

VII. The new life impels a Christian to pray, and in turn, his new life is strengthened as a result of prayer.

1. Only a Christian prays in a way acceptable to God.

a) Prayer is a sign of Christian faith.

1) Scripture refers to prayer as a regular part of the Christian's life.

Acts 2:42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

1 Corinthians 1:2 To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours.

1 Thessalonians 5:17 Pray continually.

Luther: Where there is a Christian, there is the Holy Spirit, who is always engaged in prayer. For though the Christian does not continually move his lips to utter words, nevertheless the heart is beating and pulsating, like the arteries and the heart in the body, unceasingly sighing, "O dear Father." So then, you cannot find a Christian who is not always praying, as little as a living person without a pulse, which never rests, but beats continually, though the person may be sleeping or is occupied otherwise, so that he is not aware of its beating (*LW* 24, p 89).

2) Christians have the boldness of faith to approach God.

Romans 8:14-17 Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." ¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

¹⁷ Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

John 16:26,27 In that day you will ask in my name. I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf. ²⁷ No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.

3) Christians enjoy access to God through faith in his grace.

Daniel 9:18 Give ear, O God, and hear; open your eyes and see the desolation of the city that bears your Name. We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy.

John 14:13,14 And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. ¹⁴ You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

John 16:23 In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.

1 John 5:14 This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.

4) Christians are moved by the Holy Spirit to pray.

Romans 8:14-17 Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” ¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. ¹⁷ Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

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

b) Unbelievers cannot pray in a way acceptable to God.

1) They may externally pray as fervently and devoutly as Christians.

Matthew 6:5 And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.

Luke 18:11 The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: “God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector.”

1 Kings 18:26-28 So they took the bull given them and prepared it. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. “O Baal, answer us!” they shouted. But there was no response; no one answered. And they danced around the altar they had made. ²⁷ At noon Elijah began to taunt them. “Shout louder!” he said. “Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened.” ²⁸ So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed.

2) Yet their prayers are sinful and are not pleasing to God.

Psalms 109:6,7 Appoint an evil man to oppose him; let an accuser stand at his right hand. ⁷ When he is tried, let him be found guilty, and may his prayers condemn him.

Matthew 6:7 And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.

Romans 10:14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?

Ephesians 2:1,2 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins,² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

2. Regarding the form of our prayers Scripture teaches us the following.

a) Christians may express their prayers in various ways.

1) They may offer prayers consciously or subconsciously (during work, sleep, etc.).

Romans 8:26,27 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.²⁷ And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

Isaiah 65:24 Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear.

1 Thessalonians 5:17 Pray continually.

Luther: A Christian prays even when, as often happens while fulfilling his earthly calling, he is not conscious of praying, yes, even when by reason of great sorrow and grief he imagines that he cannot pray (*St. Louis ed.*, XI, 922).

2) They may offer their prayers audibly or in thought.

Psalm 27:8 My heart says of you, "Seek his face!" Your face, LORD, I will seek.

Psalm 19:14 May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

Acts 7:59,60 While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."⁶⁰ Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.

3) They may offer their prayers according to some prescribed formula or *ex corde*.

Matthew 6:9 This, then, is how you should pray: “ Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.”

Luke 11:1,2 One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “ Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.”² He said to them, “ When you pray, say:” ‘Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come.’”

4) They may offer their prayers individually or together with their fellow Christians.

Psalm 4:1 Answer me when I call to you, O my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; be merciful to me and hear my prayer.

Psalm 5:1-2 Give ear to my words, O LORD, consider my sighing.² Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray.

Matthew 6:6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Matthew 18:19,20 Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.²⁰ For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.

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 4:24 When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. “ Sovereign Lord,” they said, “ you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.”

b) Christians may pray at any time or place.

1) They may pray at set times, or on special occasions.

Daniel 6:10 Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.

Psalm 119:164 Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous laws.

Acts 3:1 One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon.

2) They may pray in special places or anywhere.

Jonah 2:1 From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the LORD his God.

Matthew 21:13 “It is written,” he said to them, “‘My house will be called a house of prayer,’ but you are making it a ‘den of robbers.’”

John 4:20-24 “Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”²¹ Jesus declared, “Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.”²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews.²³ Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.”

1 Timothy 2:8 I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.

3) Christians can pray with a variety of postures and dress suited to the occasion.

Luke 18:13 But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

John 17:1 After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: “Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.”

Matthew 26:39 Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”

Ephesians 3:14 For this reason I kneel before the Father.

1 Timothy 2:8 I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.

1 Corinthians 11:4,5,13 Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head.⁵ And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is just as though her head were shaved.¹³ Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?

3. Scripture teaches about the content of prayer.

a) Prayers may to include praise and thanksgiving.

Psalms 26:6,7 I go about your altar, O Lord,⁷ proclaiming aloud your praise and telling of all your wonderful deeds.

Psalms 30:4 Sing to the LORD, you saints of his; praise his holy name.

Psalm 35:18 I will give you thanks in the great assembly; among throngs of people I will praise you.

Psalm 100:4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.

Psalm 103:1 Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name.

Psalm 105:1 Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done.

Psalm 106:1 Praise the LORD. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.

Psalm 118:28,29 You are my God, and I will give you thanks; you are my God, and I will exalt you. ²⁹ Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.

Romans 14:6 He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.

Ephesians 5:20 Always give thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Colossians 1:12 Give thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

b) Prayers may to include petitions.

1) We may pray about anything.

Philippians 4:6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

1 John 5:15 And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.

2) We may to pray for everyone, including our enemies.

1 Timothy 2:1 I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone.

Jeremiah 29:7 Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.

Matthew 5:44 But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

Ephesians 6:18,19 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.¹⁹ Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel.

1 Timothy 2:1-3 I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—² for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.³ This is good, and pleases God our Savior.

3) **We are not to pray for the souls of the dead.**

Note: Nowhere does Scripture command or encourage us to pray for the dead, nor does it provide positive examples of people doing so. Such prayers would be contrary to the will of God who indicates that once people die, they are either saved or lost.

Hebrews 9:27 Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.

Pomazansky: The departed need only one kind of help from their brethren: prayer and petition for the remission of their sins (*ODT*, p 311).

Council of Trent: XXV, Concerning Purgatory: Let the bishops, however, see to it that the suffrages of the believers [the things done by believers in behalf of the dead], namely, mass sacrifices, prayers, alms and other works of piety which are customarily done by believers for other believers who have died, are done with piety and devotion according to the institutions of the church.

Bellarmino: Prayer helps the souls of the dead in two ways, in one way, as a certain wearisome work of penance, and in this way it could be classified as a work of satisfaction; in the second way it helps when it is a supplication (a prayer for help), which is a characteristic of prayer as such (*Concerning Purgatory*, II, XVI, I, p 374).

2 Maccabees 12:39-45 On the follow day, since the task had now become urgent, Judas and his men went to gather up the bodies of the slain and bury them with their kinsmen in their ancestral tombs.⁴⁰ But under the tunic of each of the dead they found amulets sacred to the idols of Jamnia, which the law forbids the Jews to wear. So it was clear to all that this was why these men had been slain.⁴¹ They all therefore praised the ways of the Lord, the just judge who brings to light the things that are hidden.⁴² Turning to supplication, they prayed that the sinful deed might be fully blotted out. The noble Judas warned the soldiers to keep themselves free from sin, for they had seen with their own eyes what had happened because of the sin of those who had fallen.⁴³ He then took up a collection among all his soldiers, amounting to two thousand silver drachmas, which he sent to Jerusalem to provide for an expiatory sacrifice. In doing this he acted in a very excellent and noble way, inasmuch as he has the resurrection of the dead in view;⁴⁴ for if he were

not expecting the fallen to rise again, it would have been useless and foolish to pray for them in death.⁴⁵ But if he did this with a view to the splendid reward that awaits those who had gone to rest in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. NAB

The Lutheran Church condemns this practice.

Quenstedt: With the Apology of the Augsburg Confession we do not prohibit votive prayers for the dead, prayers of praise, gratitude and thanksgiving. But prayers for the dead which are meritorious, which serve as penitential satisfactions, and prayers of supplication through which and on account of which God should remit in the next life the punishments that remain after guilt has been forgiven, we totally disapprove of and reject (*TDP, De Extremo Judicio*, VII, p 377).

Apology, XXIV, p 416, 94,96: Our opponents quote the Fathers on offerings for the dead. We know that the ancients spoke of prayer for the dead. We do not forbid this, but rather we reject the transfer of the Lord's Supper to the dead *ex opere operato*. The ancients do not support the opponents' idea of the transfer *ex opere operato*. Even though they have support at most from Gregory and the more recent theologians, we set them against the clearest and surest passages of Scripture. There is also great variety among the Fathers.⁹⁶ Our opponents also misapply against us the condemnation of Acrius, who they say was condemned because he denied that in the Mass there was an offering for the living and the dead. They often use this dodge. They cite ancient heresies and by falsely comparing them with our position they try to crush us. Epiphanius testifies that Acrius believed that prayers for the dead were useless. This he rejects. We do not support Acrius either. But we are at suit with you for wickedly defending a heresy that clearly conflicts with the prophets, apostles, and holy Fathers, namely, that the Mass justifies *ex opere operato* and that it merits the forgiveness of guilt and punishment even for the wicked to whom it is applied, if they make no objection. We reject these wicked errors which rob Christ's suffering of its glory and utterly destroy the doctrine of righteousness by faith.

4. All prayers must be addressed to the Triune God.

a) Prayers may be addressed to God.

Matthew 4:10 Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

Deuteronomy 6:13 Fear the LORD your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name.

b) Prayers may be addressed to God the Father.

John 17:1 After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.

c) Prayers may be addressed to God the Son

Acts 7:59 While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “ Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”

d) The human nature of Christ is not excluded, since it is inseparably united with his divine nature.

Philippians 2:9-11 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

John 5:23 All may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.

Hebrews 1:6 And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, “ Let all God’s angels worship him.”

Revelation 5:11-14 Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders.¹² In a loud voice they sang: “ Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!”¹³ Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: “ To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!”¹⁴ The four living creatures said, “ Amen,” and the elders fell down and worshiped.

Note: We do not adore the flesh of Christ in the Corpus Christi, yet the Reformed rejection of the Corpus Christi is based on a false Christology.

Beza: To say that the flesh of Christ is to be adored is a crime of horrendous idolatry (*Apology to Selnecker*, III; Quenstedt, *TDP*, III, p 200).

Lambertus Danaeus (d. 1596): Cursed (says the prophet speaking in the stead of God himself) is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his arm (Jr 17:5). However, the flesh of Christ is true flesh and the man Christ is a true man. However, he who with religious worship adores or prays to any man has trust in the man whom he adores and to whom prays in that way. Therefore he who directs his adoration and prayers to the very flesh of Christ is cursed out of the mouth of God himself (*Examination of the book of Chemnitz on The Two Natures of Christ*, p 417).

Quenstedt: The human nature of Christ in the personal union, or as it exists in the person of the Son of God, is with one and the same adoration to be worshipped and adored together with the divine nature of the Logos (*TDP*, qu. XV, p 199)

e) Prayers may be addressed to God the Holy Spirit.

5. Prayers must not be directed to anyone or anything other than the Triune God.

a) Prayers must not be directed to saints.

Isaiah 63:16 But you are our Father, though Abraham does not know us or Israel acknowledge us; you, O LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name.

1 Timothy 2:5,6 For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time.

Council of Trent, XXV, p 227, Concerning Invocation: The holy synod commands all bishops diligently to instruct the believers especially concerning the intercession of and prayers to the saints, the honoring of relics, and the legitimate use of images, according to the usage of the catholic and apostolic church, teaching them that the saints who are ruling together with Christ offer their prayers to God in behalf of men and that it is good and useful to pray to them in supplication and to flee for refuge to their prayers, their support and their help in obtaining benefits from God through his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who is our only Redeemer and Savior.

b) Prayers must not be directed to images or icons.

Note: This does not exclude the use of art in worship.

Exodus 20:4,5 You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.⁵ You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me.

Deuteronomy 5:8,9 You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.⁹ You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me.

Deuteronomy 7:25 The images of their gods you are to burn in the fire. Do not covet the silver and gold on them, and do not take it for yourselves, or you will be ensnared by it, for it is detestable to the LORD your God.

1 John 5:21 Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.

2 Kings 18:4 He removed the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. He broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made, for up to that time the Israelites had been burning incense to it. (It was called Nehushtan.)

Isaiah 44:9ff All who make idols are nothing, and the things they treasure are worthless. Those who would speak up for them are blind; they are ignorant, to their own shame.

Isaiah 46:5ff To whom will you compare me or count me equal? To whom will you liken me that we may be compared?

Council of Trent, XXV, p 228, Concerning Invocation: Furthermore, images of Christ, of the virgin mother of God, and of other saints should be kept and retained especially in the church buildings and due honor and veneration should be offered to them.

Timothy Ware: Orthodox churches are full of icons—on the screen, on the walls, in special shrines, or on a kind of desk where they can be venerated by the faithful. When Orthodox people enter a church, their first action will be to buy a candle, go up to an icon, cross themselves, kiss the icon, and light the candle in front of it (*The Orthodox Church*, p 271).

c) Prayers must not be directed to angels.

Revelation 19:10 At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, “Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”

Revelation 22:8,9 I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me.⁹ But he said to me, “Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!”

Carlos Santana: It’s a real joy to be in your presence right now and we’d like to let you know that Michael, Raphael, and Gabriel are present. We suggest that you invite them into your life and you, too, will witness some incredible changes (*Angeltimes*, 6, 51).

d) Note the specious distinction Roman Catholics make between veneration and worship.

Greek / Latin terms:

- *Doulia* – directed to saints
- *Hyperdoulia* – to Mary and human nature of Christ
- *Latria* – to God

Latin / Spanish terms:

- *Venerar* – saints
- *Adorar* - God

Hoenecke: To be sure, the Council of Trent says that this worship should not happen “not as through it were believed that any divinity or power resided in them,” or because one should place trust in them, but they are to be involved “because the honor which is shown them is bestowed on the prototypes they represent, so that through the images which we kiss, and because which we

uncover our heads and bow down, we may adore Christ, and venerate the saints” (*ELD*, III, p 412, 413).

Augsburg Confession, XXI, p 56, 1,2: It is also taught among us that saints should be kept in remembrance so that our faith may be strengthened when we see what grace they received and how they were sustained by faith. Moreover, their good works are to be an example for us, each of us in his own calling....

² However, it cannot be proved from the Scriptures that we are to invoke saints or seek help from them. “For there is one mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5), who is the only savior, the only highpriest, advocate, and intercessor before God (Rom. 8:34). He alone has promised to hear our prayers.

Apology, XXI, p 342, 1-7: [The Roman Catholics] absolutely condemn Article XXI because we do not require the invocation of the saints. Nowhere else do they expend so much sophistry, but all they manage to prove is that the saints should be honored and that the living saints should pray for others. They present this as though on this account the invocation of the departed saints were also necessary. ²Cyprian asked Cornelius, while he was still alive, to pray for his brothers after his departure. They cite this example to prove the invocation of the dead. They also refer to Jerome’s controversy with Vigilantius and say, “On this field of battle Jerome conquered Vigilantius eleven hundred years ago.” So our opponents state a triumph as though the war were already over. These asses do not see that in the controversy between Jerome and Vigilantius there is not a syllable about invoking, but only about honoring, the saints. ³ Nor do the rest of the ancient Fathers before Gregory mention invocation. The theory of invocation, together with the theories our opponents now hold about the application of merits, surely has no support among the ancient Fathers. ⁴ Our Confession approves giving honor to the saints. This honor is threefold. The first is thanksgiving: we should thank God for showing examples of his mercy, revealing his will to save men, and giving teachers and other gifts to the church. Since these are his greatest gifts, we should extol them very highly; we should also praise the saints themselves for using these gifts, just as Christ praises faithful businessmen (Matt. 25:21, 23). ⁵ The second honor is the strengthening of our faith: when we see Peter forgiven after his denial, we are encouraged to believe that grace does indeed abound more than sin (Rom. 5:20). ⁶ The third honor is the imitation, first of their faith and then of their other virtues, which each should imitate in accordance with his calling. ⁷ Our opponents do not require these real honors; they only argue about invocation, which, even if it were not dangerous, is certainly unnecessary.

6. We may ask fellow Christians to pray with us and for us.

Matthew 18:19 Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.

Romans 15:30 I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me.

Ephesians 6:19 Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel.

Colossians 4:3 And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains.

2 Thessalonians 3:1 Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you.

a) Public prayer is an act of confession and an expression of fellowship, but not a means of grace (See the section on the means of grace, p 50).

1) Therefore we should not join in prayer with people who are not one in faith with us (prayer fellowship).

Matthew 7:15 Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.

Matthew 10:32,33 Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. ³³ But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.

2 Corinthians 6:14-18 Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? ¹⁵ What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." ¹⁷ "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." ¹⁸ "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

1 Thessalonians 5:22 Avoid every kind of evil.

Titus 3:10 Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him.

Romans 16:17-20 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. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I am full of joy over you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil. ²⁰ The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

Hoenecke: This unionistic mind-set, in which people want to unite even with giving up the truth, spreads like gangrene in our days, also in the Lutheran church of our land. ... The only thing agreeing with the Word

of God is totally to abstain from all prayer fellowship and worship fellowship with heretics.

...The presupposition of all union is that the truth of Scripture, particularly insofar as it condemns all error, even the least error, and warns against it as poison for the soul, was not seriously asserted (*ELD*, III, p 415, 416).

2) Our confession must be kept clear when attending worship services of the heterodox.

Note: The term “heterodox” refers to those churches and people who do not hold to an orthodox or correct view of biblical doctrine. A heterodox church is one that adheres to false teaching.

1 Timothy 1:3 As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer

2 Kings 5:18 But may the LORD forgive your servant for this one thing: When my master enters the temple of Rimmon to bow down and he is leaning on my arm and I bow there also—when I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the LORD forgive your servant for this.

Quenstedt: An orthodox man should either abstain entirely from the sacred rites of unbelievers or heretics (especially the papists) or, if he at one time or another wishes to be or is required by official duties to attend, let him be careful not to give the appearance of secretly agreeing with them ... but rather let him in some way, either by words or by signs, make clear his disagreement (*TDP*, p 383).

Pope Hadrian VI (d. 1523): Believers are permitted to pray with unbelievers in their temples, to hide their beliefs and to pretend by signs and words to hold a foreign religion (*De Extreme Judicio*, p 122).

7. God accomplishes great things as he answers the prayers of his people.

a) God takes into account our prayers as he governs and preserves the world.

1) Scripture exemplifies this truth.

Isaiah 38:1-6 In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, “This is what the LORD says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover.”² Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD,³ “Remember, O LORD, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly.⁴ Then the word of the LORD came to Isaiah:⁵ “Go and tell Hezekiah, ‘This is what the LORD, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will add fifteen years to your life.’⁶ And I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria. I will defend this city.

Quenstedt: The prayer of a believer is a key of heaven. The prayer rises to God and the mercy of God comes down, says Augustine (*Serm 220, de tempore*). It is a second Jacob's ladder and a kind of royal portal which gives entrance to the heart of God. Prayer is a refuge for the one who prays, a sacrifice [offered] to God, a scourging of the devil, yes, the strongest defense against the devil, a fountain and source (root) of all good things. Let us, who are unarmed, fight with no other arms than prayer; he who makes prayer his defense, with prayer will win the victory (*TDP, IV, XI, I, p 351*).

2) God listens to the prayers of his children.

Matthew 7:7-11 Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. 9 Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? 11 If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

James 1:6,7 But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. 7 That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord.

James 4:3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

James 5:16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

b) God answers our prayers for stronger faith and help in godly living.

1) Scripture teaches this truth.

Psalms 50:15,23 Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me. 23 He who sacrifices thank offerings honors me, and he prepares the way so that I may show him the salvation of God.

Colossians 1:9-11 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. 10 And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, 11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience.

James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.

2) Such prayers will be combined with a faithful use of the means of grace.

Romans 10:14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?

Isaiah 1:13-17 Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations— I cannot bear your evil assemblies. ¹⁴ Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. ¹⁵ When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood; ¹⁶ wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, ¹⁷ learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.

Isaiah 29:13 The Lord says: “ These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men.”

Isaiah 58:2,3 For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them. ³ “ Why have we fasted,” they say, “ and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?” Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers.

Amos 5:21-23 I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. ²² Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. ²³ Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps.

VIII. The cross which God lays on Christians serves the purpose of advancing their sanctification.

1. Cross is a term used for the Christian’s present state of humiliation.

Luke 9:23 Then he said to them all: “ If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily (*καθ’ ἡμέραν*) and follow me.”

1 Peter 4:12-16 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. ¹⁵ If you suffer, it should not

be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler.¹⁶ However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.

Hoenecke: As those justified before God, we believers have no sin and we ought not have to carry suffering for the sake of the Word or otherwise, for it no longer belongs to us; but we are in the state of humiliation and thus have all kinds of suffering. But therefore all suffering is to be called a cross, when it does not belong to us by law, but is imposed on us by paternal grace, so that we may conform to our Lord (*ELD*, III, p 404).

a) Since Christians have been justified, they are free from guilt and should not bear any suffering as a punishment for sin.

Romans 8:1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

John 3:17,18 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

b) Yet like their Lord, Christians must suffer for a time while they are waiting for their final redemption.

Matthew 10:25,38 It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household!³⁸ and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

Matthew 16:24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

Philippians 2:5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.

1 Peter 2:21 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

Colossians 1:24 Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.

Luke 21:28: When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.

c) The cross is not limited to persecution for the faith but includes all the suffering a Christian endures in this life.

- Some passages specifically mention the cross:

Mark 8:34 Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “ If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”

Luke 14:33 In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.

- **Some refer to suffering because we share a message that is foolishness to human wisdom:**

Matthew 11:25,26 At that time Jesus said, “ I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. ²⁶ Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.”

1 Corinthians 2:1,2 When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. ² For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

2 Corinthians 10:5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

- **Jesus' message will always brings outward division:**

Matthew 10:34 Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.

Luke 12:51 Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division.

- **Personal animosity is aimed at us because we belong to Christ:**

Matthew 5:11 Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

Luke 6:22 Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.

2 Corinthians 6:4-10 Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; ⁵ in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; ⁶ in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; ⁷ in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; ⁸ through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; ⁹ known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; ¹⁰ sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

1 Peter 4:14 If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

- **Division occurs even within the closest human relationships:**

Matthew 10:35-37 For I have come to turn “ a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—³⁶ a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.”³⁷ Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

Luke 12:52,53 From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three.⁵³ They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.

Luke 14:26 If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple.

- **We learn to let go of or to hold lightly this life's possessions:**

Matthew 19:21,22 Jesus answered, “ If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”²² When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

1 Corinthians 7:29-31 From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep;³¹ those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.

- **Troubles of various kinds meet us on the path to heaven:**

Acts 14:22 They returned, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. “ We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,” they said.

Romans 8:17,18 Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.¹⁸ I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

2 Corinthians 4:17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

- **We daily crucify our old self:**

Romans 6:6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.

Galatians 5:24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.

Colossians 3:5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.

- **Daily hating all that our old self produces:**

Romans 7:14,15,24 We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. ¹⁵ I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. ²⁴ What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

Hoenecke: By cross is to be understood the suffering and sorrow of Christians (*ELD*, III, p 403).

Quenstedt: I say, all the afflictions of the pious come with the name “ cross” , for by them we become like the crucified Christ, and Christ with his cross has sanctified and hallowed all our sufferings, that they might be beneficial to us (*TDP*, IV, X, I, p 348).

Jesper Brochmand (d. 1652): The disasters and afflictions to which a man is subject in this life are described with different words by the Spirit of God, and these are very significant. It is called the cross with reference to the cross of Christ. For just as Christ had to suffer and die and in this way enter into his glory (Lk 24:26), so also it is fitting that all those who want to be followers of Christ should take up their cross and through various afflictions enter the kingdom of God (*Systema*, II, XLI, I, I, p 4075).

d) The sorrows of the wicked would not be classified as a cross.

Psalm 16:4 The sorrows of those will increase who run after other gods. I will not pour out their libations of blood or take up their names on my lips.

Psalm 32:10 Many are the woes of the wicked, but the LORD’s unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him.

Psalm 34:21 Evil will slay the wicked; the foes of the righteous will be condemned.

Exodus 7:1-11:10 – The plagues sent on Pharaoh and the Egyptians.

2. It is God who lays the cross on the Christian.

a) Scripture teaches this truth.

1) God may impose the cross directly.

1 Chronicles 21:8-14 Then David said to God, “ I have sinned greatly by doing this. Now, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing.” ⁹ The LORD said to Gad, David’s seer, ¹⁰ “ Go and tell David, ‘This is what the LORD says: I am giving you three options. Choose one of them for me to carry out against you.’” ¹¹ So Gad went to David and said to him, “ This is what the LORD says: ‘Take your choice: ¹² three years of famine, three months of being swept away before your enemies, with their swords overtaking you, or three days of the sword of the LORD—days of plague in the land, with the angel of the LORD ravaging every part of Israel.’ Now then, decide how I should answer the one who sent me.” ¹³ David said to Gad, “ I am in deep distress. Let me fall into the hands of the LORD, for his mercy is very great; but do not let me fall into the hands of men.” ¹⁴ So the LORD sent a plague on Israel, and seventy thousand men of Israel fell dead.

Isaiah 45:7 I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things.

1 Corinthians 11:29-30 For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. ³⁰ That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.

Hebrews 12:6 The Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.

2) God may impose the cross through the devil or the unbelieving world.

Job 1:12 The LORD said to Satan, “ Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.” Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.

Job 2:6 The LORD said to Satan, “ Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you must spare his life.”

Luke 22:31 Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat.

2 Corinthians 12:7 To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.

John 16:2 They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God.

b) God reserves the right to impose the cross, either directly or indirectly.

1) No Christian should impose the cross on his fellow Christian.

Galatians 6:2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

2 Corinthians 11:26,29 I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers.²⁹ Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?

2) A Christian should not impose the cross on himself.

1 Peter 3:17 It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

1 Peter 1:6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

3) A Christian may pray to God for deliverance from the cross.

2 Corinthians 12:8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.

Psalms 50:15 Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me.

4) Yet the Christian will remember that ultimately the cross is for his good.

2 Corinthians 12:8-10 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.⁹ But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.¹⁰ That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

3. The cross is never a punishment for sin.

Note: In Lutheran dogmatics we make a distinction between punishment and chastisement. God punishes unbelievers but chastises believers.

a) Since Christians are forgiven, their sufferings are "without cause."

Psalms 109:3 With words of hatred they surround me; they attack me *without cause*.

Psalms 119:78 May the arrogant be put to shame for wronging me *without cause*.

Psalms 119:86 All your commands are trustworthy; help me, for men persecute me *without cause*.

Job 2:3 Then the LORD said to Satan, “ Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason.”

John 9:2,3 His disciples asked him, “ Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” ³ “ Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “ but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.”

Heerbrand: In a general way indeed every affliction is a penalty (*poena*) for sin. But properly the ungodly are punished (*puniuntur*) by God either that they may repent when they are admonished by the punishments (*poenis*) or, if they will not be converted, that they might perish. But for pious believers in Christ the guilt and the eternal punishment (*culpa et poena*) are simultaneously forgiven for the sake of the suffering and merit of Christ.... And if in the case of the pious God often responds to (*visitet*) specific sins with specific penalties (*poenis*), yet this must not be understood to be true in every case. Therefore afflictions and disasters are rightly called the cross and not the punishments (*poenae*) of the pious, because they no longer have the nature of punishments, namely, something that makes them feel God's wrath (*Compendium, Concerning the Cross, p 443*). Q831.

Calov: The essence of the cross is not punitive but fatherly affliction or suffering and, with the testing that is joined to it, a confirmation of the Father's love. After the remission of guilt there is no liability to temporal punishment to be suffered by believers. Therefore that doctrine full of [reasons for] doubt, yes, even despair, falls, [namely] that believers are still bound to endure punishment, and that therefore the affliction that comes to them in this world (*hic*) comes from God as an angry judge but not as a kind Father; but the apostle teaches differently (He 12:5f), as does also St. James [1:12], and besides one older than they, the model of true patience, Job (5:17) yes, Christ Himself (Ac 3:19), where we must distinguish between *τιμωρίαν*, punishment, and *δοκιμασίαν*, testing, and chastisement inflicted as a test (Ja 1:12,13; Mt 6:13). The former is sent on account of sin, but the latter only for the testing of faith (1 Pe 1:6,7; Ps 66:10) (*Systema, p 704*).

b) The cross is evidence of God's fatherly love and discipline.

1) Scripture teaches this truth.

Hebrews 12:6-8 The Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son. ⁷ Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? ⁸ If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.

2 Corinthians 1:5 For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.

2) Christians should expect to endure the cross.

1 Peter 4:12 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.

3) This is true even when the cross is the consequence of a weakness or sin of the Christian.

2 Samuel 12:14 But because by doing this you have made the enemies of the LORD show utter contempt, the son born to you will die.

c) It is important to remember that God does not punish Christians for their sins, either in this life or the next.

1) God withholds the blessing of the cross from unbelievers.

Psalm 73:3-12 For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. ⁴ They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. ⁵ They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills. ⁶ Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence. ⁷ From their callous hearts comes iniquity; the evil conceits of their minds know no limits. ⁸ They scoff, and speak with malice; in their arrogance they threaten oppression. ⁹ Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth. ¹⁰ Therefore their people turn to them and drink up waters in abundance. ¹¹ They say, "How can God know? Does the Most High have knowledge?" ¹² This is what the wicked are like—always carefree, they increase in wealth.

2) Since the purpose for the cross may be hidden to the Christian, he may not comprehend the grace, love, and justice of God.

Job 30:21 You turn on me ruthlessly; with the might of your hand you attack me.

Psalm 13:1,2 How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? ² How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?

Psalm 73:13-17 Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence. ¹⁴ All day long I have been plagued; I have been punished every morning. ¹⁵ If I had said, "I will speak thus," I would have betrayed your children. ¹⁶ When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me ¹⁷ till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny.

Lamentations 5:20 Why do you always forget us? Why do you forsake us so long?

3) Weak Christians, who don't understand that God imposes the cross in love, can fall from faith as a result of the cross.

Luke 8:13 Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away.

2 Peter 3:17,18 Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position.¹⁸ But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

4. A proper understanding of the cross can help a Christian grow in his life of sanctification as he ponders on the grace and love of God.

a) Scripture explains the spiritual blessings of the cross.

Acts 14:21-22 They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch,²² strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,” they said.

1 Peter 4:1,2 Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin.² As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.

2 Corinthians 12:7,8,9 To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.⁹ But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.

2 Corinthians 4:11 For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.

Isaiah 26:16 LORD, they came to you in their distress; when you disciplined them, they could barely whisper a prayer.

1 Peter 1:6,7 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.⁷ These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

James 1:12 Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.¹⁷ For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far

outweighs them all. ¹⁸ So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

b) God shows his power and glory as he strengthens us through the cross.

John 9:1-3 As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, “ Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

³ “ Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “ but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.”

1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

c) Therefore the Christian can rejoice in his cross.

Matthew 5:11-12 Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Luke 6:23 Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets.

Acts 5:41 The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.

Acts 16:25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.

Romans 5:3 Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance.

James 1:2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds.

1 Peter 4:13 But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

IX. An important factor in shaping a Christian's life is the constant expectation of the Lord's return in glory.

1. Christians are strangers in this world.

a) Scripture teaches this truth.

1) They are not of this world.

John 17:11,14,16,18 I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one. ¹⁴ I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.

1 Peter 2:11 Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.

Hebrews 13:14 For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.

2) Christians will long for the next world.

-a) Christians may long for the end of their earthly life.

2 Corinthians 5:1-10 Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. ² Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, ³ because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. ⁴ For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵ Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. ⁶ Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. ⁷ We live by faith, not by sight. ⁸ We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹ So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

Philippians 1:21-23 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²² If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! ²³ I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far.

2 Timothy 4:6-8 For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

-b) Christians may long for Christ's second coming.

1 Corinthians 1:7 Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.

Philippians 3:20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Titus 2:13 We wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

b) Because Christians can be distracted by the matters of this life, Scripture reminds them to long for their heavenly home.

1) By nature human beings cling to this earthly life.

Genesis 3:22 And the LORD God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.”

Job 2:4 “Skin for skin!” Satan replied. “A man will give all he has for his own life.”

2) A long life is a blessing of God, yet such a blessing is nothing in comparison to the eternal blessings of heaven.

Ephesians 6:2-3 “Honor your father and mother” —which is the first commandment with a promise—³ “that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.”

1 John 3:2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

1 Corinthians 15:54 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

1 Thessalonians 4:17,18 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.¹⁸ Therefore encourage each other with these words.

2. The expectation of the Lord's coming is a powerful factor in shaping a Christian's life.

Matthew 24:14,42 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.⁴² “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.

Compare Acts 1:11 “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

Matthew 25:13 Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

Romans 8:18,23 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.²³ Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

1 Corinthians 7:31 Those who use the things of the world [should live], as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.

Philippians 4:5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.

Titus 2:12-14 It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

Revelation 3:11 I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.

E. Preservation

I. God preserves the Christian in faith.

1. This preservation is necessary for a Christian to enjoy the blessings of heaven.

a) A Christian can fall from the faith.

1) Scripture teaches this truth.

Matthew 13:20-22 The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy.²¹ But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.²² The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.

Luke 8:13,14 Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away.¹⁴ The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature.

Compare *The Living Bible*: The stony ground represents those who enjoy listening to sermons, but somehow the message never really gets through to them and doesn’t take root and grow. They know the message

is true, and sort of believe for awhile; but when the hot winds of persecution blow, they lose interest.

Note also the comments of William Hendriksen (a Calvinist) regarding this verse: These are the emotional people. They are impulsive. After the sermon they rush toward the preacher to tell him how his message gripped them. How does one know whether marked emotional behavior is the evidence of genuine faith? The answer is, “It is, if it can endure testing.” The people described in Luke 8:13 cannot. In the time of trial they fall away. Of course, such people never really belonged to Christ’s flock. 1 John 2:19 describes their situation exactly, “They left us, but they never really belonged to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have stayed with us” (*Commentary on St. Luke*, p 427, 428, emphasis his).

John 6:66,67 From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. ⁶⁷ “You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the Twelve.

2) **Scripture provides examples of believers who temporarily fell from the faith.**

2 Samuel 11:27 After the time of mourning was over, David had her brought to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing David had done displeased the LORD.

Psalms 32:3-5 When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. ⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. ⁵ Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD” — and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

Matthew 26:33-35 Peter replied, “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.” ³⁴ “I tell you the truth,” Jesus answered, “this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.” ³⁵ But Peter declared, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” And all the other disciples said the same.

3) **Scripture provides examples of believers who permanently fell from the faith.**

1 Samuel 13:1-23 – The example of Saul

1 Samuel 15:35 Until the day Samuel died, he did not go to see Saul again, though Samuel mourned for him. And the LORD was grieved that he had made Saul king over Israel.

1 Samuel 16:1 The LORD said to Samuel, “How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king.”

Acts 1:16-19 Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus—¹⁷ he was one of our number and shared in this ministry.¹⁸ (With the reward he got for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out.¹⁹ Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)

Hebrews 6:4-6 It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit,⁵ who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age,⁶ if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

2 Timothy 1:15 You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes.

2 Timothy 2:17 Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus.

2 Timothy 4:10 Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia.

b) There are many things that can cause a Christian to fall from faith.

1) There are external causes.

-a) Scripture mentions some external causes.

Matthew 10:21,22 Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death.²² All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

Matthew 13:21 But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.

Matthew 13:22 The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.

2 Timothy 4:10 Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica.

Matthew 24:11 Many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.

Matthew 24:12 Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold.

2 Timothy 2:16,17 Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. ¹⁷ Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus.

-b) These external causes appeal to our sinful nature.

Galatians 5:17 For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.

Romans 7:20 Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

2) There are inner causes that can weaken the Christian.

-a) The sinful nature may lead a Christian to be complacent in the faith.

Matthew 24:42 Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.

Mark 13:37 What I say to you, I say to everyone: " Watch!"

1 Thessalonians 5:6 So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled.

1 Peter 5:8 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

Revelation 3:3 Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.

Revelation 16:15 Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed.

James 4:2 You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight.

-b) The sinful nature may lead the Christian to be unfaithful in his prayer life.

Matthew 26:41 Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body (σὰρξ) is weak.

Romans 15:30 I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me.

Ephesians 6:18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

Colossians 4:2 Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.

James 4:2 You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God.

-c) The sinful nature may lead the Christian to be apathetic or hostile toward God's Word.

Matthew 11:16-19 To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others: ¹⁷ "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn." ¹⁸ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon." ¹⁹ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and 'sinners.'" But wisdom is proved right by her actions.

Mark 3:5 He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored.

Acts 7:51 You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!

Acts 28:27 For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.

Amos 8:11,12 "The days are coming," declares the Sovereign LORD, "when I will send a famine through the land—not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD. ¹² Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the LORD, but they will not find it."

-d) The sinful nature may lead the Christian to a false sense of security.

1 Corinthians 4:8 Already you have all you want! Already you

have become rich! You have become kings—and that without us! How I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you!

Philippians 2:12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

Romans 11:20 But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid.

Matthew 26:33-35 Peter replied, “ Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.” ³⁴ “ I tell you the truth,” Jesus answered, “ this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.”

³⁵ But Peter declared, “ Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” And all the other disciples said the same.

c) God encourages Christians to endure.

Matthew 10:22 All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

Matthew 24:13 He who stands firm to the end will be saved.

Romans 11:20 But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid.

1 Corinthians 10:12 So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!

2. Preservation is not something Christians achieve through their own efforts, but a blessing that the Holy Spirit provides.

a) Scripture teaches this truth.

1) God promises to preserve Christians in the faith.

John 10:28-30 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one.

Philippians 1:6 Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Philippians 2:13 It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

1 Thessalonians 5:23,24 May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept

blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.

2 Thessalonians 3:3 But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.

1 Peter 1:5 Through faith [you are] are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

2) God preserves us in the faith through the means of grace.

-a) Scripture teaches this truth.

1 Timothy 4:16 Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

-b) We can see this in the example of the apostles.

1 Peter 5:12 With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it.

2 Peter 3:1,2 Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. ² I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles.

2 John 12 I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete.

-c) The Holy Spirit enables us to remember and understand the truth of God's Word.

John 16:13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

John 14:26 But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

-d) God preserves us in the faith, which he works and strengthens in us through the Word.

1 Peter 1:5 Through faith [you] are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

Romans 10:8,14,17 But what does it say? “The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,” that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: ¹⁴ How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? ¹⁷ Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

Luke 16:31 He said to him, “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.”

b) God protects us against our own sinful nature.

1) Our own sinful nature is our worst enemy.

Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

Galatians 5:17 For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.

Romans 7:21-23 So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. ²² For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; ²³ but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.

2) God is able to protect us from this enemy—the sinful nature.

1 John 3:20 For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

Psalm 51:10 Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Psalm 119:36 Turn my heart toward your statutes and not toward selfish gain.

3) The faithful God controls all temptations.

1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.
Compare James 1:14 Each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.

c) There are two main errors to avoid in the doctrine of preservation.

1) Calvinists deny that a Christian can fall from faith.

Note: The “ P” in the Calvinist TULIP (perseverance) teaches a “ once saved, always saved” theology.

Westminster Confession XVII, I: All those whom God has accepted in his beloved Son, called efficaciously, and sanctified by his Spirit cannot either finally or completely fall from that state of grace, but they will surely remain in it to the very end and be eternally saved.

Reymond: Not to affirm the eternal security of the truly saved, and actually to teach, as do Arminians, that those whom the Father elected, called, and justified, and to whom he also freely gives, along with the gifts of his Son, all things necessary to their salvation, to teach that those for whom the Son paid the penalty of sin by breathing that those whom the Holy Spirit has regenerated and sealed unto the day of redemption can still finally lose their salvation and never be glorified because of some action on their part is truly an ill-advised counsel of despair (*A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, p 794).

Grudem: The perseverance of the saints means that all those who are truly born again will be kept by God’s power and will persevere as Christians until the end of their lives, and that only those who persevere until the end have been truly born again (*Systematic Theology*, p 788).

Erickson: Believers are capable of repudiating their faith, but will freely choose not to (*Christian Theology*, p 1005).

R. C. Sproul: Reformed theology teaches the doctrine of perseverance of the saints. This doctrine is sometimes called “ eternal security.” In essence the doctrine teaches that if you have saving faith you will never lose it, and if you lose it, you never had it (*Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*, p 197).

Smalcald Articles, Part III, III, p 490, 42-44: On the other hand, if certain sectarians would arise, some of whom are perhaps already extant, and in the time of the insurrection of the peasants came to my own view, holding that all those who had once received the Spirit or the forgiveness of sins, or had become believers, even though they should afterwards sin, would still remain in the faith, and such sin would not harm them, and hence crying thus: “ Do whatever you please; if you believe, it all amounts to nothing; faith blots out all sins,” etc.—they say, besides, that if any one sins after he has received faith and the Spirit, he never truly had the Spirit and faith: I have had before me seen and heard many such insane men, and I fear that in some such a devil is still remaining, hiding and dwelling.⁴³ It is, accordingly, necessary to know and to teach that when holy men, still having and feeling original sin, also daily repenting of and striving with it, happen to fall into manifest sins, as David into adultery, murder, and blasphemy, that then faith and the Holy Spirit has departed from them . For the Holy Spirit does not permit sin to have dominion, to gain the upper hand so as to be accomplished, but represses and restrains it so that it must not do what it wishes. But if it does what it wishes, the Holy Spirit and faith are

certainly not present. For St. John says, 1 John 3:9, “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin, ... and he cannot sin.” And yet it is also the truth when the same St. John says, 1:8, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.”

Augsburg Confession XII, p 48, 7: Rejected here are those who teach that persons who have once become godly cannot fall again.

2) Synergists deny *sola gratia* and ascribe perseverance in part to man's own activity.

Daniel Clendenin: Fastings, vigils, prayer, alms, and other good works which are done in the name of Christ are means which help us reach that goal which always remains the same: the reception of the Holy Spirit and the making him our own, that is, theosis (*Eastern Orthodox Theology*, p 190).

Daniel Clendenin: The issue here is not one of virtue but of cooperation. Inasmuch as there is concurrence by our free will, divine grace is able to increase within us (*Eastern Orthodox Theology*, p 191).

J. Rodman Williams: It is particularly significant to note the need for confirming, or making firm one’s “call and election.” This clearly implies that calling and election (the background of calling) do not guarantee continuance; rather, this only occurs through our making this firm and hereby having an abundant entrance into God’s eternal kingdom (*Renewal Theology: Systematic Theology from a Charismatic Perspective*, II, p 125).

II. A Christian may confidently trust in God to preserve him, because God has from eternity elected him to salvation.

1. Scripture proclaims election to comfort and strengthen our faith.

a) Scripture sometimes refers to believers as the elect.

Note: Scripture does not speak of the non-elect. To speak in such terms often leads to a double predestination.

Matthew 24:22,24,31 If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the *elect* those days will be shortened.²⁴ For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the *elect*—if that were possible.³¹ And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his *elect* from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

Luke 18:7 And will not God bring about justice for his *chosen ones*, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off?

Colossians 3:12 Therefore, as God’s *chosen people*, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

2 Timothy 2:10 Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the *elect*, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.

Titus 1:1 Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God's *elect* and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness. . .

1 Peter 1:1,2 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's *elect*, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, ² who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

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.

b) God gave us the doctrine of election for our comfort and encouragement in the faith.

1) The gospel nourishes our faith.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

John 20:31 But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

2) Since the doctrine of election is gospel, it also encourages us in our faith.

Romans 8:18,26,28-30 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ²⁶ In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. ²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

2 Thessalonians 2:10-15 They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. ¹¹ For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie ¹² and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness. ¹³ But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. ¹⁴ He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁵ So then, brothers, stand firm and

hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.

Ephesians 1:3-6 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms (τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις) with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸ that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. ⁹ And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰ to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. ¹¹ In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.

2 Peter 1:10 Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall.

c) The doctrine of election underscores the truth of *sola gratia*.

1) This was true of the election of Israel as God's covenant nation.

Deuteronomy 7:6-8 For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. ⁷ The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. ⁸ But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Deuteronomy 9:4-6 After the LORD your God has driven them out before you, do not say to yourself, "The LORD has brought me here to take possession of this land because of my righteousness." No, it is on account of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is going to drive them out before you. ⁵ It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land; but on account of the wickedness of these nations, the LORD your God will drive them out before you, to accomplish what he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. ⁶ Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people.

2) It is true of our election.

2 Timothy 1:9 [God] has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.

Ephesians 1:5,6 He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

Romans 11:5,6 So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.⁶ And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.

1 Corinthians 1:27,28 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.²⁸ He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are.

1 Corinthians 4:7 For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?

d) The doctrine of election is given for our comfort not our speculation.

Example: Why some and not others?

Luke 13:23-25 Someone asked him, “Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?” He said to them,²⁴ “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.”²⁵ Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, ‘Sir, open the door for us.’ “But he will answer, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from.’”

1) This applies to every gospel statement.

1 Thessalonians 5:1 Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you.

2 Thessalonians 2:1ff Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers....

Matthew 24:36 No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

Compare v 42 Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.

2) In the case of election, speculation will lead either to Calvinism (election and reprobation) or synergism (*intuitu fidei*).

-a) In response to the question, “Why some and not others?” Calvinism answers with God’s sovereignty.

Westminster Confession of Faith, III/i,iii: God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass...and by the decree of God, for the manifestation of his own glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death.

Berkhof : Predestination includes two parts, namely, election and reprobation, the predetermination of both the good and the wicked to their final end, and to certain proximate ends which are instrumental in the realization of their final destiny (*Systematic Theology*, p 113).

Grudem: When we understand election as God's sovereign choice of some persons to be saved, then there is necessarily another aspect of that choice, namely, God's sovereign decision to pass over others and not to save them. This decision of God in eternity past is called reprobation. Reprobation is the sovereign decision of God before creation to pass over some persons, in sorrow deciding not to save them, and to punish them for their sins, and thereby to manifest his justice (*Systematic Theology*, p 684, 685).

-b) In response to the question, “ Why some and not others? Synergism answers with God’s foreknowledge of man’s faith.

H. Orton Wiley: The church is both predestinated and elected, the former referring to the plan of redemption as manifested in the universal call; the latter to the elect or chosen ones who have closed in with the offers of mercy. The elect are chosen, not by absolute decree, but by acceptance of the conditions of the call (*Christian Theology*, p 337, 338).

J. Kenneth Grider: Conditional predestination is the view of Arminius. God does predestinate each individual to an eternal destiny, but it is based on his foreknowledge of their free response to, or rejection of, the gospel (*A Wesleyan-Holiness Theology*, p 248).

Russian Orthodoxy: The Orthodox Church also recognizes predestination, but does not consider it unconditional, that is, independent of men's free will and based on a groundless decision of the divine will. According to Orthodox teaching, God, as omniscient, knows, foresees the moral state of men and, on the basis of this foresight, preordains, predetermines for them a certain fate (*The Teaching on Predestination*, <http://www.stjohndc.org/homilies/9710a.htm>).

2. By election we mean that God determined in eternity to do what he then carried out in time, that is, bringing believers to faith and keeping them in the faith.

a) Scripture teaches this truth.

1) Our personal salvation dates back to eternity.

2 Timothy 1:9,10 He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time,¹⁰ but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

2 Thessalonians 2:13 But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.

Ephesians 1:4 He chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

2) The objects of God's election are people who in time will be brought to faith.

-a) God's providence extends over all people.

Job 14:5 Man's days are determined; you have decreed the number of his months and have set limits he cannot exceed.

Matthew 5:45 He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

-b) God's election extends only over his children.

Matthew 22:14 For many are invited, but few are chosen.

Mark 13:20,22,27 If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them.²² For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect—if that were possible.²⁷ And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

Compare Matthew 24:24 For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible.)

Luke 18:7 And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off?

Romans 8:33 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.

Ephesians 1:4 He chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

Colossians 3:12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

2 Thessalonians 2:13 But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.

Formula of Concord: XI, Ep., p 830, 1-5: 1. To start with, the distinction between the foreknowledge and the eternal election of God is to be diligently noted. 2. God's foreknowledge in nothing else than that God knows all things before they happen, as it is written, "There is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days" (Daniel 2:28). 3. This foreknowledge extends alike over good people and evil people. But it is not a cause of evil or of sin which compels anyone to do something wrong; the original source of this is the devil and man's wicked and perverse will. Neither is it the cause of man's perdition; for this man himself is responsible. God's foreknowledge merely controls the evil and imposes a limit on its duration, so that in spite of its intrinsic wickedness it must minister to the salvation of his elect. 4. Predestination or the eternal election of God, however, is concerned only with the pious children of God in whom he is well pleased. It is a cause of their salvation, for he alone brings it about and ordains everything that belongs to it. Our salvation is so firmly established upon it that the "gates of Hades cannot prevail against" it (John 10:28; Matt. 16:18).

-c) Election does not refer simply to the choice of the means by which God calls people to faith.

-1) The doctrine of election pertains to persons not means.

Colossians 3:12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

-2) The choosing of the means of grace is not "election."

-3) God does call the elect to faith through the means of grace.

2 Thessalonians 2:13 But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.

b) God's motive for choosing us is his pure grace.

1) Scripture teaches this truth.

2 Timothy 1:9 [God] has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.

Ephesians 1:5,6 He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

2) The προγινώσκειν is not merely an intellectual foreknowledge, but an emotional recognition.

-a) This is true concerning election.

Romans 8:14-17,28-29 Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “*Abba, Father.*” ¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. ¹⁷ Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. ²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

1 Peter 1:1,2 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God’s elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, ² who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

1 Peter 1:20 He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.

-b) Foreknowledge denotes intellectual knowledge.

Acts 26:5 They have known me for a long time and can testify, if they are willing, that according to the strictest sect of our religion, I lived as a Pharisee.

2 Peter 3:17 Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position.

-c) Foreknowledge also stresses emotional recognition.

Psalm 1:6 For the LORD *watches over* the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

Amos 3:2 You only have I *chosen* of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins.

Matthew 7:23 Then I will tell them plainly, “ I never *knew* you. Away from me, you evildoers!”

Romans 11:2 God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don’t you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah—how he appealed to God against Israel:

Galatians 4:8,9 Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods.⁹ But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?

Formula of Concord, TD, Article VII, p 1069, 23: In this his eternal counsel, purpose, and ordinance God has not only prepared salvation in general, but he has also graciously considered and elected to salvation each and every individual among the elect who are to be saved through Christ, and also ordained that in the manner just recounted he wills by his grace, gifts, and effective working to bring them to salvation and to help, further, strengthen, and preserve them to this end.

3) God's election rests on the redemptive work of Christ.

Ephesians 1:4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

Romans 8:31-34 What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.³⁴ Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

4) The decree of election includes the means of grace.

2 Thessalonians 2:13 But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you

to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.

1 Peter 1:2 [You] have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

c) Election pertains to all phases of sanctification.

1) Scripture teaches this truth.

Romans 8:28-30 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

Ephesians 1:5 He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.

2 Timothy 1:9 [God] has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.

1 Peter 1:1,2 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, ² who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

2) Those whom God elects, he also brings to faith which is a fruit of election.

Acts 13:48 When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

2 Thessalonians 2:13 But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.

Formula of Concord XI, 8, 23: God's eternal election, however, not only foresees and foreknows the salvation of the elect, but by God's gracious will and pleasure in Christ Jesus it is also a cause which creates, effects, helps, and furthers our salvation and whatever pertains to it. Our salvation is based on it in such a way that "the gates of Hades" are not able to do anything against it (Matt. 16:18), as it is written, "No one

shall snatch my sheep out of my hand” (John 10:28), and again, “As many as were ordained to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48).²³ In this his eternal counsel, purpose, and ordinance God has not only prepared salvation in general, but he has also graciously considered and elected to salvation each and every individual among the elect who are to be saved through Christ, and also ordained that in the manner just recounted he wills by his grace, gifts, and effective working to bring them to salvation and to help, further, strengthen, and preserve them to this end.

3) It is contrary to Scripture to base election on foreseen faith or to restrict election to final glorification.

Hollaz: Predestination is God's eternal decision to confer eternal salvation on each and every man of whom God foresaw that he would believe in Christ to the end (*Examen*, p 604). Caution!

Walther: [The controversy] consists simply in the following twofold question: first, whether God from eternity, before the foundations of the world were laid, out of pure mercy and only for the sake of the most holy merit of Christ, elected and ordained the chosen children of God to salvation and whatever pertains to it...or second, whether in his election God took into consideration anything good in man, namely the foreseen conduct of man, the foreseen non-resistance, and the foreseen persevering faith, and thus elected certain persons to salvation...The first of these questions we affirm, while our opponents deny it, but the second question we deny, while our opponents affirm it (*The Controversy Concerning Predestination*, p 5).

Brief Statement, Paragraph 36: Nor does Holy Scripture know of an election 'by foreseen faith,' 'in view of faith,' as though the faith of the elect were to be placed before their election; but according to Scripture the faith which the elect have in time belongs to the spiritual blessings with which God has endowed them by His eternal election.

3. The doctrine of election serves to reassure us and preserve us in our faith to the end.

a) This is how Scripture uses this doctrine in Romans 8.

Romans 8:28-39 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.³⁴ Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or

sword? ³⁶ As it is written: “ For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

b) Election reminds us that God is in control of our salvation.

1) We did not come to faith by chance.

Ephesians 1:4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

2 Thessalonians 2:13 But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.

2) Our election was a part of God’s saving plan in eternity.

Romans 11:28,29 As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, ²⁹ for God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable.

Numbers 23:19 God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?

Psalms 33:11 But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations.

3) God always accomplishes his plans.

Matthew 24:22,24 If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened. ²⁴ For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible.

Mark 13:22 For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect—if that were possible.

John 10:28,29 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.

Romans 8:28,30 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

Romans 11:2-6 God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah—how he appealed to God against Israel: ³ “ Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me” ? ⁴ And what was God's answer to him? “ I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” ⁵ So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. ⁶ And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.

c) While this doctrine gives genuine gospel comfort, it should not be used to give a false security.

Luke 12:32 Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.

Romans 8:18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

1 Corinthians 7:29-31 What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; ³⁰ those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; ³¹ those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.

2 Peter 1:10 Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall. Compare Philippians 2:12,13 ¹² Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

1 John 2:15-17 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷ The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

4. There is no predestination to damnation as a corollary to the election of grace unto salvation.

a) This is the Calvinistic error (the “U” in the Calvinistic TULIP).

Augustine: All (1 Ti 2:4) stands for “ many,” whom he wants to come to grace. The words are: he wants all people to be saved, as if all are to be understood as predestined, since every kind of people is included (those predestined come from all kinds of people) (*De corrept. et grat.*, 44).

Calvin: God's eternal decree by which He decided in Himself what He wanted to happen to each and every man we call predestination. Eternal life is

foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others.—I confess that it is indeed an awesome decree (*decretum horribile*)(*Institutes*, III, XXIII, VI, p 151).

Westminster Confession, III, 3: God in order to manifest His glory by His decree predestined some men and angels to eternal life, others, however, He foreordained to eternal death ... 7.) The rest of the human race, according to the counsel of His unsearchable will (by which He at will extends or withholds His mercy), God was pleased to pass over to the praise of His supreme power over His creatures. He (was pleased to) appoint them to shame and wrath for their sins to the praise of His glorious righteousness.

Grudem: When we understand election of God's sovereign choice of some persons to be saved, then there is necessarily another aspect of that choice, namely, God's sovereign choice to pass over others and not save them. This decision of God in eternity past is called reprobation. Reprobation is the sovereign decision of God before creation to pass over some persons, in sorrow deciding not to save them, and to punish them for their sins, and thereby manifest his justice (*Systematic Theology*, p 684, 685).

R. C. Sproul: The only way to avoid the doctrine of double predestination is to either affirm that God predestinates everybody to election or that he predestinates no one to either election or reprobation. Since the Bible clearly teaches predestination to election and denies universal salvation, we must conclude that predestination is double. It includes both election and reprobation. Double predestination is unavoidable if we take Scripture seriously (*Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*, p 165).

b) Unbelievers—not God or his decree—are responsible for the fact that they will be eternally lost.

Acts 13:46-48 Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: “ We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷ For this is what the Lord has commanded us: “ ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’” ⁴⁸ When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

Matthew 23:37 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.

2 Peter 2:1 But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves.

c) Predestination to damnation may be a logical conclusion, but it is not a scriptural teaching.

1) God may harden unbelievers who continually reject him and his Word (obduracy). But this is not to be confused with predestination to damnation.

2 Peter 2:7,8 And if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men⁸ (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)

Isaiah 6:9 He said, “Go and tell this people: “‘Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.’”

Matthew 13:10-15 The disciples came to him and asked, “Why do you speak to the people in parables?”¹¹ He replied, “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them.¹² Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.¹³ This is why I speak to them in parables: “Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.¹⁴ In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: “‘You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.¹⁵ For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.’”

2) The statement that some are “fit for destruction” (Ro 9:22) does not mean that some are “predestined for destruction.”

Romans 9:22 What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction (*κατηρτισμένα εις άπώλειαν*)?

-a) Note the meaning of the term “fit” (ripe).

Luke 6:40 A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is *fully* (*κατηρτισμένος*) will be like his teacher.

1 Corinthians 1:10 I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be *perfectly united* (*κατηρτισμέν*) in mind and thought.

2 Timothy 3:17 so that the man of God may be *thoroughly equipped* (*έξήρτισμένος*) for every good work.

-b) God's attitude toward those “fit for destruction” shows wonderful forbearance.

Romans 9:22-24 What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his

wrath—prepared (*κατηρτισμένα*) for destruction?²³ What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance (*προητοίμασεν*) for glory—²⁴ even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

3) The scriptural statement that “God has mercy on whom he will, and hardens whom he will” is directed not against universal grace, but against self-righteousness.

Note the antecedent and consequent will of God. See middler dogmatics notes p 157-158.

Romans 9:8,15-18,30-33 In other words, it is not the natural children who are God’s children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring. . . .¹⁵ For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”¹⁶ It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.¹⁷ For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: “I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.”¹⁸ Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden. . . .³⁰ What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith;³¹ but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it.³² Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the “stumbling stone.”³³ As it is written: “See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble (*λίθον προκόμματος*) and a rock that makes them fall (*πέτραν σκανδάλου*), and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”

Romans 10:3 Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness.

d) Like other doctrines of Scripture, election is a teaching of Scripture we will not fully understand in this life.

1) Scripture reminds us of this truth.

Romans 11:33-36 Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!³⁴ “Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?”³⁵ “Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?”³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

Formula of Concord, TD, XI, p 1078, 52: But a distinction must be observed with special care between that which is expressly revealed concerning it in God's Word, and what is not revealed. For, in addition to what has been revealed in Christ concerning this, of which we have here spoken, God has still kept secret and concealed much concerning this mystery, and reserved it for his wisdom and knowledge alone, which we should not investigate, nor should we indulge our thoughts in this matter, nor draw conclusions, nor inquire curiously, but should adhere entirely to the revealed Word of God. This admonition is most urgently needed.

- 2) **The desire to harmonize this doctrine does not justify the question: "Why some and not others?"**
 - a) **By asking it as one question it presupposes a uniform cause for both.**
 - b) **The question must be divided into two and biblical answer given to each.**

F. Mystic Union

I. The Triune God makes his home in the heart of the believer.

1. The mystic union is more than the essential and operative presence of God in all people (omnipresence).

a) God is present everywhere and sustains all people.

Acts 17:28 For in him we live and move and have our being. As some of your own poets have said, "We are his offspring."

b) God lives in the hearts of believers in a special way.

1) Scripture explains the nature of this mystic union.

1 Corinthians 3:16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?

John 14:23 Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home (*μονήν*) with him."

John 14:2 In my Father's house are many rooms (*μοναί*); if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.

John 17:20-23 My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,²¹ 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.²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one:²³ I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the

world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Quenstedt: The mystic union does not consist in a mere harmony and agreement of feelings, . . . but in a true, real, proper and most intimate union. This mystic union does not consist only in the gracious working of the Holy Spirit in believers. Nor does this union consist in a (*μετουσία*) or a transubstantiation or conversion of our substance into the substance of God and Christ or vice versa. Nor does it consist in *συνουσία* or a consubstantiation, so that out of two united essences one essence is made (*TDP*, sect. II, p 623).

Luther: The true Spirit therefore lives in believers not by means of his gifts, but by what he is (i.e. he dwells personally in us) (*Erlanger Auslegung des 51 Psalms*, p 109).

Quenstedt: It does not follow that wherever God is already present according to his substance, there he cannot according to his substance come closer in another way. Only this follows that God cannot come closer in that way in which he is already there. That, however the divine essence, insofar as it is an essence, can allow for such a way of coming closer without danger of giving up its boundlessness that unique way in which it is present in Christ demonstrates. There the divine nature is united with the finite human nature in such a way that in this particular way he is not, nor does he want to be, anywhere else. This presence is certainly not defined as a new way of working in us, but as the intimate indwelling of a spaceless substance in another substance bound by space and time. Granted that this presence is uniquely unique, nevertheless it can not be denied, that from the personal union we can draw the conclusion that such a drawing near is not absolutely in conflict with the divine essence (*TDP*, I, 3, p 629).

- 2) **The mystic union should not be equated with other unions.**
- a) **It should not be compared to the hypostatic union of the two natures in Christ.**
 - b) **It should not be compared to the sacramental union of the elements in Eucharist.**
 - c) **It should not be compared to pantheism or Eastern Orthodox mysticism.**

Luther: Dionysius with his mystic theology and others who followed him have given opportunities for speculations about [God's] bare majesty. They wrote many things about “spiritual marriage,” in which they portrayed God as the bridegroom, the soul as the bride. And so they taught that men can, without means, come into contact with and deal with the unsearchable and eternal majesty of God in this mortal life and in this corrupt nature and flesh. And certainly this doctrine of theirs has been accepted as high and divine. I myself once dabbled in it with great damage to

myself. I exhort you to detest as a pestilential thing this mystic theology of Dionysius and other similar books containing such nonsense. I am afraid that together with him fanatics of the future, who will again bring such monstrosities into the church, will also through this obscure the sound doctrine and destroy it completely (In Loescher, *Timotheus Verinus*, Part 3, p 31).

2. The Holy Spirit forms the mystic union through the means of grace.

a) Scripture teaches this truth.

John 14:26 But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

Compare verse 23 Jesus replied, “ If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”

Ephesians 3:16,17 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

b) The Holy Spirit forms the mystic union at conversion.

Quenstedt: The moment when this union begins is completely identical with the moment of regeneration, justification, and renewal. For these deeds all occur together in an instant. In the Notes he adds the necessary comment: According to our way of thinking regeneration and justification are [logically though not chronologically] prior to the mystic union (*TDP*, sect. 1, thes. XVI, p 621).

Note: The mystic union is the result of justification and not the cause of it.

II. God uses the mystic union to encourage the believer.

1. God uses the mystic union to comfort the believer.

Psalm 46:5 God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day.

Matthew 10:19,20 But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, ²⁰ for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

Romans 8:9-11,16,26,35 You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. ¹¹ And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. ¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. ²⁶ In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that

words cannot express.³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

John 6:54-56 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.⁵⁵ For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.

John 15:7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.

Calov: The purpose is that he might fill us with the fullness of grace and preserve us until we come to the fullness of glory. On this he comments in the Notes: For here, in the kingdom of grace, we receive blessings of every kind, yes, we are even made partakers of the divine nature (2 Pe 1:4). All these things we will receive in fuller measure when we obtain the end of our faith (1 Pe 1:9). And we will be like God (1 Jn 3:2) who will be all in all for us (1 Cor 15:28). Therefore he fills us with his grace, that we might above all be more and more strengthened in faith and sealed with the Holy Spirit for the glory of the heavenly inheritance (2 Cor 1:22; 1 Pe 1:3-4), that our joy may be full (1 Jn 1:4) (*Systema*, cap. VIII, thes. V, p 505).

Balthazar Mentzer (d. 1627): What then? I cannot express it, but I firmly believe that this indwelling of Christ in us by which we are made one body with him is such a real bond and union and connection that nothing in this life can exist or be imagined which is sweeter, more pleasant, more filled with comfort than this (*Brevis consideratio*, cap. 2, qu. 2).

2. God uses the mystic union to give the believer the strength to do good works.

John 15:4,5 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

1 Corinthians 6:15-17 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never!¹⁶ Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.”¹⁷ But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit.

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

2 Peter 1:4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

3. God uses the mystic union to warn the believer not to sin.

1 Corinthians 6:18-20 Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.¹⁹ Do you

not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

4. God uses the mystic union to stress the close relationship that exists between the believer and his God.

John 15:4,5 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Matthew 25:40 The King will reply, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.”

Acts 9:4,5 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” ⁵ “Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked. “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied.

1 Corinthians 3:17 If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him; for God’s temple is sacred, and you are that temple.

III. The mystic union is the result not the cause of justification. We are justified by Christ outside of us, not by Christ living in us.

Luther: [A Christian] is righteous and holy by an alien or foreign holiness—I call it this for sake of instruction—that is, he is righteous by the mercy and grace of God. This mercy and grace is not something human; it is not some disposition or quality of the heart. It is a divine blessing given us through the true knowledge of the gospel, when we know and believe that our sin has been forgiven through the grace and merit of Christ.... Is not this righteousness an alien righteousness? It consists completely in the indulgence of another and is a pure gift of God who shows mercy and favor for Christ's sake.... Therefore a Christian is not essentially righteous; he is not righteous according to quality or substance (*Exposition of Ps 51:2* (1532) WA 40 II, 352f.).

Formula of Concord, III, TD, p 932, 54: We must also explain correctly the discussion concerning the indwelling of God’s essential righteousness in us. On the one hand, it is true indeed that God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who is the eternal and essential righteousness, dwells by faith in the elect who have been justified through Christ and reconciled with God, since all Christians are temples of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who impels them to do rightly. But, on the other hand, this indwelling of God is not the righteousness of faith of which St. Paul speaks and which he calls the righteousness of God, on account of which we are declared just before God. This indwelling follows the preceding righteousness of faith, which is precisely the forgiveness of sins and the gracious acceptance of poor sinners on account of the obedience and merit of Christ alone.

Formula of Concord, Ep., p 794, 16,18: We reject: 4. That faith does not look alone to Christ's obedience, but also to his divine nature in so far as it dwells and works within us, and that by such indwelling our sins are covered up. 6. That not God himself but only divine gifts dwell in believers.

On the contrary view of Osiander see the Introduction to the Triglotta, p 153-157.

Osiander: Whoever hears, retains, and believes the Word, receives God himself, for God is the Word. If, therefore, the Word of God, Christ our Lord, dwells in us by faith and we are one with Him, we may say with Paul: 'I live, though not I, but Christ lives in me,' and then we are justified by faith (*A Good Instruction*).

Osiander: The one and only righteousness availing before God is God Himself. But Christ is the Word which we apprehend by faith, and thus Christ in us, God himself, is our righteousness which avails before God....The gospel has two parts; the first, that Christ has satisfied the justice of God; the other, that he has cleansed us from sin and justifies us by dwelling in us (*Action of the Honorable Wise Council in Nürnberg with Their Preachers*).

Council of Trent, Session VI, Chapter VII: The single essential cause [of justification] is the righteousness of God, not that by which he is himself righteous, but that by which he makes us righteous, or that by which we, being endowed by him, are renewed in the spirit of our mind, and are not only reputed to be, but are truly called and are righteous, receiving the righteousness in us, everyone his own, according to the measure which the Holy Spirit imparts to each one as he wills and according to each one's disposition and cooperation.

Canon XI: If anyone says that a man is justified either solely by the crediting of Christ's righteousness or solely by the forgiveness of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and charity which is poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit and stays with them, or also that the grace by which we are justified is only the favor of God, let him be damned (anathema).

4. The Church

I. Scripture states that Christians form a body.

1. They are united by their faith in Christ which is worked in them through the means of grace.

a) The means of grace convert each person individually.

Luke 3:7-14 John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?"⁸ Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.⁹ The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."

¹⁰ "What should we do then?" the crowd asked. ¹¹ John answered, "The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same." ¹² Tax collectors also came to be baptized. "

Teacher,” they asked, “ what should we do?” ¹³ “ Don’t collect any more than you are required to,” he told them. ¹⁴ Then some soldiers asked him, “ And what should we do?” He replied, “ Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely—be content with your pay.”

Acts 2:47 And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Note: There never is a mass conversion, though many conversions may take place simultaneously as the following passages illustrate.

Jonah 3:5 The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

Acts 2:41 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

b) The means of grace join believers into a communion of believers.

Ephesians 4:4-6 There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called— ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

1 Corinthians 12:13 For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body— whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

1 Corinthians 10:17 Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.

1 Corinthians 11:26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

1 Corinthians 11:20-22 When you come together, it is not the Lord’s Supper you eat, ²¹ for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. ²² Don’t you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not!

2. Scripture calls the body of believers the church.

a) Etymologically *ἐκκλησία*, from *ἐκ-καλεῖν*, means to “ call out.” In secular usage it refers to a meeting of citizens called together by a herald.

Acts 19:32,39,41 The assembly was in confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there. ³⁹ If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly. ⁴¹ After he had said this, he dismissed the assembly.

1 Corinthians 11:18 In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it.

1 Corinthians 14:19 But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.

b) This term is sometimes applied to the assembly of Israel.

1) The Septuagint gives us some examples of this.

Psalm 22:22 I will declare your name to my brothers; in the *congregation* I will praise you.

2) The New Testament gives us some examples of this.

Acts 7:38 He was in the *assembly* in the desert, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers; and he received living words to pass on to us.

Hebrews 2:12 He says, “I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the *congregation* I will sing your praises.”

3) In Jewish usage it was gradually replaced by the term συναγωγή as a name for the congregation.

Acts 13:43 When the *congregation* was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.

Matthew 4:23 Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their *synagogues*, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. Etc.

c) The term ἐκκλησία was retained by the Christian church both for the church as a whole and also for local churches.

Matthew 16:18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

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.

Ephesians 1:22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church.

1 Corinthians 1:2 To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours:

1 Thessalonians 1:1 To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you.

3. Scripture uses the following figurative names for the church.

- **Body of Christ**

Ephesians 1:22,23 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church,²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Ephesians 2:16 And in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

Ephesians 4:12,16 [Pastors and teachers] prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.¹⁶ From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Ephesians 5:23 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.

Colossians 1:18,24 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.²⁴ Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.

Colossians 2:19 He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

Colossians 3:15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

Romans 12:4,5 Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function,⁵ so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

1 Corinthians 12:12,13,27 The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ.¹³ For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

1 Corinthians 10:17 Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.

Apology, VII, p 226, 5,6,12: Namely, where God's Word is pure, and the sacraments are administered in conformity with the same, there certainly is the church, and there are Christians. And this church alone is called the body of Christ, which Christ renews. Christ is its Head and sanctifies and governs by his Spirit, as Paul testifies, Eph. 1:22 sq., when he says: And gave him to be the Head over all things to the church, which is his body,⁶ the fulness of him that fills all in all. Wherefore, those in whom Christ does not act through his Spirit

are not the members of Christ. This, too, the adversaries acknowledge, namely, that the wicked are dead members of the church. Therefore we wonder why they have found fault with our description our conclusion concerning the church. ¹²Although, therefore, hypocrites and wicked men are members of this true church according to outward rites, yet when the church is defined, it is necessary to define that which is the living body of Christ, and which is in name and in fact the church which is called the body of Christ, and has fellowship not alone in outward signs, but has gifts in the heart, namely, the Holy Spirit and faith.

- **God's Household**

1 Timothy 3:15 If I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household (ἐν οἴκῳ θεοῦ), which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.

- **Spiritual House**

1 Peter 2:5 You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house (οἶκος πνευματικὸς) to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

- **Sanctuary - House**

Ezekiel 9:6 Slaughter old men, young men and maidens, women and children, but do not touch anyone who has the mark. Begin at my sanctuary (וּבְמִקְדָּשִׁי). So they began with the elders who were in front of the temple (הַבַּיִת).

- **God's Field – God's Building**

1 Corinthians 3:9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field (θεοῦ γεώργιον), God's building (θεοῦ οἰκοδομή).

- **God's Temple**

1 Corinthians 3:16,17 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple (ναὸς θεοῦ) and that God's Spirit lives in you? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God's Temple (τὸν ναὸν τοῦ θεοῦ), God will destroy him; for God's temple (ναὸς τοῦ θεοῦ) is sacred, and you are that temple.

- **City of God**

Psalms 46:4 There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God (עִיר־אֱלֹהִים), the holy place where the Most High dwells.

- **City with foundations**

Hebrews 11:10 For he was looking forward to the city with foundations (τὴν τοῦς θεμελίους ἔχουσαν πόλιν), whose architect and builder is God.

- **Mount Zion**

Psalm 48:1,2 Great is the LORD, and most worthy of praise, in the city of our God, his holy mountain. ² It is beautiful in its loftiness, the joy of the whole earth. Like the utmost heights of Zaphon is Mount Zion, the city of the Great King.

- **Jerusalem that is above**

Galatians 4:26 But the Jerusalem that is above (ἄνω Ἱερουσαλήμ) is free, and she is our mother.

- **Sheep Pen - Flock**

John 10:16 I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen (τῆς ἀυλῆς ταύτης). I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock (μία ποίμνη) and one shepherd.

- **The Bride of Christ**

John 3:29 The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete.

Revelation 21:9 One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."

2 Corinthians 11:2,3 I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. ³ But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

Psalm 45

- **Mother**

Galatians 4:26 But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother.

Large Catechism, p 688, 42: For, in the first place, he has a peculiar congregation in the world, which is the mother that begets and bears every Christian through the Word of God, which he reveals and preaches, and through which he illumines and enkindles hearts, that they understand, accept it, cling to it, and persevere in it.

4. The term βασιλεία (kingdom of God, of Christ, of heaven) is also used to refer to God's church and its activity.

a) βασιλεία may refer to a realm or kingdom.

John 18:36 Jesus said, “ My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.”

Matthew 4:8 The devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor.

Luke 11:18 If Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand? I say this because you claim that I drive out demons by Beelzebub.

b) Usually βασιλεία refers to a reign or activity (kingship).

1 Corinthians 4:20 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.

Romans 14:17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Large Catechism, p 710, 51,53: But what is the kingdom of God? Answer: Nothing else than what we learned in the Creed, that God sent his Son Jesus Christ, our Lord, into the world to redeem and deliver us from the power of the devil, and to bring us to himself, and to govern us as a King of righteousness, life, and salvation against sin, death, and an evil conscience, for which end he has also bestowed his Holy Spirit, who is to bring these things home to us by his holy Word, and to illumine and strengthen us in the faith by His power. . . . ^{53]} For *the coming of God's Kingdom to us* occurs in two ways; first, here in time through the Word and faith; and secondly, in eternity forever through revelation. Now we pray for both these things, that it may come to those who are not yet in it, and, by daily increase, to us who have received the same, and hereafter in eternal life.

c) βασιλεία is described as a place one may enter.

Matthew 5:20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 18:3 And he said: “ I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew 19:23 Then Jesus said to his disciples, “ I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew 8:11 I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.

Luke 13:28,29 There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. ²⁹ People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God.

Luke 14:15 When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, “ Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.”

John 3:5 Jesus answered, “ I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.”

Acts 14:22 We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.

2 Timothy 4:18 The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

d) βασιλεία is described as a possession one may have.

Matthew 5:3 Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 19:14 Jesus said, “ Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”

Mark 10:14,15 When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “ Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. ¹⁵ I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”

1 Corinthians 6:9 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders

e) In the history of the church as well as in the Lutheran confessions, the term “ kingdom” is often used as a synonym for the church.

Apology, VII, VIII, p 230, 16: Therefore, only those are the people, according to the gospel, who receive this promise of the Spirit. Besides, the church is the kingdom of Christ, distinguished from the kingdom of the devil. . . .

Therefore, the church, which is truly the kingdom of Christ, is properly the congregation of saints. For the wicked are ruled by the devil, and are captives of the devil; they are not ruled by the Spirit of Christ.

5. The church has definite boundaries.

a) It consists of all true believers.

Matthew 16:18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

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.”

John 10:14-16,27-29 I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.¹⁶ I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.

b) Yet this does not mean that the boundaries of the church can be clearly seen.

Luke 17:20,21 Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation,²¹ nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you.”

1) Only God knows with certainty the members of the church.

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.”

2) Its presence is recognized by the marks of the church, that is, the means of grace.

Matthew 28:19,20 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

II. The church is the “communion of saints.”

1. Jesus twice used the term church to denote the communion or fellowship of saints.

a) The first time he refers to the church as a whole: Mt 16:15–20.

Matthew 16:15-20 “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

¹⁷ Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.¹⁸ And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”²⁰ Then he warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.

Note: The “ rock” (πέτρα) in this section is not Peter (πέτρος) but the confession that Peter has made, that Jesus is “ the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

b) The second time he speaks of the functioning of the church on a local level: Matthew 18:15-20.

Matthew 18:15-20 “ 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. ¹⁶ 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.’ 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. ¹⁸ “ I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ “ Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”

Compare John 20:22,23 And with that he breathed on them and said, “ Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

Note: In this section Jesus is pointing out that in their love for souls, the members of the communion of saints (church) will go to all possible means to win back a straying brother.

2. As the term ἐκκλησία indicates, the church is an assembly.

a) It is an assembly of people who share a common faith.

Ephesians 4:3-6 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called— ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

1) All members acknowledge that they are sinful and cannot save themselves but that they are saved through the redemptive work of Christ.

Romans 3:23,24 All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

2) In every case this faith is produced by the means of grace.

Romans 10:17 Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

1 Corinthians 10:17 Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.

1 Corinthians 12:13 For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

3) All Christians have a common interest in the Lord's work.

Acts 2:42-47 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

b) Our confessions testify to these truths about the church.

Augsburg Confession, VII, p 46, 1 : Also they teach that one holy church is to continue forever. The church is the congregation of saints, in which the gospel is rightly taught and the sacraments are rightly administered.

Augsburg Confession VIII, p 46, 1: Although the church properly is the congregation of saints and true believers, nevertheless, since in this life many hypocrites and evil persons are mingled therewith, it is lawful (Latin: *licet*, allowed, valid; German: *gleichwohl kräftig*, still effective) to use sacraments administered by evil men, according to the saying of Christ: "The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses seat."

Apology, VII, VIII, p 228, 8, 28: The wicked indeed are not a holy church. And that which follows, namely, *the communion of saints*, seems to be added in order to explain what the church signifies, namely, the congregation of saints, who have with each other the fellowship of the same gospel or doctrine and of the same Holy Spirit, who renews, sanctifies, and governs their hearts. ²⁸¹ Wherefore we hold, according to the Scriptures, that the church, properly so called, is the congregation of saints, who truly believe the gospel of Christ, and have the Holy Spirit. And yet we confess that in this life many hypocrites and wicked men, mingled with these, have the fellowship of outward signs, who are members of the church according to this fellowship of outward signs, and accordingly bear offices in the church [preach, administer the Sacraments, and bear the title and name of Christians]. Neither does the fact that the sacraments are administered by the unworthy detract from their efficacy, because, on account of the call of the church, they represent the person of Christ, and do not represent their own persons, as Christ testifies, Luke 10:16: He that hears you hears me [Thus even Judas was sent to preach.] When they offer the Word of God, when they offer the sacraments, they offer them in the stead and place of Christ. Those words of Christ teach us not to be offended by the unworthiness of the ministers.

Large Catechism, 688, 47: The Creed denominates the holy Christian church, *communio sanctorum*, a communion of saints; for both expressions, taken together, are identical.

3. A person becomes a member of this church through faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ.

a) Saving faith is more than a mere knowledge about the history of Jesus Christ. The church is not a historical society.

James 2:19 You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

b) Saving faith is more than acknowledging that Christ is a wise teacher and a positive example for a moral life. The church is not a self-help organization for moral improvement.

Romans 3:25 God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished.

John 3:2 He came to Jesus at night and said, “ Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

Colossians 2:20,21 Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: ²¹ “ Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!” [?]

c) Saving faith is more than expecting temporal blessings from Jesus. The church is not a mutual insurance company. Example: theology of glory.

John 6:15 Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

d) Saving faith is a trust in the atoning work of Jesus Christ for forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Romans 4:5 However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.

1 Thessalonians 4:14 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.

4. Only those who have this faith are members of the church, the communion of saints.

Acts 16:31 They replied, “ Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.”

Galatians 3:26-29 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.

a) The comforting names given to the church apply to Christians.

1 Timothy 3:15 If I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.

1 Corinthians 3:16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?

1 Corinthians 6:19 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own.

Galatians 3:26 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

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.

b) These comforting names do not apply to unbelievers who because of their lack of faith in Christ are excluded from membership in Christ's church.

Note: Pluralism, inclusivism, and universalism would include unbelievers in God's "church."

c) Membership in a visible church or organization does not make one a member in the communion of saints.

1) A person may be a prominent member of the organization and yet not a member of the church.

Matthew 7:21-23 Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?" ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!"

Matthew 25:1-12 At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. ² Five of them were foolish and five were wise. ³ The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. ⁴ The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. ⁵ The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. ⁶ At midnight the cry rang out: "Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!" ⁷ Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ The foolish ones said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out." ⁹ "No," they replied, "there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves." ¹⁰ But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door

was shut. ¹¹ Later the others also came. “ Sir! Sir!” they said. “ Open the door for us!” But he replied, “ I tell you the truth, I don’t know you.”

2) A person may be excluded from a visible church or organization, and yet be in good standing in the church.

John 9:34 To this they replied, “ You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!” And they threw him out.

John 16:2,3 They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God. ³They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me.

3) Membership in the church does not presuppose a perfect knowledge or understanding.

-a) The understanding of even the more mature members will remain imperfect.

1 Corinthians 13:9-12 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. ¹¹ When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. ¹² Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

-b) Because of a weakness of faith, the understanding of some members may even be contain ignorance, doubt, and confusion about some teachings of Scripture.

Acts 1:6 So when they met together, they asked him, “ Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

Romans 14:1-3 Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. ² One man’s faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. ³ The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him.

1 Corinthians 8:7 But not everyone knows this. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled.

Hebrews 5:11,12 We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. 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!

-c) When one holds to an error against conscience and against clear testimony, this destroys faith and such a person forfeits membership in the church.

Titus 3:10,11 Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. ¹¹ You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.

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! ⁹ 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!

-d) A Christian will never attain perfection (entire sanctification) in this life.

Psalm 19:12 Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults.

Romans 7:18 I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.

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.

-e) Yet a Christian still strive to grow in his Christian faith as well as his understanding of God's Word, recognizing that a lack of sanctification can destroy faith.

Romans 3:8 Why not say—as we are being slanderously reported as saying and as some claim that we say—” Let us do evil that good may result” ? Their condemnation is deserved.

Romans 6:1,2 What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ² By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?

5. These truths are denied by Roman Catholic theology which teaches that the one true church is a visible body under a visible head.

Vatican I, Session IV, Ch. 3: We teach that the Roman Church has obtained preeminence above all others so that, when the unity with the Roman pope both in fellowship and in the profession of the same faith is preserved, the church of Christ may be one flock under one supreme shepherd.

Bellarmino: The church is a gathering of people which is just as visible and tangible as the assembly of the people of Rome, or the Kingdom of France, or the Republic of Venice. However, all the rest are included even if they are reprobate, criminals,

and ungodly (*Disputations*, Vol. 11, Book 11, Concerning the Church Militant, Chapter ii, 5,6, p 64).

Quenstedt: To the extent that anyone belongs to the outward congregation of some particular church, to that extent he also confesses the public confessions of that church and is joined with the rest; but to the extent that he belongs to the universal (invisible) church, to that extent he is through spiritual bonds, namely, faith and love, in fellowship both with the head, which is Christ, and with the rest of the pious. If there is no fellowship except between those associates who can recognize one another by external and visible signs, then all fellowship between Christ and the universal church and its members will be denied, since Christ is not seen with physical eyes in this life (*TDP*, Part IV, ch, XV, II, II, p 496).

Vatican II: Christ, the one Mediator, established and ceaselessly sustains here on earth His holy church, the community of faith, hope, and charity, as a visible structure.... But the society furnished with hierarchical agencies and the Mystical Body of Christ are not to be considered as two realities.... Rather, they form one interlocked reality which is comprised of a divine and human element (*Doc.*, p 22).

Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 816: The sole Church of Christ is that which our Savior, after his resurrection, entrusted to Peter's pastoral care, commissioning him and the other apostle to extend and rule it. . . . This Church, constituted and organized as a society in the present world, subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 838: The Church knows that she is joined in many ways to the baptized who are honored by the name of Christian, but do not profess the Catholic faith in its entirety or have not preserved unity or communion under the successor of Peter. Those who believe in Christ and have been properly baptized are put in a certain, although imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church.

III. The presence of the church becomes evident by the confession of its members.

1. The church is invisible.

a) Scripture teaches this truth.

1) We believe in the church because of Christ's promise.

Matthew 16:18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

2) Christ, the head of the church, is invisible to us now.

Acts 1:9,11 After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. ¹¹ "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

1 Peter 1:8 Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.

3) Faith, which makes someone a member of the church, is invisible, since it is an attitude of the heart.

Romans 2:29 No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God.

Romans 10:9,10 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.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 Corinthians 4:5 Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

Colossians 3:3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

4) God alone, who reads the heart, knows the members of his church.

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."

John 10:14 I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me.

Matthew 7:23 Then I will tell them plainly, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!"

Matthew 25:12 But he replied, "I tell you the truth, I don't know you."

5) Some people, including some Christians, may be deceived about the presence of the church.

Luke 17:20,21 Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation,²¹ nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you."

1 Kings 19:14,18 Elijah replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken

down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.”

¹⁸ “ Yet I [Lord] reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him.”

b) Even though we cannot see the church we can see evidence of its presence.

1) Jesus speaks of the church as a discernible body, which may admonish sinners and administer the keys, and to which people may appeal.

Matthew 16:18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

Matthew 18:17-20 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. ¹⁸ “ I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”

2) In his letters, Paul addresses groups of people as churches.

1 Corinthians 1:2 To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours.

2 Corinthians 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God in Corinth, together with all the saints throughout Achaia.

Galatians 1:2 To the churches in Galatia.

1 Thessalonians 1:1 Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you.

Romans 1:7 To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus:

Philippians 1:1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:

Colossians 1:2 To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse:
Grace and peace to you from God our Father.

3) At times the growth of the church is registered in numbers.

Acts 2:41 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

Acts 4:4 But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand.

4) We can note two things in these examples.

-a) All of these passages speak of groups of believers as churches. Though not the church universal, they are evidence of its existence.

-b) These bodies were discernible as churches to human beings.

2. The church becomes discernible by its use of the means of grace, the marks of the church (*notae ecclesiae*).

a) By his very nature, every believer confesses Christ as Savior.

1) Scripture teaches this truth.

Matthew 12:34 For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.

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

Romans 10:9,10 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 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.

Luther: On account of its confession the congregation of the church is visible (Weimar, 39/2, p 161).

2) Scripture also provides exceptions to this rule.

John 19:38 Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away.

b) The church is created and maintained through the means of grace.

Matthew 28:19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

John 8:31 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “ If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.”

Romans 10:14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?

2 Corinthians 4:5,6 For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. ⁶ For God, who said, “ Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Titus 3:5 He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

1 Peter 1:23 For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

Isaiah 55:10,11 As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, ¹¹ so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

Apology, Article VII, p 226, 5: The Christian church consists not alone in fellowship of outward signs, but it consists especially in inward communion of eternal blessings in the heart, as of the Holy Spirit, of faith, of the fear and love of God; which fellowship nevertheless has outward marks so that it can be recognized, namely, the pure doctrine of the gospel, and the administration of the Sacraments in accordance with the gospel of Christ. Namely, where God’s Word is pure, and the sacraments are administered in conformity with the same, there certainly is the church, and there are Christians.

c) Whoever adheres to the means of grace must be considered a member of the church.

1) According to the dictates of Christian love we must accept every confession as sincere (though some may not be).

1 Corinthians 13:4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

1 Timothy 6:5 [There will be] constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.

2 Timothy 3:1-5 But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. ² People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, ⁴ treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than

lovers of God—⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.

2) A person may be induced to “confess” by causes other than faith.

Psalm 7:9 O righteous God, who searches minds and hearts, bring to an end the violence of the wicked and make the righteous secure.

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.”

3) Exposing such hypocrisy is not our responsibility but that of God.

Cf. Ananias and Sapphira

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 5:13 God will judge those outside. Expel the wicked man from among you.

4) Should the insincere confession of a hypocrite be revealed, that person ceases to be a hypocrite and must be put out of the fellowship of confessors as a public unbeliever.

Philippians 1:6,7 [I am] confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.⁷ It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God’s grace with me.

3. Note the following terms that are used by Lutheran dogmaticians.

a) Recognizing that Scripture uses the term “church” in various ways, they make the following distinctions.

1) They speak about the church in a strict sense, that is, the assembly of the saints (*ecclesia stricte dicta—congregatio sanctorum*).

2) They speak about the church in a loose sense, that is, the visible assembly of the called (*ecclesia late dicta—coetus visibilis vocatorum*).

Apology, VII, VIII, p 234, 28: Wherefore we hold, according to the Scriptures, that the church, properly so called, is the congregation of saints, who truly believe the gospel of Christ, and have the Holy Spirit.

And yet we confess that in this life many hypocrites and wicked men, mingled with these, have the fellowship of outward signs, who are members of the church according to this fellowship of outward signs, and accordingly bear offices in the church. Neither does the fact that the sacraments are administered by the unworthy detract from their efficacy, because, on account of the call of the church, they represent the person of Christ, and do not represent their own persons, as Christ testifies, Luke 10:16: He that hears you hears me. [Thus even Judas was sent to preach.] When they offer the Word of God, when they offer the sacraments, they offer them in the stead and place of Christ. Those words of Christ teach us not to be offended by the unworthiness of the ministers.

b) These are not to be considered as two different churches but one church viewed from two perspectives.

Hebrews 12:22-24 But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly,²³ to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect,²⁴ to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Ephesians 1:22,23 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church,²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Quenstedt: We do not hold that there are two churches, one true, real, and internal, the other only nominal and external. But we say that one and the same church is looked at from two points of view, namely, from the inside and from the outside, or in view of the call and external fellowship, which consists in the profession of faith and the use of the sacraments, and in view of inward regeneration and internal (spiritual) fellowship, which consists of the bond of the Spirit. We concede that in the former way also hypocrites and unbelievers belong to the church, but in the latter way of looking at the matter (hendiadys) we hold that only those who truly believe and are sanctified belong to it (*Systema*, VI, p 488).

4. Roman Catholics claim that the one true church is united under the Roman pontiff.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 816: The sole Church of Christ is that which our Savior, after his Resurrection, entrusted to Peter's pastoral care, commissioning him and the other apostles to extend and rule it. This Church, constituted and organized as a society in the present world, subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him.

IV. Scripture teaches that there is one holy, Christian, and apostolic church.

1. The church is one.

Galatians 3:10,28 All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.”²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

a) This unity is a matter of faith.

Ephesians 4:3-6 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.⁴ There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism;⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

b) It is the means of grace that bring about this unity.

Augsburg Confession, VII, p 47, 2-4: And to the true unity of the church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the gospel and³¹ the administration of the sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike.⁴¹ As Paul says: One faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, etc. Eph. 4, 5, 6.

Apology, VII, p 236, 30, 31: The adversaries condemn also the part of the Seventh Article in which we said that “to the unity of the church it is sufficient to agree concerning the doctrine of the gospel and the administration of the Sacraments; nor is it necessary that human traditions, rites, or ceremonies instituted by men should be alike everywhere.” Here they distinguish between *universal* and *particular* rites, and approve our article if it be understood concerning particular rites; they do not receive it concerning universal rites. (That is a fine, clumsy distinction!)³¹¹ We do not sufficiently understand what the adversaries mean. We are speaking of true, *i.e.*, of spiritual unity we say that those are one harmonious church who believe in one Christ; who have one gospel, one Spirit, one faith, the same Sacraments; and we are speaking, therefore, of spiritual unity, without which faith in the heart, or righteousness of heart before God, cannot exist.

Formula of Concord, Ep., X, p 830, 7: We believe, teach, and confess also that no church should condemn another because one has less or more external ceremonies not commanded by God than the other, if otherwise there is agreement among them in doctrine and all its articles, as also in the right use of the holy sacraments, according to the well-known saying: *Dissonantia ieiunii non dissolvit consonantiam fidei*, Disagreement in fasting does not destroy agreement in faith.

2. Scripture teaches that the church is holy.

a) The church is holy because it has forgiveness of sins through Christ.

Ephesians 5:25-27 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word,²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

Philippians 3:9 And be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

b) This holiness is not something that can be seen.

Smalcald Articles, XII, p 498, 1-3: We do not concede to them that they are the church, and in truth they are not the church; nor will we listen to those things which, under the name of church, they enjoin or forbid.²¹ For, thank God, today a child seven years old knows what the church is, namely, the holy believers and lambs who hear the voice of their Shepherd. For the children pray thus: I believe in one holy [catholic or] Christian church.³¹ This holiness does not consist in albs, tonsures, long gowns, and other of their ceremonies devised by them beyond Holy Scripture, but in the Word of God and true faith.

3. Scripture teaches that the church is universal (catholic).

John 10:16 I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.

Acts 10:34,43 Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism.”⁴³ “All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

Romans 3:21-24 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.²² This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference,²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:6-9,28,29 Consider Abraham: “He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”⁷ Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham.⁸ The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.”⁹ So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.²⁹ If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Revelation 7:9 After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.

a) There are two stages in the development of the church.

1) We speak of the church militant.

Ephesians 6:10-17 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.¹¹ Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and

blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

1 Peter 5:8,9 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

1 John 5:4 For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.

Romans 7:14,15 We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. ¹⁵ I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.

Galatians 5:17 For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.

2) We speak of the church triumphant.

Revelation 2:10 Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Revelation 4:4 Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads.

2 Timothy 4:7,8 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

3) These are not two, but one universal church.

Hebrews 12:22,23 But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, ²³ to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect.

Colossians 1:18-20 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

b) There is no salvation outside the church.

1) Scripture teaches this truth.

John 14:6: I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

2) Our confessions teach this truth.

Large Catechism, Third Article, p 692, 56, p 694, 66: But outside of this Christian church, where the gospel is not, there is no forgiveness, as also there can be no holiness. Therefore all who seek and wish to merit holiness, not through the gospel and forgiveness of sin, but by their works, have expelled and severed themselves from this church.⁶⁶¹ These articles of the Creed, therefore, divide and separate us Christians from all other people upon earth. For all outside of Christianity, whether heathen, Turks, Jews, or false Christians and hypocrites, although they believe in, and worship, only one true God, yet know not what his mind towards them is, and cannot expect any love or blessing from him; therefore they abide in eternal wrath and damnation. For they have not the Lord Christ, and, besides, are not illumined and favored by any gifts of the Holy Spirit.

3) The Roman Catholic Church applies this statement to their visible church.

See *Unam sanctam*, 1302, Boniface VIII (see Smacald Articles, Of the Power and Primacy of the Pope, 34).

Vatican II: The Church ... is necessary for salvation.... Whosoever, therefore, knowing that the Catholic Church was made necessary by God through Jesus Christ would refuse to enter her or to remain in her could not be saved. (*Doc.*, p 32f). Those also can attain to everlasting salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the gospel of Christ or his Church, yet sincerely seek God and, moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do his will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience (*Doc.*, p 35).

4. Scripture teaches that the church is apostolic.

a) It is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.

Ephesians 2:20 Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

John 17:20 My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message.

Acts 2:42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

b) This does not mean that Scripture teaches an apostolic succession of a hierarchy in the church as some believe.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 869: The Church is apostolic. She is built on a lasting foundation: "the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (Rev. 12:14). She is upheld infallibly in the truth: Christ governs her through Peter and the other apostles, who are present in their successors, the Pope and the college of bishops.

Timothy Ware: The Orthodox Church is a hierarchical Church. An essential element in its structure is the Apostolic Succession of the bishops (*The Orthodox Church*, p 248).

The Anglican/Episcopal Church also believes in Apostolic Succession.

Luther: We need pay no attention to the bogey man of these masqueraders when they distinguish between the power of the keys and the use of the keys, a distinction based on no Scripture but on their own recklessness alone. As usual they beg the question. For when it is incumbent on them to show that they have a power different from that given the whole church, they rush on as if this were already demonstrated, and then go on to this fictitious distinction that the power of the keys belongs to the church, their use, however, to the bishops. This is trifling, and the argument has nothing to support it. Christ gives both the power and the use of the keys to each Christian, when he says, "Let him be to you as a Gentile" (Matt. 18:17) (*LW* 40, p 26).

V. To the church have been committed the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

1. Christ arranged the church as his body so that the members could support and encourage each other in the faith.

a) Scripture teaches this truth.

Ephesians 4:16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Colossians 2:19 He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

1 Corinthians 12:7-11 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. ⁸To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the

same Spirit,⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit,¹⁰ to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues.¹¹ All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

1 Peter 4:10,11 Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.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.

Romans 12:4,5 Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function,⁵ so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

1 Corinthians 12:12-14 The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ.¹³ For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.¹⁴ Now the body is not made up of one part but of many.

Large Catechism, 3rd Article, p 690, 51-53: But this is the meaning and substance of this addition: I believe that there is upon earth a little holy group and congregation of pure saints, under one head, even Christ, called together by the Holy Spirit in one faith, one mind, and understanding, with manifold gifts, yet agreeing in love, without sects or schisms.⁵²¹ I am also a part and member of the same, a sharer and joint owner of all the goods it possesses, brought to it and incorporated into it by the Holy Spirit by having heard and continuing to hear the Word of God, which is the beginning of entering it. For formerly, before we had attained to this, we were altogether of the devil, knowing nothing of God and of Christ.⁵³¹ Thus, until the last day, the Holy Spirit abides with the holy congregation or Christendom, by means of which he fetches us to Christ and which he employs to teach and preach to us the Word, whereby he works and promotes sanctification, causing it daily to grow and become strong in the faith and its fruits which he produces.

b) The members of the body of Christ support and encourage each other in the faith through the ministry of the keys.

1) The ministry of the keys is the authority to pronounce or withhold the forgiveness of sins.

Matthew 16:19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

Matthew 18:18 I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

John 20:23 If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.

Smalcald Articles, VII, p 492, 1-3: The keys are an office and power given by Christ to the church for binding and loosing sin, not only the gross and well-known sins, but also the subtle, hidden, which are known only to God, as it is written in Ps. 19:13: Who can understand his errors? And in Rom. 7:25 St. Paul himself complains that with the flesh he serves the law of sin. ²¹ For it is not in our power, but belongs to God alone, to judge which, how great, and how many the sins are, as it is written in Ps. 143: 2: Enter not into judgment with your servant; for in your sight shall no man living be justified. ³¹ And Paul says, 1 Cor. 4: 4: For I know nothing against myself; yet am I not hereby justified.

Smalcald Articles, Of the Power and Primacy of the Pope, p 510, 24, p 522, 68: In addition to this, it is necessary to acknowledge that the keys belong not to the person of one particular man, but to the church, as many most clear and firm arguments testify. For Christ, speaking concerning the keys adds, Matt. 18;19, "If two or three of you shall agree on earth, etc." Therefore he grants the keys principally and immediately to the church, just as also for this reason the church has principally the right of calling. For just as the promise of the gospel belongs certainly and immediately to the entire church, so the keys belong immediately to the entire church, because the keys are nothing else than the office whereby this promise is communicated to every one who desires it, just as it is actually manifest that the church has the power to ordain ministers of the church. And Christ speaks in these words: Whatever you shall bind, etc., and indicates to whom he has given the keys, namely, to the church: Where two or three are gathered together in my name. Likewise Christ gives supreme and final jurisdiction to the church, when he says: Tell it unto the church. Therefore it is necessary that in these passages Peter is the representative of the entire assembly of the apostles, and for this reason they do not accord to Peter any prerogative or superiority, or lordship which he had, or was to have had, in preference to the other apostles. ⁶⁸¹ Here belong the statements of Christ which testify that the keys have been given to the church, and not merely to certain persons, Matt. 18:20, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, etc."

2) **The power of the keys is identical with the means of grace.**

Mark 16:15 He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation."

Matthew 28:19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 11:24,25 And when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “ This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.”²⁵ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “ This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

Augsburg Confession, XXVIII, p 84, 5-9: But this is their opinion, that the power of the Keys, or the power of the bishops, according to the gospel, is a power or commandment of God, to preach the gospel, to remit and retain sins, and to administer sacraments.⁶¹ For with this commandment Christ sends forth his apostles, John 20:21 sqq., As my Father has sent me, even so send I you. Receive the Holy Spirit . Whoever’s sins you remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins you retain, they are retained.⁷¹ Mark 16: 15, Go preach the gospel to every creature.⁸¹ This power is exercised only by teaching or preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments, according to their calling either to many or to individuals. For thereby are granted, not bodily, but eternal things, as eternal righteousness, the Holy Spirit, eternal life.⁹¹ These things cannot come but by the ministry of the Word and the sacraments, as Paul says, Rom. 1:16: The gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.

Apology, VI, p 306, 79: But the keys have not the power of binding and loosing except upon earth, according to Matt. 16:19: Whatsoever, you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Although, as we have said above, the keys have not the power to impose penalties, or to institute rites of worship, but only the command to remit sins to those who are converted, and to convict and excommunicate those who are unwilling to be converted. For just as to loose signifies to remit sins, so to bind signifies not to remit sins. For Christ speaks of a spiritual kingdom. And the command of God is that the ministers of the gospel should absolve those who are converted, according to 2 Cor. 10:8, The authority which the Lord hath given us for edification.

Smalcald Articles, IX, p 496: The greater excommunication, as the Pope calls it, we regard only as a civil penalty, and it does not concern us ministers of the church. But the lesser, that is, the true Christian excommunication, consists in this, that manifest and obstinate sinners are not admitted to the Sacrament and other communion of the church until they amend their lives and avoid sin. And ministers ought not to mingle secular punishments with this ecclesiastical punishment, or excommunication.

Smalcald Articles, Of the Power and Jurisdiction of the Bishops, p 522, 67: For wherever the church is, there is the authority to administer the gospel. Therefore it is necessary for the church to retain the authority to call, elect, and ordain ministers. And this authority is a gift which in reality is given to the church, which no human power can wrest from the church, as Paul also testifies to the Ephesians when he says, Eph 4:8, He ascended, he gave gifts to men. And he enumerates among the gifts specially belonging to the church pastors and teachers, and adds that

such are given for the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. Hence, wherever there is a true church, the right to elect and ordain ministers necessarily exists. Just as in a case of necessity even a layman absolves, and becomes the minister and pastor of another; as Augustine narrates the story of two Christians in a ship, one of whom baptized the catechumen, who after baptism then absolved the baptizer.

c) The church administers the means of grace with the attitude of Christ.

1) Christ is the head of the church.

Ephesians 1:22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church.

Colossians 1:18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

2) Christ's attitude is one of loving service.

Matthew 20:28 The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Luke 19:10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.

3) The church imitates the attitude of Christ.

Philippians 2:5-8 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!

d) God does not prescribe the methods we are to use in administering the means of grace.

1) The members of the church have the freedom of adult children.

1 Corinthians 3:21-23 So then, no more boasting about men! All things are yours, ²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, ²³ and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.

Galatians 4:4-6 But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, ⁵ to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. ⁶ Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “*Abba, Father.*”

2) Christ trusts us that we will make the most of every opportunity.

2 Corinthians 4:2 Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

1 Corinthians 9:19-23 Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. ²⁰ To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. ²¹ To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. ²³ I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

3) When Christ committed the keys to the church, he did not give a rigid set of instructions about the manner of their use.

Matthew 16:19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

Matthew 18:18 I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

John 20:23 If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.

Romans 13:8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.

4) He equipped the church with his Spirit and spiritual gifts.

John 20:22 And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

Romans 12:4-8 Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶ We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. ⁷ If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; ⁸ if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

1 Corinthians 12:4-7 There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶ There

are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. ⁷ Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

Ephesians 4:11-13 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹² to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ 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.

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.

5) **The early church applied the means in a variety of ways.**

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. ¹⁶ 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." 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 5:1-5,11-13 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. ² 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? ³ 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. ⁴ 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, ⁵ hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord. . . . ¹¹ 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. ¹² What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? ¹³ God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you."

Romans 14:1 Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.

Romans 15:1 We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.

Galatians 6:1 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.

Acts 13:1-3 In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul.² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”³ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

Colossians 3:16,17 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.¹⁷ And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Acts 15:6,22,30,31 The apostles and elders met to consider this question.²² 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.³⁰ The men were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter.³¹ The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message.

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.¹⁸ 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.

6) Jesus emphasizes that the church will go to great lengths to win back a straying brother.

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.¹⁶ 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.”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 Timothy 5:20 Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning.

2 Corinthians 2:5-11 If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you, to some extent—not to put it too severely.⁶ The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him.⁷ Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.⁸ I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him.⁹ The reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything.¹⁰ If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your

sake,¹¹ in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.

Galatians 6:1 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.

2. The church will respect but not subject itself to human authority as it administers the keys.

a) The church will recognize its unique role in this area.

1) The greatest power that God gave to his church is the authority to forgive sins.

Mark 2:5-8 When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “ Son, your sins are forgiven.”⁶ Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves,⁷ “ Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”⁸ Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, “ Why are you thinking these things?

Luke 5:21 The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, “ Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

2) In exercising this power the church should not be made subject to human authority.

1 Corinthians 7:23 You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.

2 Corinthians 3:17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

3) In exercising this power the church should not abuse its authority and tyrannize believers or unbelievers.

Romans 14:4,10 Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.¹⁰ You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat.

Matthew 20:25-28 Jesus called them together and said, “ You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.²⁶ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,²⁷ and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Luke 22:24-30 Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. ²⁵ Jesus said to them, “ The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. ²⁶ But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. ²⁷ For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. ²⁸ You are those who have stood by me in my trials.

²⁹ And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, ³⁰ so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

1 Peter 5:2,3 Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; ³ not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

Smalcald Articles, Of the Power and Jurisdiction of the Bishops, p 524, 74-76: It is certain that the common jurisdiction of excommunicating those guilty of manifest crimes belongs to all pastors. This they have tyrannically transferred to themselves alone, and have applied it to the acquisition of gain. For it is certain that the officials, as they are called employed a license not to be tolerated and either on account of avarice or because of other wanton desires tormented men and excommunicated them without any due process of law. But what tyranny is it for the officials in the states to have arbitrary power to condemn and excommunicate men without due process of law! ⁷⁵¹ And in what kind of affairs did they abuse this power? Indeed, not in punishing true offenses, but in regard to the violation of fasts or festivals, or like trifles! Only, they sometimes punished adulteries; and in this matter they often abused and defamed innocent and honorable men. Besides, since this is a most grievous offense, nobody certainly is to be condemned without due process of law. ⁷⁶¹ Since, therefore, bishops have tyrannically transferred this jurisdiction to themselves alone, and have basely abused it, there is no need, because of this jurisdiction, to obey bishops. But since there are just reasons why we do not obey, it is right also to restore this jurisdiction to godly pastors to whom, by Christ’s command, it belongs, and to see to it that it is legitimately exercised for the reformation of morals and the glory of God.

b) The roles of the church and state in administering discipline and punishment should not be confused.

Note: See middler notes p 292ff.

1) The role of the church is to win and nurture souls with the gospel.

-a) This does not mean that the church will not be concerned about the physical welfare of believers and unbelievers alike.

Acts 6:1-4 In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.² So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables.³ Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them⁴ and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.”

James 1:27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

-b) The church will use the sword of the Spirit (law and gospel) as the tool for winning and nurturing souls.

Matthew 28:19-20 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Ephesians 6:13-17 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place,¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

-c) The church should not expect civil government or use the tools of civil government to assist her in this task.

Matthew 26:52 “Put your sword back in its place,” Jesus said to him, “for all who draw the sword will die by the sword.”

2 Corinthians 10:4-6 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.⁵ We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.⁶ And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete.

2) The role of the state is to maintain peace and stability in society through the sword (civil law and punishments).

Romans 13:1-7 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.² Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.³ For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you.⁴ For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.⁵ Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.⁶ This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing.⁷ Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

3) The church and its members must passively resist the state should the state order it to disobey God's Word.

Acts 4:19 But Peter and John replied, " Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God."

Acts 5:29 Peter and the other apostles replied: " We must obey God rather than men!"

c) Both the Roman Catholic view and the traditional Calvinist view err in this article.

1) The traditional Calvinist view holds that the kingdom of God should be realized on earth through the means of the state.

Judges 21:25 In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.

Calvin: This shows the foolishness of those who want kings to be concerned only with pronouncing judgment between men, while concern for God is neglected, as if God established magistrates in His name, who should decide earthly controversies but that he passed over something of far greater importance, namely, that he should be purely worshiped according to the prescriptions of his Law (*Institutes*, IV, 20, 9).

2) The Roman Catholic view holds that the church is the head of the state.

Catholic Encyclopedia: The State, then, exists to help man to temporal happiness the Church, to eternal. Of these two purposes the latter is more ultimate.... It is clear, therefore, that the purpose of the Church is higher in the order of Divine Providence and of righteous human endeavor than that of the State.... In all subject-matter not purely spiritual nor purely temporal, but at the same time both spiritual and temporal in character, both jurisdictions may enter, and so entering give occasion to collision,

for which there must be a principle of solution. In case of direct contradiction, making it impossible for both jurisdictions to be exercised, the jurisdiction of the Church prevails, and that of the State is excluded. ...In analogous fashion every higher court is always judge of its own jurisdiction as against a lower ("State and Church," Online Edition).

Smalcald Articles, Of the Power and Primacy of the Pope, p 512, 31,33-35: The second article is still clearer, that Christ gave to the apostles only spiritual power, *i.e.*, the command to teach the gospel to announce the forgiveness of sins, to administer the sacraments, to excommunicate the godless without bodily force by the Word, and that he did not give the power of the sword, or the right to establish, occupy or confer kingdoms of the world to set up or depose kings.³³¹ Therefore the Constitution of Boniface VIII and the chapter *Omnes*, Dist. 22 and similar opinions which contend that the Pope is by divine right the ruler of the kingdoms of the world, are utterly false and godless.³⁴¹ From this persuasion horrible darkness has been brought into the church, and after that also great commotions have arisen in Europe. For the ministry of the gospel was neglected, the knowledge of faith and the spiritual kingdom became extinct, Christian righteousness was supposed to be that external government which the Pope had established.³⁵¹ Next, the Popes began to seize upon kingdoms for themselves; they transferred kingdoms, they vexed with unjust excommunications and wars the kings of almost all nations in Europe, but especially the German emperors, sometimes for the purpose of occupying cities of Italy, at other times for the purpose of reducing to subjection the bishops of Germany, and wresting from the emperors the conferring of episcopates. Yes, in the *Clementines* it is even written: When the empire is vacant, the Pope is the legitimate successor.

Smalcald Articles, Of the Power and Primacy of the Pope, p 502, 2: Secondly, he adds also that by divine right he has both swords, *i.e.*, the authority also of bestowing kingdoms, that is, enthroning and deposing kings, regulating secular dominions etc.

V. Brought together by the Holy Spirit, Christians will gather together for mutual edification and to do the work of the church more efficiently.

1. Scripture refers to local gatherings of Christians.

a) It calls them churches.

Acts 8:1 A great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem.

Acts 14:23,27 Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.²⁷ On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

Acts 20:28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

Romans 16:16 Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send greetings.

1 Corinthians 1:2 To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours.

1 Corinthians 11:16 If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God.

1 Corinthians 14:23 So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some who do not understand or some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?

1 Corinthians 16:1 Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do.

1 Timothy 3:5 If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?

b) This name applies because they are gatherings of Christians “in the name of Jesus.”

1) When Christians gather to apply the keys, the work of the church is being done.

Matthew 18:20 For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.

2) Christians may gather for reasons other than carrying out the work of the church. (Example: St. John's softball team. Does one need to be a member of the church to be a member of the team?)

c) The purpose of these gatherings is to carry out the work of Christ's kingdom.

1) Gathered around Christ and his Word, the members will build each other up in the faith.

1 Thessalonians 4:1 Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more.

Ephesians 4:13-15 [We will 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.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.¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

Ephesians 4:16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Galatians 6:1,2 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. ² Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Matthew 18:15 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.

Compare verse 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.

2) The members will also seek to share the gospel with others in their local area and throughout the world.

Matthew 10:32 Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven.

Acts 13:1-3 In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. ² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

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.

2. A "congregation" is a church body consisting of two or more Christians. (In general "a congregation" refers to a formally organized group.)

a) The public use of the keys is to be carried out by the congregation as a whole and not by individual Christians acting on their own.

Matthew 18:19,20 Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.

1 Corinthians 5:1-5 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. ² 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? ³ 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. ⁴ 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, ⁵ hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.

Smalcald Articles, Of the Power and Primacy of the Pope, p 510, 24: In addition to this, it is necessary to acknowledge that the keys belong not to the person of one particular man, but to the church, as many most clear and firm arguments testify. For Christ, speaking concerning the keys adds, Matt. 18:19, If two or three of you shall agree on earth, etc. Therefore he grants the keys principally and immediately to the church, just as also for this reason the church has principally the right of calling. For just as the promise of the gospel belongs certainly and immediately to the entire church, so the keys belong immediately to the entire church, because the keys are nothing else than the office whereby this promise is communicated to every one who desires it, just as it is actually manifest that the church has the power to ordain ministers of the church. And Christ speaks in these words: Whatsoever you shall bind, etc., and indicates to whom he has given the keys, namely, to the church: Where two or three are gathered together in my name. Likewise Christ gives supreme and final jurisdiction to the church, when he says: Tell it unto the church. Therefore it is necessary that in these passages Peter is the representative of the entire assembly of the apostles, and for this reason they do not accord to Peter any prerogative or superiority, or lordship which he had, or was to have had, in preference to the other apostles.

Smalcald Articles, Of the Power and Jurisdiction of Bishops, p 522, 68: Here belong the statements of Christ which testify that the keys have been given to the church, and not merely to certain persons, Matt. 18:20: Where two or three are gathered together in My name, etc.

Tertullian: Are not we laymen also priests? ... The authority of the church has established the difference between clergy and people, and through the assembly of the clergy themselves the higher honor of the clergy was approved. Therefore where the ecclesiastical order, i.e. a clergyman, is not present you alone are sacrificer, i.e. one who celebrates the Lord's Supper, baptizer, and priest. But wherever there are three, even if they are laymen, there is the church (*De Exhortatione Castitatis*, 7; *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. IV, p.54).

b) The place where Christians gather is not important.

1) Scripture uses the word “ church” to refer to Christians who gathered in houses.

Romans 16:5 Greet also the church that meets at their house. Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia.

1 Corinthians 16:19 The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house.

Colossians 4:15 Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.

Philemon 2 To Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier and to the church that meets in your home.

2) Scripture uses the word “church” to refer to gatherings of Christians in a city.

1 Corinthians 1:2 To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours.

2 Corinthians 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God in Corinth, together with all the saints throughout Achaia:

1 Thessalonians 1:1 Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you.

2 Thessalonians 1:1 Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Etc.

3) Scripture uses the word “church” to refer to gatherings of Christians or groups of congregations in a province or area.

1 Corinthians 16:1 Now about the collection for God’s people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do.

Acts 16:1-2 He came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek. ² The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him (*ἐμαρτυρέιτο*).

2 Corinthians 8:1,19 And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. ¹⁹ 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.

Galatians 1:2,22 To the churches in Galatia: ²² I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ.

Titus 1:5 The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.

Acts 9:31 Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.

Ἡ μὲν οὖν ἐκκλησία καθ’ ὅλης τῆς Ἰουδαίας καὶ Γαλιλαίας καὶ Σαμαρείας εἶχεν εἰρήνην οἰκοδομουμένη καὶ πορευομένη τῷ φόβῳ τοῦ κυρίου καὶ τῇ παρακλήσει τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος ἐπληθύνετο.

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.

1 Thessalonians 4:10 And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more.

1 Corinthians 5:13 God will judge those outside. “Expel the wicked man from among you.”

Compare 2 Corinthians 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God in Corinth, together with all the saints throughout Achaia; 2 Corinthians 2:5ff If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you, to some extent—not to put it too severely. . . .

1 Peter 1:1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God’s elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia.

3. The local congregation, smaller in extent, is more comprehensive in the scope of its work than a synod.

a) The local congregation is a gathering of Christians in a particular area.

1) Its purpose is to join in prayer, hearing of the Word, using the sacraments, educating of the children, spreading the gospel, and displaying Christian love.

2) The local congregation must not be confused with the legal corporation. The congregation consists only of the believers. No specific form of organization is prescribed in Scripture.

This We Believe: We reject any attempt to identify the holy Christian church with an outward organization. We reject any claim that the church must function in the world through specific organizational forms (VII, 11).

b) A synod is a voluntary association of congregations established to work together in certain aspects of the work of the church.

1) Such groups are churches, gatherings in the name of Jesus.

2) A synod is a group of churches that share a common faith.

Matthew 18:19,20 Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.²⁰ For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.

Acts 20:28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

Baier: Although particular churches could be subdivided into simple churches which are not composed of other churches, and composite churches which are composed of other churches.—Churches which were under the care of individual bishops, but in the same province were under the care of one metropolitan (bishop), formed one provincial church (*Compendium*, III, XIII, 19, 19g).

Walther: First Sermon at the Opening of the Synod.

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love, be with you all. Amen.

Honorable brethren in the Lord, esteemed and loved by all!

The most important feature of a synodical fellowship is pure doctrine and understanding. A Synod, after all, is to be a part of God's church on earth. For that reason also its distinguishing mark is this that in it “the Gospel is rightly taught and the sacraments are administered in accord with the Gospel.” Also a Synod is to be built on nothing but the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ as the cornerstone. Also a Synod is to be a flock of those holy believers and lambs who hear the voice of their Shepherd. Also a Synod has been given the assignment which the Savior, when He ascended to heaven, left behind for His church on earth, “Teach them to observe all things which I have commanded you.” Also its ultimate purpose is the salvation of sinners, which is achieved by nothing else than the pure Gospel. Also its very first prayer should be, not “Thy kingdom come”, but “Hallowed be Thy name!” Yes, what am I saying?—even if a Synod has the pure confessions of the orthodox church as its law, but does not have in practice the pure doctrine and its correct understanding, then it, too, will be one of those whitewashed sepulchers that look beautiful on the outside but inwardly are full of the bones of dead men and all uncleanness (*Brosamen*, p 391).

3) The scope of the synod's work is not as comprehensive as that of the local congregation.

-a) No baptism; services and communion only for the time of delegates' meetings; etc.

-b) Their purpose: training of the servants of the church (educational institutions); mission work (home, heathen;—publications); visitations; care for invalid servants of the Word; general charity work (home for aged).

Acts 8:14 When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them.

Acts 11:22 News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.

2 Timothy 2:2 And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.

- c) **Groups of congregations and groups of synods may form other types of voluntary associations to carry on certain aspects of the work of the church.**
- d) **In purely local, internal, affairs of the congregation the synod can exercise no more than advisory authority.**
- e) **Each of these groupings will not interfere with the work or rights of the others, but they will work together in a spirit of cooperation and according to the accepted agreements.**
 - 1) **The exercise of the keys and church discipline is not limited to the local congregation.**

August Pieper: From the very composition of a synod it is evident that the synod is church in the same sense as each local congregation. Its members ... do not divest themselves of their Christianity, do not lay aside their faith, do not sever their connection with Christ, do not lose their sanctity. As members of the synod they remain exactly what they were as members of the local congregation: Christians, believers (In Jahn, *Our Great Heritage*, III, p 362).

August Pieper: Our confessions not only recognize the representation of the entire church by synods and call their decisions the decisions of the church (Smal. Art.,p. 521, 56); but our church in Europe has always placed congregational discipline in the hands of representatives of the entire church, of consistories, of ministerial, and of synods. That could result in tyranny, and it did; but in principle it was not contrary to God's word, as long as it was done with the consent of the congregations and the discipline was administered in accordance with the word of God (*OGH*, III, p 376).

Contra Francis Pieper: On the other hand, the union of congregations into larger church bodies, such as conferences, synods, etc., has not been ordained by God. The command "Tell it unto the church," according to the context, pertains to the local church, or congregation, and it must be restricted to the local church. "Tell it unto the synod," etc., is a human device (*CD*, III, p 420).

- 2) **For example, in the case of a high school teacher who must be disciplined, the governing body of the school will deal with his call to teach, the synod will deal with his eligibility for a call, and his congregation will deal with his membership in the church.**

Note. There is no actual authority in the church except that of the Word.
All other “ authority” is simply a matter of brotherly love and agreement.

VI. The church may delegate the execution of certain functions to individuals, committees, or associations (*ecclesia repraesentativa*).

1. Scripture provides some examples.

Acts 6:3-6 “Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them ⁴ and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.” ⁵ This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. ⁶ They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

Acts 15:2,27 This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. ²⁷ Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing.

2 Corinthians 8:18,19 And we are sending along with him the brother who is praised by all the churches for his service to the gospel. ¹⁹ 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. God has not established a divine hierarchy to rule the church.

Smalcald Articles, Of the Power and Primacy of the Pope, p 504, 7-8: In the first place, therefore, let us show from the holy gospel that the Roman bishop is not by divine right above, that it cannot arrogate to himself any supremacy whatever over other bishops and pastors. ⁸¹ Luke 22:25. Christ expressly prohibits lordship among the apostles, i.e., that no apostle should have any supremacy over the rest. For this was the very question, namely, that when Christ spoke of his passion, they were disputing who should be at the head, and as it were the vicar of the absent Christ. There Christ reproves this error of the apostles and teaches that there shall not be lordship or superiority among them, but that the apostles should be sent forth as equals to the common ministry of the gospel.

Quenstedt: The assembly of the teachers is called a “ representative church” (*TDP*, Part IV, chap. XV, p 483).

Quenstedt: This assembly of teachers and bishops is also called “ a council” (*TDP*, Part. IV, chap. XV, p 483).

Quenstedt: Beside the president, competent evaluators and judges are not only bishops, but any believers well-trained in the Holy Scriptures, both lay and clergy, who are sent to the church by the churches (*TDP*, Part. IV, chap. XV, p 485).

3. The church can delegate only those powers that it possesses.

- a) **The authority of the church is restricted to the administration of the keys.**
- b) **Churches may come to a mutual agreement as to the best methods of administering the keys in a particular situation.**

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.

- c) **Out of Christian love, congregations in a synod will respect such agreements, unless and until they are change by mutual agreement.**

1 Corinthians 14:40 But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.

1 Corinthians 16:14 Do everything in love.

1 Corinthians 10:32 Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God.

1 Corinthians 11:16 If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God.

- d) **The authority of any representative is limited by his commission.**

4. There are various organizations that may carry out the work of the church.

- a) **They may be found on a synodical level (e.g., conventions and conferences). These may consist of delegates from constituent congregations. Between sessions they in turn may be represented by their executive officers, various boards, and special committees.**

- b) **They may be found on a congregational level.**

1) **A great deal of the ongoing work of a congregation is delegated to the church council, school board, church committees, or other organizations in the congregation.**

2) **Business meetings are actually only representative.**

- c) **All meetings of the church (congregational and synodical) should be conducted in an orderly manner and in the spirit of love.**

1 Corinthians 14:40 But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.

1 Corinthians 16:14 Do everything in love.

- 1) **Such rules of order should serve the body and be carefully observed and not be applied in a legalistic manner.**

- 2) **In some cases a vote may be taken.**
 - a) **In doctrinal matters a vote can aim only at confessing a truth not establishing one.**
 - b) **In external matters and adiaphora everybody must be willing to abide by the outcome.**
 - 1) **The minority must not reject the decision, but cheerfully cooperate with the majority.**
 - 2) **The majority must not ruthlessly override or ignore the wishes of the minority.**

VII. Church organizations may err in their confessions.

1. Christ's holy church will remain until the end.

a) The Lord promises this in his Word.

Matthew 16:18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

Matthew 24:24 For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible.

Mark 13:22 For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect—if that were possible.

Luke 1:33 He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.

1 Timothy 3:15 If I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth (στῦλος καὶ ἐδραίωμα τῆς ἀληθείας).

Apology, p 232, 20-22: We are speaking not of an imaginary church, which is to be found nowhere; but we say and know certainly that this church, wherein saints live, is and abides truly upon earth; namely, that some of God's children are here and there in all the world, in various kingdoms, islands, lands, and cities, from the rising of the sun to its setting, who have truly learned to know Christ and his gospel. And we add the marks: the pure doctrine of the gospel [the ministry or the gospel] and the sacraments. And this church is properly the pillar of the truth, 1 Tim. 3:15. For it retains the pure gospel, and, as Paul says, 1 Cor. 3:11, "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."—the foundation, i.e., the true knowledge of Christ and faith. Although among these in the body which is built upon the true foundation, i.e., upon Christ and faith, there are also many weak persons, who build upon the foundation stubble that will perish, i.e., certain unprofitable opinions, which, nevertheless, because they do not overthrow the foundation, are both forgiven them ²¹⁾ and also corrected. And the writings of the holy Fathers testify that sometimes even they built stubble upon the foundation, but that this did not

overthrow their faith. . . . But just as the church has the promise that it will always have the Holy Spirit, so it has also the threatenings that there will be wicked teachers and wolves. But that is the church in the proper sense which has the Holy Spirit . Although wolves and wicked teachers become rampant in the church, yet they are not properly the kingdom of Christ. Just as Lyra also testifies, when he says: The church does not consist of men with respect to power, or ecclesiastical or secular dignity, because many princes and archbishops and others of lower rank have been found to have apostatized from the faith. Therefore, the church consists of those persons in whom there is a true knowledge and confession of faith and truth. What else have we said in our Confession than what Lyra here says in terms so clear that he could not have spoken more clearly?

b) The Roman Catholic Church claims supreme authority not only for their church organization, but also for its head the pope.

Vatican II, Cap VI: We teach and define that it is a divinely revealed doctrine that the Roman pontiff, when he speaks *ex cathedra*, i.e. when he functions in his capacity as the shepherd and teacher of all Christians and by his supreme apostolic authority defines a doctrine concerning faith or morals which must be held by the universal church through the divine assistance promised to him in blessed Peter possesses that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer wanted His Church to be endowed for the defining of the doctrine concerning faith and morals; and therefore definitions of this kind, made by the Roman pontiff are unchangeable in themselves and not by the agreement of the church.

2. Visible Christian church bodies may be divided into two classes.

a) These two classes are as follows:

- 1) Orthodox churches hold to the true and pure doctrine of God's Word and administer the sacraments according to their divine institution.**
- 2) Heterodox churches tolerate false doctrine or deviate from divine institution in the sacraments.**

b) This distinction is made on the basis of Scripture.

Matthew 28:20 Teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

1 Timothy 1:3 As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer

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 23:31 “ Yes,” declares the LORD, “ I am against the prophets who wag their own tongues and yet declare, ‘The LORD declares.’”

Romans 16:17 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.

1 Timothy 6:3-5 If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching,⁴ he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions⁵ and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.

Titus 3:10 Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him.

Matthew 7:15 Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.

Deuteronomy 13:1-5 If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder,² and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, “ Let us follow other gods” (gods you have not known) “ and let us worship them,”³ you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul.⁴ It is the LORD your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him.⁵ That prophet or dreamer must be put to death, because he preached rebellion against the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery; he has tried to turn you from the way the LORD your God commanded you to follow. You must purge the evil from among you.

c) The entire visible church may at times become a heterodox church in its public confession.

Quenstedt: That all particular churches can err is proved from the prophecies, or predictions, concerning the great deception (Mt 24:24; I Tim 4:1; 2 Th 2:3) (*TDP*, part. IV, chap. II, p 499).

Gerhard: The apostle is manifestly speaking of some great and almost universal apostasy, for many limited ones had already occurred (quoted by Quenstedt, *TDP*, part. IV, chap. II, p 499).

3. Christians are also found in heterodox churches.

a) They are present because the gospel is found there, in spite of any false doctrines that are taught.

Note: While false doctrine does lead away from Christ and works against the gospel, a church or person does not need to have a correct understanding of all the doctrines of Scripture for the gospel or saving faith to be present. If that was the case, no one could be certain of salvation. This does not mean we take false doctrine lightly but that we recognize it is the gospel that saves. When the gospel is proclaimed, God promises it will produce results.

Acts 16:31 They replied, “ Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.”

b) The efficacy of the gospel does not depend on the beliefs, skills, or motives of the preacher.

Philippians 1:15-18 It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. ¹⁶ The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁷ The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. ¹⁸ But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.

1) There may occur a near total corruption of the public ministry.

1 Kings 22:23 So now the LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouths of all these prophets of yours. The LORD has decreed disaster for you.

Isaiah 56:10 Israel’s watchmen are blind, they all lack knowledge; they are all mute dogs, they cannot bark; they lie around and dream, they love to sleep.

Mark 14:64 “ You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?” They all condemned him as worthy of death.

2) Yet even in such times the church will survive.

1 Kings 19:10,14,18 He replied, “ I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.” ¹⁴ He replied, “ I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.” ¹⁸ “ Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him.”

John 12:42 Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue.

Romans 11:3,4 “ Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me” ? ⁴ And

what was God's answer to him? "I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal."

3) When a group of people is gathered around the gospel, there will still be Christians present, even when plagued by false teachings.

Galatians 1:2,6-9 To the churches in Galatia: . . . I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—⁷ which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸ 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! ⁹ 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!

4) The believers in erring bodies do not realize their error.

Note: To knowingly reject Scripture is inconsistent with faith.

4. Scripture encourages us to work together with those who share a common confession in the teachings of Scripture.

3 John 8 We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth.

Note the distinction of types of fellowship:

- *Christian fellowship* refers first of all to the spiritual fellowship we have with God through faith in Christ. It may also refer to the spiritual ties that we have with all believers as members of the invisible church.
- *Church fellowship* refers to all activities in which Christians join together as members of visible churches. It is every expression of faith in which Christians join together because they are united by their acceptance and confession of all the teachings of Scripture (Brug, *Working Together for the Truth*, p 19,20).

Ephesians 4:3-6 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called— ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Ephesians 4:11-16 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹² to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ 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. 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. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶ From him the whole body, joined and

held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

1 John 3:17-19 If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? ¹⁸ Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. ¹⁹ This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence

3 John 4-8 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth. ⁵ Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you. ⁶ They have told the church about your love. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. ⁷ It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. ⁸ We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth.

a) Scripture presents the doctrine of church fellowship as a blessing for his people and his church, not as a burden to be endured.

Psalm 133:1-3 How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! ² It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes. ³ It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.

b) When people or groups share a common confession in the teachings of Scripture, they share in joint activities.

1) They join together in hearing and studying God's Word and worshipping.

Acts 2:42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Colossians 3:15,16 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

Hebrews 10:23-25 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. ²⁵ Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

2) They join together in administering and partaking of the sacraments.

Luke 22:19-20 And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance

of me.”²⁰ In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.

1 Corinthians 10:16,17 Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?¹⁷ Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.

Ephesians 4:3-6 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.⁴ There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called—⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism;⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

3) They join together in prayer.

Acts 2:42 They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Acts 4:23,24 On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them.²⁴ When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. “Sovereign Lord,” they said, “you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.

4) They join together in mission work.

Acts 13:1-3 In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul.² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”³ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

5) They join together in Christian education.

Matthew 28:19-20 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

Acts 2:42 They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

6) They join together in training workers for the church.

Ephesians 4:11-16 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,¹² to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up¹³ 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. 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. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶ From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

2 Timothy 2:2 And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.

Titus 1:5 The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.

7) They join together in supporting the work of the church and in caring for each other's needs.

Galatians 6:10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

2 Corinthians 8:1-4 And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. ² Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. ³ For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, ⁴ they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.

Philippians 4:15-18 Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; ¹⁶ for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. ¹⁷ Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. ¹⁸ I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

c) Scripture forbids us to join together (practice church fellowship) with those who do not share a common confession with us in the teachings of Scripture.

Romans 16:17 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.

1 Timothy 6:3-5 If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, ⁴ he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions ⁵ and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who

have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.

Titus 3:10 Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him.

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. ¹¹ Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work.

- 1) Such a refusal to practice church fellowship does not necessarily pass judgment on the faith or eternal fate of those who hold to a heterodox confession.**

Note the distinction between how we deal with a persistent errorist (Romans 16:17) and an erring brother (Matthew 18:15-18).

- 2) Since we cannot judge the presence or absence of saving faith, the practice of church fellowship is determined on the basis of a individual's or church's confession of faith and practice.**

1 Samuel 16:7 Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.

Matthew 12:34 Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.

Matthew 7:16 By their fruit you will recognize them.

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.

- 3) God wants us to show patience in confronting a person or church body with doctrinal error before one ceases from practicing church fellowship with them. The distinction between a weak brother and a persistent errorist must be maintained.**

Galatians 6:1 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.

2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 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. ¹⁵ Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

Note: How long we continue to practice church fellowship with a church or individual that is erring, but struggling for the truth, is a matter of Christian wisdom and brotherly love.

- d) Scripture teaches the “unit concept” of church fellowship.**

1) All doctrines of Scripture are to be treated as a unit.

Note: It important to distinguish between doctrines of Scripture and adiaphora. The “ unit concept” does not apply to agreeing on adiaphora.

Matthew 28:20 [Teach] them to obey everything I have commanded you.

Acts 20:27 For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.

Note that when the word “ teaching” is used in the New Testament to refer to the doctrines of Scripture, it is used only in the singular to denote the teachings of Scripture as a unit:

Titus 1:9 He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message (*κατὰ τὴν διδαχὴν πιστοῦ λόγου*) as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

2 John 9 Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching (*ἐν τῇ διδαχῇ*) of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.

Romans 6:17 But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching (*διδαχῆς*) to which you were entrusted.

1 Timothy 6:3,4 If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, ⁴ he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions

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. ¹⁹ 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.

Augsburg Confession: VII, p 46, 2-4: And to the true unity of the church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and ³¹ the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike. ⁴¹ As Paul says: One faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, etc. Eph. 4:5. 6.

Note how Scripture gives examples of particular doctrines that are divisive of fellowship.

1 Timothy 4:3 They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth.

Titus 3:9 But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless.

2 Timothy 2:17,18 Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus,¹⁸ who have wandered away from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some.

Revelation 2:14,15 Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality.¹⁵ Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

Revelation 2:20 Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols.

Hoenecke: The only thing agreeing with the Word of God is totally to abstain from all prayer fellowship and worship fellowship with those of other beliefs. For first, we are to confess Christ, and this confession includes all that Scripture teaches about him, his person, his office, and his work; and second, we are to not be ashamed of him and his Word (Lk 9:26; Mk 8:38). Prayer and worship fellowship with the heterodox contradicts this duty. Further, we are to avoid every kind of evil (1 Th 5:22), thus also the evil that we regard fellowship between light and darkness, truth and lie, to be correct (against 2 Co 6:14). However, he who fosters worship fellowship with heretics at least gives the appearance of evil (*ELD*, III, p 415,416).

Grudem: Consistent with this New Testament emphasis on the unity of believers is the fact that the direct commands to *separate* from other people are always commands to separate *from unbelievers* (2 Cor. 6:14) (*ST*, p 877).

Michael L. Dusing: Because the Lord's Supper is a true fellowship of believers, most churches in the Pentecostal and Evangelical traditions practice open Communion. This means that all born-again believers, regardless of their less significant differences, are invited to join with the saints in fellowship with the Lord at his table (*Systematic Theology*, Stanley M. Horton, Editor, p 563)

Grudem: A need for separation may arise when the doctrinal position of a church deviates from biblical standards in a serious way. This deviation may be in official statements or in actual belief and practice, insofar as that can be determined. But when does doctrinal deviation become so

serious that it requires withdrawing from a church or forming a separate church? As we noted above, there are no commands in the New Testament to separate from any true church, so long as it is still a part of the body of Christ. Paul's response even to people in erring churches (even in churches like the one at Corinth, which tolerated serious doctrinal and moral error, and for a time tolerated some who rejected Paul's apostolic ministry) is not to tell faithful Christians to separate from those churches, but to admonish the churches, work for their repentance, and pray for them. Of course there are commands to discipline those who cause trouble within the church, sometimes excluding them from church fellowship (1 Cor. 5:11-13; 2 Thess. 3:14,15, Titus 3:10,11), but there are no instructions to leave the church and cause divisions if this cannot be done immediately (Rev. 2:14-16; 20-25; cf. Luke 9:50; 11:23) (*ST*, p 880).

2) All expressions of church fellowship are to be treated as a unit.

Acts 2:42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

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. ¹¹ Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work.

Philippians 1:4,5 In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

Compare Philippians 4:15 Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only.

Friedrich Balduin (d. 1627): We should not confirm errorists in their error, which we do if we take part in their service. For in this way we give them the hope that finally we will come to agreement with them also in the remaining points. They will look upon our participation in their services as a sign that we thereby confess that we have separated from them without cause, since we in action approve of their worship (*Tract on cases of conscience*, II, 6, 7).

Quenstedt: An orthodox man should either abstain entirely from the sacred rites of unbelievers and heretics (especially the papists) or if he at one time or another wishes to attend or is required by official duties to attend, let him be careful not to give the appearance of secretly agreeing with them...but rather let him in some way, either by words or signs, make clear his disagreement (*TDP*, Pt 4, Ch 11, Sec 2, Qu 8).

This We Believe: We believe that those whose confession of faith reveals that they are united in the doctrines of Scripture will express their fellowship in Christ as occasion permits (Ephesians 4:3). They may express their fellowship by joint worship, by joint proclamation of the gospel, by joining in Holy Communion, by joint prayer, and by joint

church work. God directs believers not to practice religious fellowship with those whose confession and actions reveal that they teach, tolerate, support, or defend error (2 John 10,11). When error appears in the church, Christians will try to preserve their fellowship by patiently admonishing the offenders, in the hope that they will turn from their error (2 Timothy 2:25,26; Titus 3:10). But the Lord commands believers not to practice church fellowship with people who persist in teaching or adhering to beliefs that are false (Romans 16:17,18) (VII, 6).

3) **Scripture does not teach “ levels of church fellowship.”**

Walther’s Thesis XXI in *The Evangelical Lutheran Church* concludes: The Ev. Lutheran Church rejects all fraternal and churchly fellowship with those who reject its confessions in whole or in part.

The Brief Statement: We repudiate unionism, that is, church fellowship with the adherents of false doctrine (The Church, 28).

The LCMS constitution renounced “unionism and syncretism of every description such as ... participating in heterodox tract and missionary activities” (Article VI, 2).

Franz Pieper: It is important to point out again and again that in all Scripture there is not a single text permitting a teacher to deviate from the Word of God or granting a child of God license to fraternize with a teacher who deviates from the Word of God (*CD*, III, p 422).

LCMS CTCR (1981): Through the use of the word “ fellowship” almost exclusively to refer to a formal altar and pulpit fellowship relationship established between two church bodies on the basis of agreement in the confession of the faith, some have been given the impression that no fellowship relationship other than the spiritual unity in the body of Christ can or should exist among members of Christian churches not in altar and pulpit fellowship. The fact that the LC-MS is closer doctrinally to a church body which at least formally accepts Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions than to those denominations which do not is often obscured by the “ all or nothing” approach that frequently accompanies ecclesiastical declarations of altar and pulpit fellowship” (“The Nature and Implications of the Concept of Fellowship,” p 42).

LCMS, “ The Lutheran Understanding of Church Fellowship,” (1998): For some time after Christ’s resurrection Christians continued to pray with the Jews in their synagogues and the temple (Acts 2:46, 3:1, 21:26ff.) even though their leaders did not believe that Jesus was the Christ and had been raised from the dead (Matt. 28:11-15, Acts 4;1ff.). However, Holy Communion was not celebrated in the temple but only in the homes of Christians that served as their churches (Acts 4:26). Unbelieving Jews were excluded from the Sacrament. ... Agreement in the apostles’ doctrine was necessary for the breaking of bread (Acts 2:42). *Church fellowship is altar and pulpit fellowship in the New Testament.* [italics in original]

Commission on Theology and Church Relations – Lutheran Church Missouri Synod: The LCMS is prevented from practicing church fellowship with other church bodies whose confessions or other official positions seriously distort the Christian proclamation. They do not share with the Synod the same biblical understanding of the Gospel and thus we do not share a common confession with them. Therefore the LCMS and its congregations do not join with them in proclaiming the Gospel or in administering the Sacraments. Under these circumstances the LCMS properly declines to be in “altar and pulpit” fellowship with these churches ([The Lutheran Understanding of Church Fellowship: Report on Synodical Discussions](#), 2001, p 2,3)

- 4) **Nor does Scripture allow the use of ambiguous language to gloss over differences.**
- 5) **Scripture tells us not to separate from fellowship without cause.**

This Blessed Fellowship (WELS tract): If it is wrong to subtract from God’s Word or to add to it, it is just as wrong to divide the church over questions which are not answered by God’s Word as it is to divide the church by discarding teachings of Scripture. We cannot bind people to doctrinal opinions which cannot be demonstrated from Scripture.

Agreement in adiaphora (things which God has neither commanded nor forbidden) and ceremonies is not necessary for fellowship. In Romans 14 Paul says: “¹Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. ³The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. ⁵One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. ¹³Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way. ¹⁹Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.” On another occasion Paul said, “Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day” (Colossians 2:16).

Christians do not have to use the same liturgy or enjoy the same style of worship to be in fellowship with each other. Worship styles in third-world mission fields are often quite different than those in American or Scandinavian Lutheran congregation. Some Christians may baptize by immersion; some may baptize by pouring water on the baby. Christians are not required to have the same system of church government or all of the same forms of ministry. The WELS has a ministry of Christian elementary school teachers. Many other churches do not. Christians do not have to follow the same diet or wear the same styles in order to practice fellowship together. Some Christians may choose to abstain from alcoholic beverages; others may use them in moderation. Such differences of opinion and practice are not divisive of church fellowship

unless one party insists that its way is the only right way (Galatians 5:1). There is room for much diversity of *custom* in the church, but nothing in the New Testament offers any basis for excluding any *doctrine* from the unity needed for fellowship.

Our Lutheran Confessions state this principle in Article VII of the Augsburg Confession which says, “To the true unity of the church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike.”

Complete agreement in doctrinal terminology is not necessary for church fellowship. We should not battle about mere words (2 Timothy 2:14-26). In 2 Thessalonians 2 Paul warns against a false teacher called “the man of sin” or “the man of lawlessness.” In the fourth chapter of his first epistle John calls this same false teacher “the Antichrist.” Even though they used different names for this false teacher, Paul and John agreed on the doctrine concerning his coming. It, therefore, would not be right to deny fellowship to someone who had the same teaching which we have, but who used different words to express it. It is, however, desirable to agree on common terminology within a church body to avoid confusing people.

Difference of words does not necessarily mean difference of doctrine, but we also need to be alert for the opposite danger. Use of the same words may be intended to hide differences of doctrine. False teachers often try to disguise their false teaching by twisting the meaning of the words which the orthodox church uses to express its teaching. For example, when false teachers call the Bible “infallible,” they mean that it never fails to accomplish God’s purpose even though it contains many errors. Such a use of “infallible” is intended to fool orthodox Christians, who use the same word, “infallible,” to assert that the Bible is entirely without error. Such deception may mislead faithful Christians into thinking that the false teachers are proclaimers of the truth, who deserve their help and support. For this reason, the church has sometimes found it necessary to insist on specific, unambiguous terminology to “smoke out” false teachers. The need for such clear terminology is one reason that the church has composed creeds and confessions. The false teachers’ refusal to accept these creeds exposed their deception and warned people to avoid them.

It is wrong, however, to divide the church on the basis of personal preference for a particular leader (1 Cor 1:11-13, 3:21-23) or to refuse fellowship to anyone on the basis of race, sex, or economic status (Galatians 3:28, James 2:1-5).

Although agreement in adiaphora, ceremonies, and wording is not necessary for fellowship, complete agreement in doctrine is necessary. The New Testament admonitions to doctrinal unity and its warnings against false doctrine are all-inclusive, general statements, which in no way imply that there are some scriptural doctrines which can safely be omitted or that there are some false teachings which can safely be tolerated: “Teach them to obey *everything* which I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20).

e) **God permits errors in the visible church for various reasons.**

1) It may be as a judgment for ingratitude and indifference.

2 Thessalonians 2:10-12 They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.¹¹ For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie¹² and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

Romans 1:28 Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done.

2) It may be as a test for his children.

Deuteronomy 13:3 You must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul.

Deuteronomy 8:2 Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.

Matthew 24:23-26 At that time if anyone says to you, “Look, here is the Christ!” or, “There he is!” do not believe it.²⁴ For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible.²⁵ See, I have told you ahead of time.²⁶ So if anyone tells you, “There he is, out in the desert,” do not go out; or, “Here he is, in the inner rooms,” do not believe it.

1 Corinthians 11:19 No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God’s approval.

5. The evangelical practice of the biblical church fellowship principles is an expression of love.

1 Timothy 1: 3-5 As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer⁴ nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God’s work—which is by faith.⁵ The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

Luther: Hence this passage must also be considered carefully in opposition to the argument by which they accuse us of offending against love and thus doing great harm to the churches. We are surely prepared to observe peace and love with all men, provided they leave the doctrine of the faith perfect and sound for us. If we cannot obtain this, it is useless for them to demand love from us. A curse on the love that is observed at the expense of the doctrine of the faith to which everything must yield—love, an apostle, an angel from heaven, etc! (*LW* 27, p 37).

a) Love for God’s Word.

2 Corinthians 13:8: For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth.

Psalms 119:136 Streams of tears flow from my eyes, for your law is not obeyed.

b) Love for the errorist.

2 Timothy 2:24-25 The Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. ²⁵ Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, ²⁶ and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

c) Love for his victims and for the weak.

Ephesians 4:11-15 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹² to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ 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. 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. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

Jude 22,23 Be merciful to *those who doubt*; ²³ snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.

And on some have compassion, *making a distinction*; ²³ but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh. (NKJV)

1 Timothy 4:1-6 The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. ² Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. ³ They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. ⁴ For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, ⁵ because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer. ⁶ If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, brought up in the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed.

WELS Theses on Fellowship, B,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 overcome our individual weaknesses. In precept and example Scripture abounds with exhortations to pay our full debt of love toward the weak.

