

Church Fellowship

Do we think we're the
only ones going to
heaven, or do we want to
see more there?

What's in a Name?

- Wisconsin
 - 1892 (federation): Allgemeine Evangelisch-lutherische Synode von Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan und andern Staaten (1904: Nebraska added)
 - 1912 (merged synod): Allgemeine Synode von Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan und andern Staaten
- Evangelical
- Lutheran
- Synod

Introduction to our Theses



- As we read through the historical setting of these theses, consider why the WELS would have done what it did. Remember this introduction for next month and consider if the WELS was proven prophetic or naive.

- *Church fellowship* is a term that has been used to designate both a *status* and an *activity*. Both usages lie very close together, and one flows out of the other. The two usages follow the general dogmatic distinction of *actu primo et actu secundo*.
- *Was?*
- *What is the importance of one flowing from the other?*
- *Isn't this just impractical and academic theology? I mean, there's Latin in it, isn't there?*

✓ *Church fellowship* can be *defined* as the *status* in which individuals or groups, on the basis of a common confession of faith, have mutually recognized one another as Christian brethren and now consider it God-pleasing to express, manifest, and demonstrate their common faith jointly.

✓ *Church fellowship* can also be *defined* as the *activity* which includes every joint expression, manifestation, and demonstration of the common faith in which Christians (individuals or groups), on the basis of their confession, find themselves to be united with one another. (Mutual recognition of one another as Christian brethren is itself one such "joint expression" of common faith in which Christians on the basis of their confession find themselves to be united with one another.)

- What is the difference between the two types of fellowship?
- Is there a point?
- If so, what is the relationship between the two?
- Take a look at the next paragraph. Why concentrate on the activity and not the status? Look especially at the beginning of the paragraph:
- “For very practical reasons, we have preferred to treat church fellowship in our theses as a term designating an *activity* since the inter-synodical tensions have to do more with church fellowship as an activity than as a status.”

Church fellowship is every joint expression, manifestation, and demonstration of the common faith in which Christians on the basis of their confession find themselves to be united with one another.

➤ A. How Scripture leads us to this concept of church fellowship.

1. Through faith in Christ, the Holy Spirit unites us with our God and Savior. Gal 3:26; 4:6; 1 Jn 3:1.

• Galatians 3:26 - *You are all sons of God through faith in Christ*

• Galatians 4:6 - *Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."*

• 1 John 3:1 - *How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.*

- 2. This Spirit-wrought faith at the same time unites us in an intimate bond with all other believers. 1 Jn 1:3; Eph 4:4-6; Jn 17:20,21. Compare also the many striking metaphors emphasizing the unity of the Church, e.g., the body of Christ, the temple of God.
- 1 John 1:3 - *We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.*
 - Ephesians 4:4-6 - *There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*
 - John 17:20,21 - *My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.*

- 3. Faith as spiritual life invariably expresses itself in activity which is spiritual in nature, yet outwardly manifest, e.g., in the use of the means of grace, in prayer, in praise and worship, in appreciative use of the "gifts" of the Lord to the Church, in Christian testimony, in furthering the cause of the gospel, and in deeds of Christian love. Jn 8:47; Gal 4:6; Eph 4:11-14; Ac 4:20; 2 Co 4:13; 1 Pe 2:9; Gal 2:9; 5:6.
- John 8:47 - *He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.*
 - Galatians 4:6 - *Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."*

•Ephesians 4:11 - *It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.*

•Acts 4:20 - *For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.*

- 2 Corinthians 4:13 - *It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak...*
- 1 Peter 2:9 - *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*
- Galatians 2:9 - *James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews.*
- Galatians 5:6 - *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.*

- 4. It is God the Holy Ghost who leads us to express and manifest in activity the faith which He works and sustains in our hearts through the gospel. Gal 4:6; Jn 15:26,27; 7:38,39; Ac 1:8; Eph 2:10.
- Galatians 4:6 - *Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."*
 - John 15:26,27 - *When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.*
 - John 7:38,39 - *Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.*

- Acts 1:8 - *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*
- Ephesians 2:10 - *For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

➤ 5. Through the bond of faith in which He unites us with all Christians, the Holy Spirit also leads us to express and manifest our faith jointly with fellow Christians according to opportunity: **as smaller and larger groups,** Ac 1:14,15; 2:41-47; Gal 2:9;

- *Acts 1:14 - They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.*
- *Acts 2:41-47 - Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*
- *Galatians 2:9 - Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews.*

- 5. Through the bond of faith in which He unites us with all Christians, the Holy Spirit also leads us to express and manifest our faith jointly with fellow Christians according to opportunity: as smaller and larger groups; **as congregations with other congregations**, Ac 15; 1 Th 4:9,10; 2 Co 8:1,2,18,19; 9:2.
- 1 Thessalonians 4:9,10 - *Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more.*

- 2 Corinthians 8:1,2,18,19 - *And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. And we are sending along with him the brother who is praised by all the churches for his service to the gospel. What is more, he was chosen by the churches to accompany us as we carry the offering, which we administer in order to honor the Lord himself and to show our eagerness to help.*
- 2 Corinthians 9:2 - *For I know your eagerness to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians, telling them that since last year you in Achaia were ready to give; and your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action.*

- 5. Through the bond of faith in which He unites us with all Christians, the Holy Spirit also leads us to express and manifest our faith jointly with fellow Christians according to opportunity: as smaller and larger groups; as congregations with other congregations, (Before God every activity of our faith is at the same time fellowship activity in the communion of saints. 1 Co 12; Eph 4:1-16; Ro 12:1-8; 2 Ti 2:19.)
- Take a look at Ephesians 4:1-16 in your Bibles.
 - 2 Timothy 2:19 - *Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness."*

➤ 6. We may classify these joint expressions of faith in various ways according to the particular realm of activity in which they occur, e.g., pulpit fellowship; altar fellowship; prayer fellowship; fellowship in worship; fellowship in church work, in missions, in Christian education, and in Christian charity. Yet insofar as they are joint expressions of faith, they are all essentially one and the same thing and are all properly covered by a common designation, namely, church fellowship.² Church fellowship should therefore be treated as a unit concept, covering every joint expression, manifestation, and demonstration of a common faith. Hence, Scripture can give the general admonition "avoid them" when church fellowship is to cease (Ro 16:17). Hence, Scripture sees an expression of church fellowship also in giving the right hand of fellowship (Gal 2:9) and in greeting one another with the fraternal kiss (Ro 16:16); on the other hand, it points out that a withholding of church fellowship may also be indicated by not extending a fraternal welcome to errorists and by not bidding them Godspeed (2 Jn 10,11; cf. 3 Jn 5-8).

- Hence, Scripture can give the general admonition "avoid them" when church fellowship is to cease (Ro 16:17).
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- Hence, Scripture sees an expression of church fellowship also in giving the right hand of fellowship (Gal 2:9) and in greeting one another with the fraternal kiss (Ro 16:16);
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- Romans 16:16 - *Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send greetings.*

- on the other hand, it points out that a withholding of church fellowship may also be indicated by not extending a fraternal welcome to errorists and by not bidding them Godspeed (2 Jn 10,11; cf. 3 Jn 5-8).
- 2 John 10,11 - *If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work.*
 - 3 John 5-8 - *Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you. They have told the church about your love. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth.*

- B. What principles Scripture teaches for the exercise of such church fellowship.
- 2. In selecting specific individuals or groups for a joint expression of faith, we can do this only on the basis of their confession. It would be presumptuous on our part to attempt to recognize Christians on the basis of the personal faith in their hearts. 2 Ti 2:19; Ro 10:10; 1 Jn 4:1-3; 1 Sa 16:7.
- 2 Timothy 2:19 - *Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness."*
- Romans 10:10 - *For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.*

- 1 John 4:1-3 - *Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.*
- 1 Samuel 16:7 - *But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”*

- 2. A Christian confession of faith is in principle always a confession to the entire Word of God. The denial, adulteration, or suppression of any word of God does not stem from faith but from unbelief. Jn 8:31; Mt 5:19; 1 Pe 4:11; Jer 23:28,31; Dt 4:2; Rev 22:18,19.
- John 8:31 - *To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples."*
 - *Matthew 5:19 - Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*
 - *1 Peter 4:11 - If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.*

- Jeremiah 23:28,31 – *“Let the prophet who has a dream tell his dream, but let the one who has my word speak it faithfully. For what has straw to do with grain?” declares the LORD. “Yes,” declares the LORD, “I am against the prophets who wag their own tongues and yet declare, ‘The LORD declares.’”*
- Deuteronomy 4:2 - *Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you.*
- Revelation 22:18,19 - *I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.*

➤ We recognize and acknowledge as Christian brethren those who profess faith in Christ as their Savior and with this profession embrace and accept His entire Word. Compare Walther's "Theses on Open Questions," Thesis 7: "No man has the privilege, and to no man may the privilege be granted, to believe and to teach otherwise than God has revealed in His Word, no matter whether it pertains to primary or secondary fundamental articles of faith, to fundamental or nonfundamental doctrines, to matters of faith or of practice, to historical items or other matters subject to the light of reason, to important or seemingly unimportant matters."

- 3. Actually, however, the faith of Christians and its manifestations are marked by many imperfections, either in the grasp and understanding of scriptural truths, or in the matter of turning these truths to full account in their lives. We are all weak in one way or another. Php 3:12; Eph 4:14; 3:16-18; 1 Th 5:14; Heb 5:12; 1 Pe 2:2. Compare Walther's Thesis 5: "The Church militant must indeed aim at and strive for absolute unity of faith and doctrine, but it never will attain a higher degree of unity than a fundamental one." Cf. Thesis 10.
- *Philippians 3:12 - Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.*
 - *Ephesians 4:14 - Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.*

- Ephesians 3:16-18 - *I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,*
- 1 Thessalonians 5:14 - *And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone.*
- Hebrews 5:12 - *In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!*
- 1 Peter 2:2 - *Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation...*

- 4. Weakness of faith is in itself not a reason for terminating church fellowship, but rather an inducement for practicing it vigorously to help one another in overcoming our individual weaknesses. In precept and example, Scripture abounds with exhortations to pay our full debt of love toward the weak.
- A. General exhortations. Gal 6:1-3; Eph 4:1-16; Mt 18:15-17.
 - Galatians 6:1-3 - *Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.*
 - Matthew 18:15-17 - *“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.”*

- b. Weakness in laying hold of God's promises in a firm trust. Mt 6:25-34.
- *Matthew 6:25-34 - "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not*

➤ c. Weakness with reference to adiaphora in enjoying fully the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free. Ro 14; 1 Co 8 and 9. The public confession of any church must [on the basis of Scripture] establish, however, which things are adiaphora, so that it may be evident who are the weak and who are the strong. Ro 14:17-23; 1 Co 6:12; 10:23,24.

- Romans 14:17-23 - *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men. Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall. So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.*

- 1 Corinthians 6:12 – *“Everything is permissible for me”—but not everything is beneficial.*
“Everything is permissible for me”—but I will not be mastered by anything.
- 1 Corinthians 10:23,24 – *“Everything is permissible”—but not everything is beneficial.*
“Everything is permissible”—but not everything is constructive. Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.

- d. Weakness in understanding God's truth, and involvement in error. Ac 1:6; Galatians (Judaizing error); Colossians (Jewish-Gnostic error); 1 Co 15; 1 Th 4:10-12,14; 2 Th 3:6,14,15; Ac 15:5,6,22,25. Note how in all these cases, Paul patiently built up the weak faith of these Christians with the gospel to give them strength to overcome the error that had affected them. Compare Walther's Theses 2, 3, 4, and 8.
- Acts 1:6 - *So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"*
 - 1 Thessalonians 4:10-14 - *And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more. Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody. Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.*

- *2 Thessalonians 3:6,14,15 - In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.*
- *Acts 15:5,6,22,25 - Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses." The apostles and elders met to consider this question. Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, two men who were leaders among the brothers. So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul...*

- 5. Persistent adherence to false doctrine and practice calls for termination of church fellowship.
- a. We cannot continue to recognize and treat anyone as a Christian brother who in spite of all brotherly admonition impenitently clings to a sin. His and our own spiritual welfare calls for termination of church fellowship (excommunication). Mt 18:17; 1 Co 5:1-6.
- Matthew 18:17 - *If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.*

- 1 Corinthians 5:1-6 - *It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present. When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord. Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough?*

- b. We can no longer recognize and treat as Christian brethren those who in spite of patient admonition persistently adhere to an error in doctrine or practice, demand recognition for their error, and make propaganda for it. Gal 1:8,9; 5:9; Mt 7:15-19; 16:6; 2 Ti 2:17-19; 2 Jn 9-11; Ro 16:17,18. If the error does not overthrow the foundation of saving faith, the termination of fellowship is not to be construed as an excommunication. Moreover, an excommunication can only apply to an individual, not to a congregation or larger church group. The "avoid them" of Romans 16:17,18 excludes any contact that would be an acknowledgment and manifestation of church fellowship; it calls for a cessation of every further joint expression of faith. Cf. 1 Co 5:9-11. Compare Walther's Theses 9 and 10.

- Galatians 1:8,9 - *But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!*
- Galatians 5:9 - *A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.*
- Matthew 7:15-19 – *“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”*

- Matthew 16:6 – *“Be careful,” Jesus said to them. “Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”*
- 2 Timothy 2:17-19 - *Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have wandered away from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some. Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: “The Lord knows those who are his,” and, “Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.”*
- 2 John 9-11 - *Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or*

- Romans 16:17,18 - *I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.*
- 1 Corinthians 5:9-11 - *I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.*

- c. Those who practice church fellowship with persistent errorists are partakers of their evil deeds. 2 Jn 11.
- 2 John 11 - *Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work.*

From all of this, we see that in the matter of the outward expression of Christian fellowship, the exercise of church fellowship, particularly two Christian principles need to direct us: the great debt of love which the Lord would have us pay to the weak brother, and His clear injunction (also flowing out of love) to avoid those who adhere to false doctrine and practice and all who make themselves partakers of their evil deeds. Conscientious recognition of both principles will lead to an evangelical practice also in facing many difficult situations that confront us, situations which properly lie in the field of casuistry.

- On the basis of the foregoing, we find it to be an untenable position
- ✓ A. To distinguish between joint prayer which is acknowledged to be an expression of church fellowship and an occasional joint prayer which purports to be something short of church fellowship;
- ✓ B. To designate certain nonfundamental doctrines as not being divisive of church fellowship in their very nature;
- ✓ C. To envision fellowship relations (in a congregation, in a church body, in a church federation, in a church agency, in a cooperative church activity) like so many steps of a ladder, each requiring a gradually increasing or decreasing measure of unity in doctrine and practice.

Some Considerations:

- What is the difference between a law and a principle? What is the significance in this regard?
- “Hard cases make bad law.” Explain and apply in this regard.
- Explain: “Exceptions cannot undermine the principle.”
- “Each case is unique.” Explain and apply.
- When faced with a hard case, what should we do?
- What should we do when we hear of the questionable actions of a brother or sister?
- Lutherans do not have canon law. Why is this the case? Why does this require greater responsibility?
- While we in many instances have a measure of freedom in our practices, what is the danger of disunity in it?

- How does one distinguish between a weak brother and a persistent errorist?
- What do we owe to those with whom we refuse to practice fellowship?
- What is the difference between the public and private practice of fellowship? What factors into both?
- Is there a difference between praying with your Missouri Synod aunt or Presbyterian grandfather in private and worshipping with them publicly in their church? Consider the weak brother/persistent errorist distinction.