concern is for doing what God tells us to do for the sake of the sheep and lambs who are endangered by the false teaching. It is for their protection that God gives us the instruction to “avoid.” Previously, concurrently, and subsequently, as the Christian has call and opportunity, he will try to correct the erring teachers and their supporters, always being concerned lest he himself be taken in by the good words and fair speeches of the false teachers. Paul gave this instruction to Titus: “Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned” (Titus 3: 10-11).

Since one of the catchwords of our age is “tolerance,” Christians may have a difficult time following God’s instructions to avoid false teachers. Therefore it is particularly dangerous to say that one should not terminate fellowship with a false teacher or a false-teaching group as long as the person or group is willing to listen to admonition. False-teaching churches may be willing to meet endlessly to discuss differences in teaching and practice. The time may never come when admonition will not be allowed. Meanwhile the false teaching is allowed to spread and grow. The surgery of separation may be painful, but it is what God has told us to do to halt the advance of the disease.

To sum up, we reject and condemn any limitations of the application of the scriptural injunction to separate from false teachers and groups that promote or tolerate false teaching. All who deviate are to be avoided. They are to be avoided when it is clear that they are causing divisions and offenses among Christians. To the extent that they are causing divisions and offenses contrary to Scriptural doctrine, they are serving themselves and their own desires (“their own belly” - Romans 16:18) rather than our Lord Jesus Christ. If we continue to practice fellowship with them, we become partners with them in their false teaching, and our own faith in Christ is endangered. It is wrong to put God to the test, to see whether God will preserve our faith in Christ even if we ignore His earnest warning to separate from false teachers. “You shall not tempt the LORD your God” (Matthew 4:7).

B. We also reject and condemn all limitations on the intensiveness of such divinely commanded separation from false churches and teachers.

One: We reject as false the teaching which would forbid only joint worship services with errorists.

Some teachers have introduced the idea of levels of fellowship in order to practice certain forms of fellowship with false teaching groups, while forbidding other forms of fellowship. For example, altar fellowship and pulpit fellowship are forbidden, whereas prayer fellowship and certain forms of joint religious work are acceptable. But there is nothing in

Scripture that allows such distinctions. The word “avoid” in Romans 16:17 makes no such distinction. Whether we are communing together or sharing pulpits with each other or praying together or working together in some form of Christian ministry, we are declaring to one another and to the world that we have a common confession, that we are agreed in Christian teaching as brothers and sisters in Christ. But when it has become clear that a person or group is causing divisions and offenses contrary to Scriptural doctrine, then it is our Christian duty to separate ourselves from that person or group and no longer participate with them in any of these forms of fellowship.

We carry out this separation because God tells us to do this, and we do not want to disobey Him. We also practice such separation for the benefit of our fellow-believers, so that they may be warned against the dangers involved in supporting false teaching (Romans 16:18). But we also carry out God’s instruction to “avoid” for the benefit of the errorists we are avoiding, so that they recognize that they are causing divisions and offenses contrary to the teaching of our Lord. Confession of the truth includes rejection of errors. Holding to or supporting any kind of false teaching, major or minor, is dangerous, whether it is through altar or pulpit fellowship or through some other kind of joint religious worship or work.

To join with heterodox persons or groups, as churches or as church people, in producing Christian literature, in conducting special ministries, in participating in so-called ecumenical services, or even in various charitable causes, is not giving testimony to them or to the world that they are false teachers. Coordination or cooperation with persons or groups that have a different confession can hardly be called avoiding them. Especially in times of doctrinal indifference we need to refrain from giving the impression that the divisions caused by false teaching are not serious. What could observers conclude when orthodox teachers and leaders join with the heterodox in religious seminars, ecumenical organizations, and other religious projects?

Two: We reject as spurious the distinction which is made between prayer fellowship and joint prayer, namely, that while the former is indeed forbidden with errorists, an occasional joint prayer would not be displeasing to God.

In an effort to justify the practice of joint prayer between the orthodox and the heterodox at meetings designed to settle doctrinal differences, a distinction has been made between such joint praying together and regular prayer fellowship. While it is granted that regular prayer fellowship is wrong, it is argued that under proper safeguards a joint prayer on certain occasions would be proper. But this is an artificial distinction without any real difference. In either case persons or groups that differ in doctrine and confession are praying together and thus practicing fellowship with each other. Can something be God-pleasing when done only occasionally, but become sinful when it is repeated regularly?

Jesus said: "Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (Matthew 18: 19-20).

Notice the emphasis on agreement and the gathering together in Jesus' name, which implies agreement with the teaching of Christ and His apostles. When orthodox and heterodox meet and pray together, they are not praying in agreement with each other but against each other, each group praying that its particular view may prevail.

How can joint prayer be considered avoiding? Consider 2 John 8-11: "Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward. Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him, for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds." John is not forbidding good manners and ordinary civility, but he is warning against a brotherly greeting that would carry spiritual implications. But if we are to deny a brotherly reception to a man because he is an adherent of false

doctrine, how could we rightly arrange a joint prayer with him? If we become guilty of sharing in his evil deeds by a mere brotherly greeting, surely we would become guilty to a greater degree by joining him in prayer.

Three: We also reject the teaching that fellowship with errorists is permitted if there be no complicity with the error itself, or that the errorist may be fellowshipped but not his error.

It is clear from Romans 16:17-18 and other passages that it is not only the error that is to be avoided, but the persons who teach and promote the error, the persons who are causing divisions and offenses contrary to Scriptural doctrine. Therefore the practice of fellowship with an errorist as long as his specific errors are not being presented at that particular time cannot be justified.

Four: We also reject the teaching that one may practice outward or external fellowship with errorists, if one does not embrace the error in his heart.

It is very important, of course, that our hearts do not embrace doctrinal error, for God looks beyond the outward appearance at the heart (First Samuel 16:7). It is also important that we testify against such error with our mouths. But to say that we can practice fellowship with an errorist as long as the personal faith in our heart is right and we continue to testify with our mouths against the error is to ignore our Lord's instructions to "avoid" such errorists in order to prevent the simple Christians in our care or concern from being misled.

There have been times in history when open testimony against error has led to swift action by the errorist to break off fellowship with the critic. Martin Luther did not have to break with the Roman Catholic Church; that Church was quick to break with him because of his testimony. But in our tolerant and ecumenical age errorists may, at least for a time, tolerate someone with a different point of view as long as that person is only talking and not acting. Many a fine confession is negated

by the continuance of fellowship with an errorist who has been rebuked. In such cases the action of separating speaks louder than words and protects the simple Christians from being deceived.

We recognize that there may be occasions when, for the sake of family or civic obligations, an orthodox Christian may consider attending a church service or function that is led by the heterodox. In such situations he will do what he can to make it clear that he is not practicing fellowship with the heterodox. He will also want to refrain from giving offense. Consider Naaman's question and Elisha's answer in Second Kings 5: 18-19.

Five: We also reject the idea of protesting fellowships when they are used as license to practice fellowship with errorists.

Continuing testimony against errorists without breaking the bond of fellowship is sometimes defended as a "protesting fellowship" or as a "state of confession." Such a stance may be in place when error first arises in a church body, and the position of the church body itself is in doubt.

We confess in the *Brief Statement* of 1932: "A church does not forfeit its orthodox character through the casual intrusion of errors, provided these are combated and eventually removed by means of doctrinal discipline, Acts 20:30; First Timothy 1:3" (#29).

It is the duty of pastors and church leaders to sound the alarm when error arises in a church body. A true shepherd is not a "hireling" who runs away when the wolf attacks, but he faithfully warns those in his care against the error, even when that error occurs in his own church body. There may be a period of strife and uncertainty when it is not clear whether the truth or the error will prevail. When such is the case, it may be in place for the Christian to disavow the error without immediately suspending fellowship with the church body where the error has arisen.

But when it is clear that the church body itself is allowing the error to continue and spread and is thus causing divisions and offenses contrary to Scriptural doctrine, it is disobedience to God's Word to remain

in fellowship with such a church body and defend such fellowship by calling it a “protesting fellowship” or a “state of confession.” Without the appropriate action of “avoiding,” the error that is being tolerated by the church body is seen as not serious, as something not clearly condemned in Scripture, or as not being divisive.

Six: Finally, we reject the plea of “cooperation in externals” when it is used as license for actual joint church work with errorists.

It is not impossible for church bodies or congregations who are divided in doctrine to cooperate with each other in truly external matters such as sports activities or gathering of statistics. But when “cooperation in externals” is used to justify or allow working together with the heterodox in religious matters, then we condemn the use of the expression as well as the fellowship practices that result from it. For to work together with the heterodox in parachurch groups, mission projects, and ecumenical organizations is certainly not “avoiding” them but “sharing in his evil deeds,” with the result that simple Christians are in danger of being confused or misled.

Whatever other erroneous opinions there may still be, over and above the foregoing, can be gathered from the preceding explanations. For we reject and condemn everything that is not in accordance with, but contrary and opposed to, the doctrine recorded above and thoroughly grounded in God’s Word.

We believe that Jesus is our only Savior and that only in His precious Gospel do we find peace and joy and comfort and hope. With Him we would ever be in fellowship. We yearn for the day when we shall experience the fullness of that fellowship and see Him face to face. There, with the great cloud of witnesses that has gone before, we shall be in fellowship with all believers in Him. All visible church bodies on earth shall pass away. But His Word shall never pass away. Even though we may find ourselves alone and separated from all human beings but united with Christ and His Word, we shall be rich in His fellowship, and through Him, with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Deliver us from evil. Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly.

Definitions:

Sedes doctrinae – Seat or source of doctrine, referring to a Bible passage or Bible passages (Sedes is both singular and plural) that clearly present a certain doctrine or teaching of Scripture.

In statu confessionis – in a state of confession, referring to a declaration by an individual or group that he does not agree with the doctrinal position espoused by the church body with which he has been affiliated.

Note: In the above elaboration Bible passages have been quoted according to the New King James Version. Quotations from the Book of Concord have been taken from the volume edited by Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, copyright 2000, published by Fortress Press, Minneapolis.