

Church Fellowship: Working Together for the Truth

Lamb of God Lutheran Church, Columbus, OH

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Adapted from "Church Fellowship: A Bible Study Course for Adults,"
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Lesson Four: Scriptural Principles – The Unit Concept

Church Fellowship, pp. 33-50

Goals

1. To teach the two main principles of the unit concept.
 - (a) Church fellowship requires agreement in all doctrines.
 - (b) All expressions of church fellowship require complete agreement in doctrine.
2. To study the abundant scriptural evidence for these two principles.

Introduction

Scripture teaches two principles.

Agreement in *all* doctrine is necessary for church fellowship.

Church fellowship includes *all* expressions of a shared faith.

We call this the unit concept. The term *unit* stresses the fact that doctrine cannot be divided into two categories: those which require agreement in all doctrine and those which do not. And it stresses that fellowship activities cannot be broken up into two categories: those we cannot practice with Christians who are not in fellowship with us and those we can.

Agreement in *all* doctrine is necessary for expressing fellowship

- Read the following passages, and list some of the errors the apostles treated as divisive of fellowship:
 - Galatians 1:6-8; 3:2 (p. 1151, 1153)
 - 1 John 2:18,19; 4:2-3 (p. 1208-1209)
 - 2 Timothy 2:16-18 (p. 1179)
 - Jude 3-4 (p. 1213)

- 1 Timothy 4:1-3 (p. 1175)
- Titus 3:8-11 (p. 1182)
- Read **Revelation 22:18,19** (p. 1232). What amount of deviation from Scripture does God condemn?
- Discuss the following quotation from *Church Fellowship: Working Together for the Truth*: “It is true that, just as some doses of poison are more deadly than others, the loss of certain doctrines, such as the doctrines of justification or the deity of Christ, is more deadly to faith than the loss of other doctrines, such as a correct understanding of the doctrine of the Antichrist. But just as we want no poison in our food, not even the unintentional inclusion of small amounts of cancer-causing substances, so we can tolerate no poison in our spiritual food, that is, the teachings of Scripture that feed our faith” (p. 34).

Scripture makes no exceptions on doctrines. For fellowship, complete agreement in doctrine is necessary. Mark phrases in the following passages that underscore this truth.

- **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.
- **Ephesians 4:3,11-15** Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.
- **Acts 20:27-31** I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. 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. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.
- **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 in mind and thought.
- **Revelation 22:19** 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.

- **1 Timothy 1:3,4** 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 nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God’s work—which is by faith.
- **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, he is conceited and understands nothing.
- **John 8:31** To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.”
- **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.
- **Romans 15:5,6** May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- In the light of the above passages, discuss this quotation from *Church Fellowship: Working Together for the Truth*: “None of these passages nor any of the many other similar passages in the New Testament offers even a hint of support for the idea that any doctrine of Scripture can be dispensed with or that any doctrinal error can be accepted as harmless” (p. 39).

Agreement in *adiaphora* is not necessary for expressing fellowship

Some differences among members of God’s church are not divisive of fellowship. Read **Romans 14:1-3** (p. 1124). **Adiaphora** are things neither forbidden by God nor commanded by him. Examples are different liturgies, moderate use of alcohol, and method of baptism.

- Why are differences in *adiaphora* not divisive of church fellowship?
- Read **2 Thessalonians 2:3** (p. 1172) and **1 John 4:3** (p. 1209). Demonstrate from these two passages that it is not necessary for Christians to agree in the **exact words or terminology** which they use in expressing the doctrines of Scripture.

Other differences that should not be a cause of division in the church are loyalty to certain personalities or economic, racial, and cultural differences.

All ways of expressing fellowship are a unit

- Read the following passages, and list some of the various ways Christians express fellowship:
 - Hebrews 10:24-25 (p. 1191)
 - Colossians 3:16 (p. 1167)
 - 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 (p. 1135)
 - Galatians 6:6 (p. 1155)
 - 1 Corinthians 9:11,14 (p. 1134)
 - Philippians 1:4,5; 4:15 (p. 1161, 1164)
 - 2 John 10-11 (p. 1211)
 - Galatians 2:8-9 (p. 1152)
 - Acts 15:1-2 (p. 1094)
 - Romans 16:16 (p. 1126)
- In the light of the above passages, discuss this statement from *Church Fellowship*: “There is no scriptural basis for dividing the various expressions of fellowship into different levels that require different degrees of doctrinal agreement. Different forms of fellowship are simply different ways of expressing one and the same unity of faith” (p. 49).

Summary

The unit concept is drawn from the clear testimony of Scripture. We must be in agreement in all doctrines of Scripture to have church fellowship. All ways of expressing church fellowship require complete agreement in doctrine.

During the week

1. Suggested Reading: *Church Fellowship*, pp. 51-58.
2. Think about the fellowship you enjoy with the members of your congregation and others who share the same confession. What are some things you can do to preserve that fellowship? to extend it?