

Martyr  
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## INTRODUCTION

"O most merciful God, who hast given Thine only-begotten Son to die for us, have mercy upon us and for His sake grant us remission of all our sins; and by Thy Holy Spirit increase in us true knowledge of Thee and of Thy will and true obedience to Thy Word, to the end that by Thy grace we may come to everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen." (Lutheran Hymnal, page 6)

Every Sunday we pray that God, the Holy Spirit, would increase our knowledge of the Bible, and give us the courage and strength to live according to it. This has always been the prayer of true believers. So long as this desire was uppermost in the hearts of God's people, the church was strong and faithful to its Lord. But when the desire to grow in the knowledge of the truth was not sincere, nor the willingness to be obedient, the church grew weak and its blessed work suffered. The history of the church through all its ages could be written on the basis of this prayer and its fulfillment.

There were times in the history of the church when only a few were concerned about God's Word. Like heroes they stand out in the pages of Scripture, because they were not willing to go along with the trend of their day, but faithfully followed the Lord's Word. Noah, for example, stood up against all the sin and indifference of his day, preached God's Word faithfully in all its truth and purity, and yet the church grew smaller and smaller as men went their own sinful ways. In the days of the prophet Elijah there was only one voice that was heard publicly testifying against the shameful idolatry of those days. Listen to that prophet as he spoke during a moment of human weakness, "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant (the promise of a Savior), thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I, am left; and they seek my life to take it away." (I Kings 19, 10) But God comforted Elijah with the assurance that his faithfulness was not in vain; for He said, "Yet have I left Me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him." (I Kings 19, 18) These are only a few examples from the Old Testament. Many more could be listed.

When Jesus began His ministry, publicly preaching and teaching the people, He received wide acclaim and many followed Him. But when He showed them that He was not willing to yield to their selfish interests, nor compromise with the false religious teachings of that day --then His popularity began to fall off. Not only did He become unpopular, but His strict obedience to the truth led the Jews to shout before Pilate, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" Jesus was not willing to compromise a single truth of the Bible. How thankful we can be that He didn't; for if He had, there would now be no salvation for us.

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Jesus has also plainly told us that "the disciple is not above His master." (Matthew 10, 24) In sending out His disciples for work in His church, He did not hold out pleasant prospects to them. Instead He said, "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents and harmless as doves. But beware of men: for they will scourge you in their synagogues; and ye shall be brought before governors and kings for My sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. . . . And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents and cause them to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for My name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved." (Matthew 10, 16-18; 21-22) When Jesus speaks of our suffering for His name, that is, for His Word, we are reminded of what He says in another passage of Scripture: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it." (Matthew 16, 24-25) And still Jesus does hold out to all who follow Him the prospect of better days, but not here in this world. That will come in the world beyond; for Jesus continues the above quotation, "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with his angels; and then He shall reward every man according to his works." (Matthew 16, 26-27)

Physical suffering often became the result of faithfulness to God's Word. But Jesus also informed the disciples that such faithfulness would require a constant watchfulness and warfare against false doctrine. He warned, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." (Matthew 7, 15) He emphasized this even more when He said, "For false Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall show signs and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect. But take ye heed: behold, I have foretold you all things." (Mark 13, 22-23) As the end of the world draws near, false doctrine shall increase more and more. The Apostle Paul writes, "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron." ("Such people are fully conscious of the fact that they are working harm with their hypocritical conduct, but they have branded, seared, their own conscience; they bear the knowledge of their guilt and culpability around with them at all times. The more actively they carry on their propaganda for their false doctrines, the more deeply they drive the hot iron into their conscience. Yet they harden their hearts and are finally lost with their false doctrines....'Popular Commentary'") (I Timothy 4, 1-2) In the last days it will be more difficult to withstand the false prophets and the flood of false doctrine, because of the willingness and eagerness of men to listen to it. Paul also writes, "The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." (II Timothy 4, 3-4) Men will want preachers who tell them what they want to hear, and not what they need to hear. Thus they will be turned from the truth and will believe fables.

What God here has foretold in prophecy we see coming to pass in our own generation. In the questions that we will study together on Thursday evenings in the light of God's Word each of us will be called upon to make a decision. That decision does not, at present, involve physical persecution. But it will require personal courage and sacrifice to take our place on the side of the Truth against the rising tide of false doctrine. The decision that we make will affect our personal spiritual life, the future of the pure Word of God among us and our children, and the source of the Truth in our land and in the world.

But let us not imagine that God is expecting the unusual of us in our generation. God says, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial, which is to try you, as though some strange (unusual) thing happened unto you." (I Peter 4, 12) Every age has its own tests and trials.

Let us not become down-hearted and discouraged at the prospect that faces us. Rather let us consider ourselves blessed that God has given us the opportunity to do this small thing for Him, Who has done all things for us. The blessing of God is promised to the faithful in their difficulties, trials and tribulations. And the study of the Word of God that the present situation forces upon us can only serve to deepen and strengthen our Christian faith.

Let no one be misled into believing that the matter before us is so deep and difficult that only the learned theologians can grasp it. The Word of God is clear. If only we become as little children, open our hearts to the precious Word of God and let God speak to us, the Holy Spirit will give us understanding. The knowledge of the Truth and the understanding of it are not the product of highly educated minds, but are precious gifts of God.

The Apostle Paul once wrote to the Ephesians, "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him (Jesus Christ): the eyes of our understanding being enlightened; that we may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward, who believe according to the working of His mighty power." (Ephesians 1, 17-19)

To Timothy he wrote, "Consider what I say; and the Lord (will) give thee understanding." (II Timothy 2, 7) Here then, is a promise from God Himself. With this assurance let us prayerfully listen to His Word and we will be led to the right and God-pleasing decision in the matter before us.

It is our intention to study the following points in this and following Thursday evening meetings:

- I. What the Bible Teaches Concerning the Church
- II. What the Bible Teaches Concerning Church Fellowship
- III. The Problems Created by the Missouri Synod
- IV. The Wisconsin Synod's Dealings With the Missouri Synod;  
and the Formation of the Church of the Lutheran Confession
- V. A final discussion and vote to determine where our mission support should go. (Quarterly Meeting)

Before we begin it should be stated that:

1) In determining the Scriptural correctness of the church bodies of which we shall speak, our decision must be made on the basis of the official positions and official actions of the bodies. In judging Synods, or, for that matter, congregations, there is no other possible or fair way to judge than on the basis of the confession of their official positions and actions.

2) While every member of the congregation must be informed (for which reason these open meetings are being held), according to God's Word only the voting members of our congregation can decide what position our congregation shall take in this matter.

## I.

### WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES CONCERNING THE CHURCH

In the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed we confess, "I believe in the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints."

We do not believe "in" the Church as we believe "in" God, but we believe that there is one holy Christian Church. We believe that this holy Christian Church is the total number of those who believe in Jesus Christ. We also call those believers "the communion of saints."

Who are saints? They are those who have been sanctified. To sanctify means to make holy. Saints, then, are those who have been made holy.

The Bible knows of only one way for sinful man to be sanctified, and that is, to be made holy by God the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost sanctifies a sinner (makes him holy) by bringing him to faith in Jesus Christ and giving to him the blessings of redemption, such as the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Saints are then all those whom the Holy Ghost has thus sanctified. The Apostle Paul in his epistles often calls believers "saints." For example, "Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints (believers) in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi...." (Philippians 1, 1)

When we confess, "I believe in the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints," we mean, "I believe that there is one holy Christian Church; that it is made up of believers; that they have been gathered together into this one spiritual body by the Holy Ghost; that they are a communion (gathering) of saints."

It scarcely needs to be said that there are no unbelievers in the holy Christian Church. For unless a sinner has been brought to faith by the Holy Ghost and through the Gospel, sanctified, and added to those who are the Christian Church, he is not and cannot be a part of it. Paul writes, "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." (Romans 8, 9)

This Church is called a holy Christian Church. It is called holy because it is the communion of saints, who are made holy by faith in Christ and who serve God with holy works. The Word of God teaches the perfect holiness of this Church: "Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for It; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that It should be holy and without blemish." (Ephesians 5, 25-27)

Since faith in Christ alone makes men members of the holy Christian Church, and since faith in the heart is invisible to man, we call this Church the invisible Church. We can only judge by the confession and life of a man whether he is to be considered a member of the holy Christian Church or not. However, the true state and condition of a man's heart is known only to God. "The Lord seeth not as a man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." (I Samuel 16, 7) Jesus clearly states that, while we must accept a man's confession as genuine, unless it is denied by his life, his heart may reveal to God that his words and life are those of a hypocrite. "Not everyone that says unto Me (Jesus), Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 7, 21)

The holy Christian Church is also invisible in the sense that it is no visible, earthly organization. The Word of Jesus is clear, "The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation; neither shall they say, Lo, here! or Lo, there! For, behold, the Kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17, 20-21) For this reason in our confirmation vow we promise "to remain steadfast in the confession of this church," and do not pledge ourselves to any local congregation or group of congregations banded together into a larger body, such as Synods. Visible, earthly organizations, as history proves conclusively, can and do turn aside from the pure faith they once held. The promise to remain true to the teachings of the Word of God is the one important thing.

The outward organization and form of Christians joined together on the basis of a common faith has varied from time to time. This is perfectly right and proper, since the form of outward organization is not essential to the existence of the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints. In fact, when circumstances make it impossible for any outward form the holy Christian Church will still exist so long as two or three are gathered together in Jesus' name. For Jesus said, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matthew 18, 20) Even one lone believer, isolated from all others, has the assurance that he is a part of the communion of saints, the holy Christian Church, for the Lord's promise is true, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." (Hebrews 13, 5)

Although Christians are scattered throughout the world, there is only one holy Christian Church. The many members in this Church are a communion of saints, that is, a gathering together of many into one body joined together by their common faith in Jesus, their Redeemer. "So we, being many, are one body in Christ." (Romans 12, 5)

This Church, the holy Christian Church, is "built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets (the Word of God), Jesus Christ Himself being the chief Cornerstone." (Ephesians 2, 20) The means of grace, the Word of God, and the Sacraments---while not a part of the Church---are the means, and the only means, by which God makes and

keeps men members of His Church. "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." (Romans 10, 17) Except God convert men through His Word by the power of the Holy Ghost, there can be no members of the holy Christian Church; for, "no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." (I Corinthians 12, 3)

By the same token, wherever the Word of God is preached and proclaimed, there members of the holy Christian Church will be found. God says, "So shall My Word be that goeth forth out of My mouth; it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." (Isaiah 55, 11)

Jesus tells us, "If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8, 31-32) When we take heed to be and remain members of the invisible church by sincere faith in our Redeemer, then we are keeping this teaching of the Bible as the Lord desires. Every Christian has no greater concern in life than to do as Paul suggests, "Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves." (II Corinthians 13, 5)

It is out of concern for our own salvation that this matter is before us. It has to do with the holy Christian Church and our being and remaining members of it.

We shall in future meetings speak of separating ourselves from those who have become errorists, who have turned away from the Truth. When we do so, we are not judging their souls, nor declaring that they are outside of the holy Christian Church, but we are warning them that this could be the possible consequence of this turning from the Truth. God alone can read the thoughts and intents of the hearts of men. We can only hope and pray that their disobedience to the Word of God will not lead to the loss of their faith and cause them to lose their place in the holy Christian Church. But God demands for our own sakes, as well as theirs, that we judge their doctrine. The Bible says, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world." (I John 4, 1)

## WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES CONCERNING CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

Last Thursday we spoke of the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, which is the total number of those who believe in Jesus Christ. Although the Church is invisible, "the Lord knoweth them that are His." (II Timothy 2, 19) This Church is one, since it includes all men the world over who believe in Christ. This Church is holy, since all its members are saints. This Church will never perish since Jesus promised, "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16, 18) This Church is the only saving Church, since faith in Jesus is the only thing that saves, and this Church includes all those who have this faith. This Church is built by the Holy Ghost who calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith."

The Bible, however, does not only speak of this one holy Christian Church, but also of churches. In closing his letter to the Corinthians Paul writes, "The churches of Asia salute you." (I Corinthians 16, 19) In the Book of Revelation we read, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." (Revelation 2, 7) It is clear that when the Bible refers to churches, it is not speaking of the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints; for that Church is one. (Romans 12, 5)

The Bible also speaks of a church or churches located in a certain place. For example, Luke speaks of "the church which was at Jerusalem." (Acts 8, 1) And Paul writes, as stated above, "the churches of Asia salute you." The Bible cannot be speaking here of the holy Christian Church, since Jesus says that it is invisible to the eye of man and cannot be pointed to in any particular place. (Luke 17, 20)

When the Bible thus speaks of churches, it is speaking of what our Catechism calls the visible church; it is speaking of all those people who gather about God's Word and Sacraments, profess the Christian faith, and call themselves Christians. These people, of course, are visible. Their conduct can be seen. So the Bible speaks of churches that are visible as well as of the one holy Christian Church, which is invisible.

In the visible church there are both believers and unbelievers linked together. The faith of a Christian cannot be seen but it shows itself in various ways. A true Christian confesses his faith, as Paul writes, "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." (Romans 10, 10) He also proves his faith by living a godly life, thus letting his light shine before men, that they may see his good works, and glorify his Father which is in heaven. (Matthew 5, 16) He also makes diligent use of God's Word and Sacrament in order that his faith may grow and be strengthened, for Jesus says, "he that is of God, heareth God's Word." (John 8, 47) These outward things give evidence of the faith that is in his heart. Faith itself, however, remains invisible.

But there are also people who join Christians in their use of God's Word and Sacraments, who also confess a belief in the true God, and who give the appearance of living a godly life. They are not believers at all, but are false Christians, or hypocrites. The Apostle Paul says of them that they have the "form of godliness." (II Timothy 3, 5)

When the Bible speaks of churches, it is speaking of the visible church, or, as our Catechism says, "the whole number of those who use the Word of God and profess the Christian faith, but among whom, besides the true Christians, there are also hypocrites." (page 135) A simple summary of the whole matter might be, "The invisible Church is the total number of those who HAVE true faith in their hearts; the visible church is the total number of those who PROFESS the faith. The invisible Church is hidden in the visible church." (A Summary of Christian Doctrine)

It is because of this truth that Jesus told the parable of the net in Matthew 13, 47-50. He says, "The kingdom of heaven" (the Church of God on earth) "is like" (is similar in outward appearance) "unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." Again Jesus says, "The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also." (Matthew 13, 24-26) The Lord interpreted these words as follows: "He that soweth the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; the enemy that sowed them is the devil." (Matthew 13, 37-39)

Thus it is, and ever will be in the visible Church on earth--namely that there will be believers and unbelievers alike. Not until the end of the world will the wheat be separated from the chaff. True believers and hypocrites will stand shoulder to shoulder in Christian congregations, both will use God's Word and Sacraments, both will confess faith in the Triune God, both will give the appearance of living a godly life. But the time will come when the Lord Himself will separate the believer from the unbeliever. Until that time we must count all those true believers (though some are not) who gather about God's Word and confess the Christian faith, for we cannot look into men's hearts.

Because the true Church of God, the communion of saints, lies hidden within the visible Church, the Apostle Paul, for example, always addressed his epistles to the true Church, to the true believers. He writes, "unto the Church of God which is at Corinth," that is, to the entire visible congregation at Corinth; but he at once goes on to say, "to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours." (I Corinthians 1, 1-2)

When Christians gather together about God's Word and Sacraments, this is the will of God. For God not only wants His Word read pri-

vately, but preached publicly; He wants the public ministry established and Christians brought into fellowship with one another. Christians who continue "steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers," (Acts 2, 42) are strengthened in their Christian faith, and grow in their knowledge of the Truth. In keeping with this will of God Christians some times met in private homes, as we read in Paul's writings, "Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my helpers in Christ Jesus: who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Likewise greet the church that is in their house." (Romans 16, 3-5) In closing his letter to the Colossians Paul writes, "Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house." (Colossians 4, 15) Sometimes these gatherings of Christians were in cities such as Corinth or Thessalonica. Sometimes Scripture speaks of them as being in provinces such as Galatia, Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. (Galatians and Acts 9, 31)

Even to this day Christians gather into congregations which are formed according to certain geographical lines. Sometimes language determines membership in congregations. Years ago when only German was used in our church services, our congregation must have been made up completely of people who were of German background.

But not only do Christians unite with each other to form congregations, but congregations unite and work together. We call that organization a synod. A synod's work is never as complete as that of an individual congregation. A synod does not administer baptism; it holds church services only when the delegate meetings are held. The purpose of a synod is to train workers for the church (educational institutions), do mission work (home, heathen) visit and care for the invalid and provide general charity where it is needed in the church. A synod dare not exercise authority in the local, internal affairs of a congregation. It can only offer advice. There is only one authority in the church, and that is the Word of God. But congregations unite to form synods since one congregation alone cannot easily do what a number of congregations banded together can do.

But whenever Christians do band together in an outward way, to form a Christian congregation or to establish a synod, it must always be done on the basis of complete agreement in God's Word. The Word of God is the only thing that is to be preached and taught in the church. Christians gathered together into a congregation or a synod must be careful that no false teaching or error be permitted in their midst. They dare not join with those who teach false doctrine or have false Christian practice.

The Lord has clearly told us how congregations or synods are to handle His Word in their midst. In His great commission to the church Jesus said, "Go ye therefore and teach (make disciples of) all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." (Matthew 28, 18-20) Jesus also says that true discipleship requires faithfulness to His Word: "Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on Him, If ye continue in My Word then are ye My disciples indeed." (John 8, 31) It is God's will that nothing but His Word, the Truth, shall stand among men in the church: "For I testify to every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this Book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the

words of the Book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the Book of Life, and out of the holy city, and from the things that are written in this Book." (Revelation 22, 18-19) Because of His loving concern for the salvation and safety of our souls, our Savior says, "Be thou faithful unto death and I will give you a crown of life." (Revelation 2, 10) The will of the Lord that men on earth cling faithfully to the Word is finally emphasized by the Lord, when He says, "The Word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." (John 12, 48) The favorable judgment of the Lord on the Last Day will depend upon our faithfulness to His Word while we were on earth.

Therefore in the visible church no man is permitted by God to speak and promote his own words and opinions. "If any man speak, let him speak as an oracle of God." (I Peter 4, 11) To teach otherwise than God's Word teaches is strictly forbidden by God. "As I (Paul) besought thee (Timothy) to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge (command) some that they teach no other doctrine." (I Timothy 1, 3) The doctrine of God as revealed in the Word is as pure and perfect as God Himself and is to be so kept among men. "The law (the doctrine of God) is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple." (Psalm 19, 7) This is so important that God says through Paul, "Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." (Galatians 1, 8)

God wants His believers to be gathered together around His Word in visible Christian congregations, but He wants them to be united by His Word. Only then can they be joined together in a fellowship that is pleasing to God and reflects the perfect unity that exists in God Himself.

Through Paul God sets forth the only acceptable basis for a pleasing fellowship or union with others in the church, when He says, "God is faithful, by Whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord. 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." (I Corinthians 1, 9-10) Where men do the will of God and speak the same thing on the basis of the Word of God, they will be perfectly joined together, and there will be no divisions among them. Paul prayed for the same wonderful unity in the local congregation in Rome, saying, "Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 15, 5-6) When men are likeminded according to Christ Jesus, that is, on the basis of His Word, then, and then only can they with one mind and one mouth glorify their saving God. Fellowship with others in the visible church must be a fellowship based upon a common faith and a public confession that rests securely on the entire Word of God. Without that unity in the Word no fellowship is possible.

If all men would heed the will of God and bow humbly to His Word, there would not be a single division among the visible Christian congregations of the world. But men are sinful and the rebellious nature of man is most evident in his refusal to bow to the will of God and to accept and uphold the Word of God. Here is the answer to the question

so often asked, "Why are there so many different Christian churches? In disregard for the will of God, men have corrupted or ignored doctrines of the Bible, and thus have separated themselves from the fellowship of the truth. Every division in the visible church has come about, not because a certain few insist on holding to the truth of the Word and thus doing the will of their God, but rather because sinful men were unwilling to listen to God and abide in His Word. The truth of God always upholds, promotes and unites in true fellowship; it never makes divisions.

Departure from the teachings of the Word and the divisions in the church that result can easily be seen in church history. About sixty years elapsed from the day of Pentecost to the writing of the Book of Revelation. Yet in this short time instances of men and visible Christian churches turning away from the Truth can be found in the Bible. For example, the Apostle Paul had founded congregations in Galatia on the solid foundation of the Word of God. Yet, after he left Galatia, false teachers entered this territory and the Christians there began to listen to these wolves in sheep's clothing. With great sorrow Paul had to write, "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from Him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another Gospel." (Galatians 1, 6) Again in the 2nd and 3rd chapters of the Book of Revelation our Lord addresses seven letters to seven congregations in Asia Minor. These congregations had been founded upon the pure Word by the Apostles. Yet, when the Book of Revelation was written four of the seven were condemned by God as such as had embraced error. Of the remaining three, only two could be called genuinely faithful to the Word. The third congregation, while still having the pure doctrine of the Word, had lost their first love for the Gospel and thus were ready to be led astray. The history of visible churches in the world is often a history of fine beginnings on the basis of the Word of God and in time a turning away from that glorious Truth.

God has not only told us that in the visible church the joining together of Christians in local assemblies or congregations is to be based on complete unity in the Word of God, but He has also in His Word laid down the conditions of our relationship toward other visible Christian assemblies, which have forsaken the full Truth of the Word and refuse to accept correction on the basis of the Word.

In the first place, God demands that we always test teachers and teachings by the Word and expose and reject every false teacher and teaching. "Brethren, believe not every spirit, but try (test) the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world." (I John 4, 1) This is not the responsibility of pastors alone, although they are to lead in detecting and exposing error, but it is the responsibility of every believer. When Paul and Silas came to Berea and preached to that visible Christian assembly, we read, "They were more noble than they in Thessalonica in that they received the Word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily whether those things were so." (Acts 17, 11) All teachings are to be tested by all Christians.

God furthermore demands in His Word that we be on our guard constantly against all false doctrine. Jesus says, "Beware of false prophets." (Matthew 7, 15) To beware means to be on your guard against something that is dangerous for you. False prophets are wolves, bent on the destruction of the sheep, the believers. Though they come in sheep's clothing, that is, as true prophets of God, who cover their

false teachings by saying, "Thus saith the Lord," it is not an impossible task to recognize them for what they are; for Jesus says, "Ye shall know them by their fruits." (Matthew 7, 16) The fruits of a prophet are his words, his doctrine, his teachings. Whenever we recognize a false prophet by his false teachings, we are to "Beware!"

God has in His Word forbidden us to have fellowship with those who are in error. That includes not only the false teacher, but also those who have been misled by him and his teachings. God says, "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple." (Romans 16, 17-18)

When we find some who stubbornly and steadfastly hold to any teaching contrary to the doctrine we have learned, we are to avoid them. This avoiding has always meant to sound Lutherans that we are to have no spiritual fellowship such as pulpit, altar and prayer fellowship with them. Nor are we to join them in any spiritual undertaking that will give anyone inside or outside of the visible church the impression that there is no difference between them and us--or between their error and the Truth which we uphold.

God tells us what those people are doing by this persistent adherence to false doctrine. In the first place, He says, "they are such as serve not our Lord Jesus Christ." They are not true slaves of the Lord Jesus; they are not completely obedient to His will; for if they were true servants (slaves) of the Lord, they would "observe all things, whatsoever He has commanded" and not hold to teachings "contrary to the doctrine we have learned." But instead, they are slaves of their own belly, that is, serving their own inmost wishes and desires rather than the Lord.

God tells us more. He says that those same people by their false doctrines cause divisions in the visible Christian church.

Finally, God says that they also cause offenses. The word offense means death trap, a deadly trap that kills. False doctrine is a lie designed to mislead and destroy the souls of men. Concerning those who hold to and promote false doctrine God says, "By good words and fair speeches (they) deceive the hearts of the simple." Their words sound good and their speeches are fair, but because their doctrine is false it can only deceive, mislead and harm. Therefore, God says, "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them."

The matter that is before us centers on this doctrine and its application. To ignore this doctrine and join in religious fellowship with those who hold to error is called religious unionism. It is, without a doubt, the great sin of our age and a powerful weapon in the hands of the great enemy of the Truth, the devil, the father of lies.

May we always uphold the Truth upon which this congregation was founded and to which each of us has pledged ourselves before the altar of the Lord. May ours be the spirit and strength expressed by the Formula of Concord, "We have no intention of yielding aught of the eternal, immutable truth of God for the sake of temporal peace, tranquillity, and unity (which, moreover, is not in our power to do). 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." (Concordia Triglotta, p. 1095)

This expresses the clear voice and will of our God. To this voice alone we must give heed.



## THE PROBLEMS CREATED BY THE MISSOURI SYNOD

Last Thursday we spoke of the visible church, that is, of all those who confess faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. We said that they gather themselves together about the Word of God and the Sacraments in earthly visible assemblies or congregations, called churches. We noted that in such visible assemblies God wants nothing but His Word to be taught and proclaimed and that every false teaching is to be rejected. Whenever men reject any teaching of the Bible and hold to error, they destroy the unity that God wants in His Church. The Bible says that these men "cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine we have learned" and are to be "avoided." (Romans 16, 17)

The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, once the stronghold of genuine Lutheranism, has departed from the truth of God's Word that it once held. Today the Missouri Synod is teaching contrary to the doctrine we have learned. We can see this if we examine the official records of the Wisconsin Synod.

The beginning of this present tragic situation can be traced back to the union resolutions of the Missouri Synod convention of 1938. In its negotiations with the American Lutheran Church the Missouri Synod adopted the principle that certain differences of doctrine need not be settled before churches could have altar, pulpit and prayer fellowship. The exact words were "need not be divisive of church fellowship."

This represented a major change in the historic position of the Missouri Synod. Throughout its glorious history until 1938 the Missouri Synod had steadfastly maintained that agreement on all doctrines of Scripture was necessary before joint worship and work could be entered upon and church fellowship exercised and enjoyed.

Other Lutheran bodies outside of the Synodical Conference have always maintained that it is too much to insist upon agreement in all doctrines of Scripture before church fellowship can be established. They maintain that there must be agreement in the fundamental or chief doctrines of Scripture, but that "it is neither necessary nor possible to agree on all doctrines of Scripture." On the basis of this opinion of men they reason that the "avoid" of Romans 16 does not apply to those who differ on doctrines which do not directly affect our justifying faith in Christ.

It certainly is true that there are some doctrines in Scripture that one may not even know, or concerning which one may hold a false opinion, and still be saved. If, however, it is shown that a doctrine of Scripture is clearly taught in the Word, it will be accepted by the believer. If, in spite of the clear testimony of the Word, a wrong teaching is maintained, the authority of the Word of God has been denied and rejected. Under such conditions fellowship would be a violation of the will of God.

This reversal of the historic position of the Missouri Synod on the doctrinal requirements for fellowship has removed the solid foundation of the absolute authority of the entire Word of God which had always been the strength of this body. As must certainly always be the result, this action in 1938 was the hole in the dike through which an ever-increasing flow of errors and un-Scriptural practices has rushed. When the absolute authority of the Word is forsaken, departure from that Word must inevitably follow.

By 1953 the Wisconsin Synod had charged the Missouri Synod with an imposing list of departures from the Word of God in these words, "That we declare that the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod a) by reaffirming its acceptance of the Common Confession as a 'settlement of past differences which are in fact not settled' (Proceedings 1951, p. 146) and by its persistent adherence to its unionistic practices (the Common Confession, joint prayer, scouting, chaplaincy, communion agreement with the National Lutheran Council, cooperation with unorthodox church bodies in matters clearly not in the field of externals; negotiating with lodges and Boy Scouts of America with the plea that this gives opportunity to bear witness, under the same plea taking part in unionistic religious programs and in the activities of unionistic church federations; negotiating for purposes of union with a church body whose official position it is that it is neither possible nor necessary to agree in all matters of doctrine and which contends for an allowable and wholesome latitude of theological opinion on the basis of the teachings of the Word of God) has brought about the present break in relations that is now threatening the existence of the Synodical Conference and the continuation of our affiliation with the sister Synod." (Proceedings 1953, p. 104)

This was not the first time that the Wisconsin Synod had brought these charges to the attention of the Missouri Synod. The official records of the Synod show that the Wisconsin Synod recognized these departures as they arose and patiently admonished the Missouri Synod in a Scriptural manner.

The 1941 convention of the Wisconsin Synod passed the following resolution: "2. That in obedience to St. Paul's exhortation I Corinthians 1, 10; Ephesians 4, 3: a) We extend an invitation to our sister Synod of Missouri to discuss with the fellow member of the Synodical Conference the matters that endanger our unity of spirit. b) That President Brenner appoint a committee to represent our Synod at these conventions." (Proceedings 1941, p. 78)

The committee was appointed and the resolutions carried out. Questions pertaining to church fellowship, prayer fellowship with errorists and the proper basis for "framing a document of agreement" were discussed. Two years later the Wisconsin Synod's committee reported, "A substantial measure of agreement was revealed on all these matters excepting only that of prayer fellowship at intersynodical meetings." (Proceedings 1943, p. 65) At the same convention a memorial was sent from the Wisconsin Synod to the Missouri Synod, warning at length of the present false and therefore dangerous basis for negotiations with the American Lutheran Church. (Proceedings 1943, p. 67) In the same year, 1943, note was taken of the fact that in a direct reversal of its former position the Missouri Synod had entered into the chaplaincy program of our government. A paper was also delivered at

the 1943 convention by Prof. Schweppe, showing the Scriptural reasons why a pastor could not in good conscience enter the government's chaplaincy program under prevailing conditions. The convention "encouraged the pastoral conferences of the various districts to study the paper at their various meetings." (Proceedings 1943, p. 71)

In the convention of 1945 the matter of the chaplaincy brought forth the following resolution, "Your committee reaffirms the position of our Synod in the matter of the chaplaincy and therefore holds it impossible for the Synod to recommend pastors for chaplaincies." (Proceedings 1945, p. 22) With regret another change was noted in the Missouri Synod. At the 1944 convention of the Missouri Synod that body had reversed its former strong stand against Scouting. In calling attention to this reversal President Brenner stated, "This is a question (what a pastor and a church owe the public in the area of building good citizenship in the community) that demands serious study, but some brethren have already anticipated the answer by allying themselves as Lutherans with agencies or organizations outside of our Church. The most disturbing case in point is that of the introduction of Boy Scouting into our Church. We hold that the Scout program still contains elements of religion; that it perverts the teachings of Holy Scripture; and that, therefore, the Scriptures bid us avoid it. According to our firm convictions, the book 'Scouting in the Lutheran Church,' which is a product of a joint committee of Lutherans not of one fellowship is rendering our Lutheran Church an outstanding disservice. These instances reveal a definite trend of thought and action away from the position we have held unto now. Shall we yield to this trend?" (Proceedings 1945, p. 11-12) The 1945 convention also adopted as its own a letter written before the convention by President Brenner addressed to the Synodical Conference, "We feel constrained to state at this time that we have been seriously perturbed by numerous instances of an anticipation of a union not yet existing, or, as it has been put, not yet declared, which in our opinion is in conflict with the above agreement (of the Synodical Conference--EA) and contrary to the best interests of the Synodical Conference. It will suffice to adduce only a few: Cooperation with the National Lutheran Council in the work among the prisoners of war; participation with others in the dedication of service centers, Washington and others; attendance at conferences of professors of theology, and membership in committees that clearly did not concern themselves merely with externals, but whose deliberations, planning and work dealt with doctrine and the things of the Christian life (Lutheran Committee on Scouting); a Synodical Conference pastor serving as guest essayist at the convention of a District of the American Lutheran Church; etc.

"We must frankly confess that we derive little comfort from the Missouri Synod's revision of its resolution on 'Prayer at Intersynodical Meetings' as it is reported in the Lutheran Witness of July 18, p. 234. It is our firm conviction that the cause of true unity is not furthered by such actions, which can only put undue pressure behind the 'union movements' and cause confusion to our Church" (Proceedings 1945, p. 74) The convention also noted that "official protests in these matters have been filed with the Synodical Conference and are now before a Committee on Intersynodical Relations which has been appointed by that body." (Proceedings 1945, p. 75) The same convention declared that the so-called "Cooperation in Externals" are "unionistic." (Proceedings 1945, p. 77) Elaborating further the convention de-

clared, "'Cooperation in Externals' (What in church work can truly be said to be purely external?) may hide our wounds, but it will not heal them. Joint endeavors will not remove existing differences, but it may lead us to forget them and to grow indifferent to the authority of the Inspired Word.

"A united front, after all, is only a 'front,' will not strike terror to the heart of the foes of the Church, nor will it make for a vigorous wielding of the Sword of the Spirit by men rooted in the Truth and zealous for it.

"No, we are frank to state that we see a great danger to our Lutheran Church in the cooperation in externals that is being advocated so strongly these days." (Proceedings 1945, p. 77-78) It should be noted that the entire report dealing with these matters in 1945 was adopted unanimously.

At the 1947 convention of the Wisconsin Synod President Brenner reported in his opening address that the committee appointed in 1941 to represent our Synod at discussions "with the fellow-members of the Synodical Conference on the matters that endanger our unity of spirit" (Proceedings 1941, p. 78) had "performed its duties faithfully. Its executive committee attended many conferences with representatives of our sister-synods. The pertinent documents were printed and discussed in the 'Quartalschrift' (the theological magazine of the Wisconsin Synod---EA), but for the sake of peace, not so frequently in the 'Northwestern Lutheran' and the 'Gemeindeblatt.' But now Professor Reim has been requested to present the issues to our people." (Proceedings 1947, p. 15-16) The Missouri Synod was to meet at Chicago on July 20-29, 1947. A memorial was addressed to that convention by the Standing Committee on Church Union (the committee appointed in 1941), asking the Chicago convention to "reconsider your 1944 Resolution on Scouting" (Proceedings 1947, p. 104) Attention was called to the obvious change from the former Missouri Synod position on Scouting. The memorial stated "We confess we find it difficult to reconcile the Saginaw Report (1944 Missouri convention--EA) with the 1938 Resolution of your Synod on the same subject, particularly paragraph three, in which you speak of the 'naturalistic and unionistic tendencies still prevalent in the Boy Scout movement.' We note that this pronouncement was made even after the only material change in the Scout program of which our synods have been informed had already been made. That these unionistic features have not been eliminated, even now, is indicated, we believe, by the book, 'Scouting in the Lutheran Church' which to us is a plain instance of unionism with Lutheran synods with whom we are not in fellowship.

"Our own restudy of the question of Scouting has confirmed us in our conviction that Scouting is not consistent with Scriptural principles. In order to indicate our findings we enclose a paper entitled 'A Study in Boy Scoutism'.... We ask that you give it serious consideration in your deliberations and pray that it may help to reunite us in our views of this problem and allay the confusion which your 1944 Resolution has created." (Proceedings 1947, p. 105) The August 1947 convention of the Wisconsin Synod adopted this statement as its own. The Chicago convention of the Missouri Synod did respond to this memorial. It appointed a committee of three to restudy the matter and report to the next convention.

The Standing Committee on Church Union reported on the above matter to the 1949 convention, "It was the favorable impression of our representatives that this new Missouri Committee is making a sincere effort to understand our Wisconsin position. We cannot, however, venture a prediction as to the outcome of these discussions." (Proceedings, 1949, p. 110) However, the general picture as reported by the same committee, was not encouraging. The committee reported further, "Your committee has with deep concern observed an ever-increasing number of incidents of joint worship and work under conditions which are contrary to Scripture. We are impressed by the growing frequency and boldness of these incidents. Unfortunately they often involve members and sometimes official representatives and organizations of our sister synod, Missouri. Efforts have been made to deal with these matters privately or through official channels. They have met with little success. After careful consideration your committee authorized the writing of a series of articles for the 'Northwestern Lutheran,' dealing with the issue of unionism in its several phases. The Synod should at this time become clear as to what further steps, if any, should be taken." (Proceedings 1949, p. 110-111)

The same Wisconsin Synod convention in 1949 noted that the Missouri Synod had formally proposed further meeting of all Lutheran bodies to further unity. To this the Synod responded, "In view of the sharp division in the Synodical Conference affecting matters of doctrine and practice, we are of the firm conviction that, before we undertake to correct and direct other Lutheran bodies, it is our first duty, and this is a holy duty, to set our own house in order, and that in doing this in the true spirit of the Gospel we are making the most effective contribution toward the unity of the Lutheran Church in our land and other countries." (Proceedings 1949, p. 115-116) In 1949 attention was again called to the fact that the departure from the Word and from their former position by the Missouri Synod in the matter of the Army-Navy chaplaincy was still a source of disagreement. (Proceedings 1949, p. 116)

The same report noted the following, "With deep concern we note that the ties which have united us, particularly with the Missouri Synod, are being loosened. In order that certain disturbing factors may be clarified, and with the hope that the bond of unity may be strengthened, we move that a letter be addressed to the Synod of Missouri." (Proceedings 1949, p. 117-118) Again, as in 1947 the report states, "The adoption of the report and confirmation of action taken and action contemplated was unanimous." (Proceedings 1949, p. 118)

The 1951 convention saw a worsening of the situation. The 1950 convention of the Missouri Synod had replied to the 1947 Wisconsin Synod memorial on Scouting. The action of the Missouri Synod "reaffirmed the position taken by Missouri in 1944." (Proceedings 1951, p. 141) The Wisconsin Synod convention also reported, "Neither of these two documents has therefore informed the members of the Missouri Synod of the true reasons for the Wisconsin objections to scouting. They have in fact interposed an effective censorship, defeating the intentions of the Synodical Conference resolution." (Proceedings 1951, p. 142) The convention passed this judgment unanimously, "We deplore that the last mentioned reply holds forth no hope of settlement of this vexing question (Scouting--EA)." (Proceedings 1951, p. 161)

Another new and serious departure from the truth was noted by the 1951 Wisconsin Synod convention. The Missouri Synod had adopted a document, known as the Common Confession, as a settlement of long-standing doctrinal differences with the American Lutheran Church. The Missouri Synod resolution read, "That, if the American Lutheran Church in convention assembled, accepts it, the 'Common Confession' shall be recognized as a statement of agreement on these doctrines between us and the American Lutheran Church." Our Standing Committee on Church Union reported concerning this, "After careful consideration and mutual discussion we find ourselves constrained to report that in our judgment this Agreement involves an actual denial of the truth, since it claims to be a settlement of doctrinal differences which are not settled in fact." (Proceedings 1951, p. 144) The convention action, again adopted by unanimous vote, was as follows, "Be it further resolved: 2) That we inform the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod that we not only find the Common Confession to be inadequate in the points noted (cf. Review of the Common Confession), but that we also hold that the adoption of the Common Confession by the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod involves an untruth and creates a basically untruthful situation since this action has been officially interpreted as a settlement of past differences which are in fact not settled. 3) And be it further resolved that we ask the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod to repudiate its stand that the Common Confession is a settlement by the two committees (Missouri and American Lutheran Church)". (Proceedings 1951, p. 147)

After ten years of admonishing and instructing the Missouri Synod the pattern had clearly emerged. By its resolutions and actions the Missouri Synod had rejected the patient and loving testimony of the Wisconsin Synod, continued in the departures of the past, and regularly added new offenses. The 1953 convention clearly recognized the pattern and stated, "That we declare that the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.....has brought about the break in relations that is now threatening the existence of the Synodical Conference and the continuance of our affiliation with the sister Synod." (Proceedings 1953, p. 104) That all the world might know that we recognized the Missouri Synod as a body persistently holding to doctrine and practices contrary to the Truth, the Synod declared that "we remain in a state of confession." (Proceedings 1953, p. 105) Another letter was sent by the Synod to the Missouri Synod listing the departures and asking for a complete disavowal of the same. It is to be noted that for the first time in three conventions the action was not unanimous. Not that there were those who by a negative vote wanted to say that the Missouri Synod had not departed from the truth it formerly held, but that some held that in view of the fact that the Missouri Synod had persistently rejected the admonition of the Word, Romans 16, 17 now be applied and the Missouri Synod be avoided.

At the Saginaw convention of the Wisconsin Synod in 1955, in his first opening address as president, President Naumann clearly and forcefully stated, "We are convinced that our position not only in doctrine but especially in the application of doctrines in our lives and in the lives of our members, is the position that the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference had occupied ever since its organization. The differences that have arisen between us, which we have been trying to face honestly and soberly, and to remove in an evangelical manner by the application of God's Holy Word brother to brother, have

not been removed. They have increased. Things we consider contrary to God's Word have been defended with the statement, 'That passage does not apply in this case.' We have heard so often the expression 'Synod's interests are sufficiently safeguarded.' Matters which we named in our resolutions of 1953, which we considered dangerous to our souls' welfare, deterrent to our Gospel ministry, and detrimental to our fellowship in the Conference, have been and still are vigorously defended. The charges we brought in an effort to do our brotherly duty before God, have been definitely denied. We have reached the conviction that through these differences divisions and offenses have been caused contrary to the doctrine we have learned. And when that is the case, the Lord our God has a definite command for us: 'Avoid them.'" (Proceedings 1955, p. 13) The convention reechoed this conviction, though, sad to say, it postponed the action it should have taken--to avoid the Missouri Synod. This failure to obey God's Word will be fully explored in our next meeting.

Lest anyone be inclined to believe that the situation has changed since 1955, let it be stated that every charge of departure from the truth brought by the Wisconsin Synod before 1955 stands unchanged today, and new offenses have been steadily added since that time. We shall hear more of this when we meet next Thursday to consider--

The Wisconsin Synod's Dealings With The Missouri Synod,  
and  
The Formation Of The Church Of The Lutheran Confession



## V.

## THE DECISION THAT LIES BEFORE US

In April of this year we voted to affiliate or associate ourselves with the Church of the Lutheran Confession. We were not ready at that time to support it with our mission offerings, but decided to wait for more information. This evening we are reconsidering this matter.

In our last two Thursday evening meetings we looked at the problems that are now plaguing the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods. We noted especially that the Missouri Synod has gone far down the road of indifference and carelessness in respect to God's Word. We observed the failure of the Wisconsin Synod to terminate fellowship with the Missouri Synod on the basis of Romans 16, 17. We analyzed the newly-adopted principle of the Wisconsin Synod for terminating church fellowship, namely, that "termination of fellowship is called for when you have reached the conviction that admonition is of no further avail." This "new" principle we said is unscriptural.

We pointed out the true principle, namely, that termination of church fellowship is called for when Scriptural admonition has been offered and rejected and the erring body continues in its error despite admonition.

By affiliating with the Church of the Lutheran Confession in April, we rejected the "new" principle now being followed by the Wisconsin Synod and are upholding the Scripturally correct one.

In matters pertaining to God's Word, the vote of a majority of people never decides the Truth. The Truth remains unchanged regardless how many people are for or against it. Paul says in II Corinthians 13, 8, "For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth."

But by a majority vote a congregation determines whether it will uphold the Truth or reject it. We voted correctly to uphold the Truth. And this evening when we decide the matter of supporting the Church of the Lutheran Confession with our mission offerings, we will do one of two things. Either we will continue to stand upon the confession and teaching that this congregation has always upheld, or we will adopt a new principle, different from what we have always taught in the past. What the Wisconsin Synod now teaches in its principle of church fellowship is not the old position of the Synod, nor of our congregation.

God's Word never changes. Jesus says, "For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." (Matthew 5, 18) Again the Savior promises, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." (Matthew 24, 35) Because the Word of God is unchangeable, Jesus says, "The Scripture cannot be broken." (John 10, 35) Men may destroy themselves by setting themselves against the Word, but they will never destroy or change the Truth; for "God's Word is truth." (John 17, 17)

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Men change. Synods change. But God's Word never changes. We therefore do not want any new teaching. We do not want to follow the new principle that the Wisconsin Synod is now following, but we want to keep our teachings as they have always been taught. We want to continue in the old paths, as the Wisconsin Synod used to teach. "Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls." (Jeremiah 6, 16)

We should state again that when a congregation is affiliated with a synod, it thereby supports or confesses the position of that synod. For many years we supported the Wisconsin Synod, and it is doubtful that many in this congregation have had deeper affection for and roots in the Wisconsin Synod than I have. But because the Synod turned aside from the old paths and has been disobedient to the Word of God, and does not follow its own teaching, I withdrew my membership from it--a membership I had enjoyed for many years. It is still my fervent hope that the Synod will correct itself and return to the old paths. To remain in the Synod, under present circumstances, however, would mean that I would become guilty of the very thing that I have been protesting against and seeking to correct.

If this congregation this evening should reverse its action of April, and vote to affiliate again with the Wisconsin Synod, that act would end my ministry here at St. Paul's at once, for the confession of this congregation would then be changed. St. Paul's and I would no longer hold to the same confession. This congregation would then no longer be governed solely by God's Word. The Wisconsin Synod's new teaching on church fellowship would then be a part of the congregation's doctrine.

This evening we will not merely vote on whether to support the Church of the Lutheran Confession with our mission offerings, but this vote will also determine the future doctrinal course of this congregation.

Not only will the congregation make a testimony and confession in this decision, but each individual member will make a confession also. By belonging to this or that visible assembly or local congregation we as individuals confess to the world what we believe. Whatever the visible assembly to which we belong believes, teaches and confesses--both the Lord and the world may rightly assume we believe, teach and confess. We cannot separate ourselves from the confession of the visible assembly to which we belong. We bear either the blessing or the burden of that confession.

On the basis of the information we have studied in our special meetings, each must make his own decision. I gave my solemn pledge to lead you according to the Word of God. It is so easy to keep silent in this matter concerning the synods for the sake of outward peace. If I would have done so, I would have been an unfaithful shepherd of my Lord and unfaithful to the vow I took when I entered the holy ministry and when I was installed as your pastor. However, I face eternity, when I shall have to stand before my Lord. Not only will I need the cleansing blood of my Savior for the forgiveness of my sins, but God is going to call me to account for the souls he entrusted to my care. Listen to the charge He gives every pastor, "So thou, O Son of Man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore

thou shalt hear the Word at My mouth, and warn them from Me. When I say to the wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thy hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it: if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul." (Ezekiel 33, 7-9) The way of silence would not have been safe for you; for me it would have been utterly disastrous on the Last Day. In doing what I have done in bringing this matter to your attention for action, I have followed the instruction of the Word of God to pastors, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood." (Acts 20, 28) By speaking out I have taken the only course that is safe for me and good for you.

God, however, has not only laid an obligation upon me, but also upon you. Unless it can be shown from the Word of God that your pastor is leading you contrary to the Word of God, the only right and safe course for you as a member of the Flock of God is to follow him. Jesus says of His pastors, "He that heareth you heareth Me, and he that despiseth you despiseth Me; and he that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent Me." (Luke 10, 16) Again God says concerning the relation of people to their pastors in matters concerning the Word of God, "Obey them that have the rule over you and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you." (Hebrews 13, 17)

The decision that we face is most important for us as individuals. God is confronting us with a personal testing of our faith. His purposes in such testings are always good. Through this and other testings He wishes to strengthen our faith and thus increase our joy and hope in Jesus and His salvation. The Word of God declares, "Wherein (in your salvation) ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." (I Peter 1, 6-7) By following the Word of God in a time of testing we always experience the strengthening of our faith; by the same token, a failure to follow the Word at such a time can and will weaken our faith. We must also remember that if we turn aside from the Word of God in the face of the testimony of that Word we may lose the ability to make correct spiritual decisions in the future.

As we prepare to make our decision we certainly will think of the future of the Word of God among us. To think of the future of the Word is to think of our children and our children's children. The importance of preserving the Truth now so that it may be preserved unto and through our children is emphasized in Scripture, Moses says, "Only take heed to thyself and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons; specially the day that thou stoodest before the Lord thy God in Horeb, when the Lord said unto me, Gather me the people together, and I will make them hear My Words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children." (Deuteronomy 4, 9-10) The teaching of our children

is a continuing, daily process. They are watching us in the matter before us. Either we will demonstrate to them that the Word of God is to be valued above all else, or that full obedience to the Word of God is not always necessary. Let us not underestimate the lasting impression that the decision we face will have upon our children and thus upon the future of the saving Truth among us.

As a congregation we face one of two possible effects in the decision before us. Either we will be strengthened in the way of obedience that we have always upheld in this congregation, or else we will begin a new course that does not demand complete, unquestioning obedience. History proves that the latter course always leads downward. The individual, congregation or Synod that finds reason to yield on one point of doctrine will find that the same reason will make it possible to yield other truths. Such churches that are willing to yield in any matter of doctrine and practice according to the circumstances that happen to prevail are to be found in abundance everywhere.

The sound, Biblical principles upon which this congregation was founded have brought many blessings of God in our midst. We have a congregation of about four hundred communicants; we have a beautifully kept church property; but we also have the Word of God in its truth and purity. The physical beauty of this church property and the fine congregation to be found here are not the real glory of this congregation. The crown of glory, which God recognizes, is its love, devotion and obedience to His Word. If that is removed, the glory of this house and this congregation will depart with it.

But we must also recognize the importance of our action in the light of eternity. We want to be able to say on the Last Day, "Lord, this is what your Word said and I acted according to it." Is not that far better than to have to say on that Day, "Lord, I know what your Word said, but I thought it would be better if we followed a different course." To stand on the Word of God and act accordingly is to be absolutely sure of being safe on Judgment Day. My reason may seek to lead me on an entirely different way from where God's Word points me. But if I follow my reason rather than the Word of God in this life, I have no assurance of everlasting life in heaven. To lead and guide me safely through this evil world with its many temptations to the glory of heaven, God has given me the only safe and certain guide--His Word. Though I stand alone on that Word of God, I will be safe and not deceived on the Last Day.

May God grant us the faithfulness that will lead us to follow His Word and the courage to act accordingly. God's blessing will surely rest upon us if we do.