

Introduction

"I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, 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 1:3-6).

By graciously bringing us to faith in Jesus, the Lord brought us into fellowship with him and all who trust in Christ. Through his powerful Word, he has also brought us into the special fellowship we enjoy in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Ours is a unity based not on an agreement to disagree or on acceptance of a few fundamental teachings, but on a full commitment to the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions. This gracious gift simply cannot be taken for granted but must rather be treasured for what it is: an unthinkable blessing from our thoughtful Savior. We demonstrate our appreciation for this fellowship as we "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). That happens as we gladly commit ourselves to a regular and repeated study of God's Word, by which the Holy Spirit equips us to apply God's never-changing truth to the situations we face.

This document, a toolbox of sorts, is intended as an aid to all of us who are committed to an ongoing study of God's Word and a careful application of its principles to ministry, particularly in the matter of church fellowship. You will find that there is no short-cut "application handbook." Instead, the document lays out the core Biblical principles that need to be applied and then encourages honest and open discussion of the best way to demonstrate love for God's Word, for the souls of others, and for our own souls in the ministry situations we regularly face. While that discussion will primarily take place at the local level, we are wise to seek the counsel of brothers and sisters in faith miles removed from the situation, who might have a more objective view. What a privilege to work together in his kingdom, as we strive, with the Lord's strength, to hold firmly to the truth and to proclaim the good news to the world!

The table of contents points the reader to the following materials:

- 1) General guidelines (read and discuss these ten overarching guidelines first)
- 2) Glossary of terms (ensures that we have a shared understanding of terms commonly used)
- 3) "This Blessed Fellowship" Bible study (outlines core Biblical principles of fellowship)
- 4) "This Blessed Fellowship" Bible study leader's guide (assists the one leading the study)
- 5) Case studies (provides real ministry situations in which to apply the core Biblical principles)
- 6) A word for leaders (outlines the critical role of school leaders in applying the principles)
- 7) Pre-enrollment template (supplies a helpful guide for pre-enrollment policy)
- 8) Handbook entry template (supplies a worship participation policy)

The Conference of Presidents has approved these materials and prays that they will be a blessing to our schools as we walk together in a way that honors God's Word, serves his people, and offers loving witness to the world. Though designed particularly for use by governing boards in our high schools and colleges, they can certainly be shared and used more broadly.

These materials were prepared by a committee President Schroeder appointed in April 2013. The following served on the Fellowship Study Committee: Pastor Jon Buchholz, member of the Conference of Presidents; Mr. Stephen Granberg, principal at Fox Valley Lutheran High School; Dr. John Kolander, provost at Wisconsin Lutheran College; Pastor David Rockhoff, chairman of the Shoreland Lutheran High School Board; Mr. Kurt Rosenbaum, principal at Arizona Lutheran Academy; Pastor Earle Treptow, member of the Conference of Presidents, who served as committee chairman; and Pastor David Wenzel, teacher at Fox Valley Lutheran High School.

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General Guidelines in Applying Scripture's Doctrine of Fellowship

1. Christians eagerly participate in the Lord's work by seizing opportunities to proclaim his gospel, yet they will not use "outreach" as a justification for a practice that is inconsistent with God's Word.
2. Christians want to uphold the truth of God's Word and preserve the church from false teaching, yet they will be careful not to set up artificial measures to do so.
3. Christians live in the freedom Christ won for them, yet they will not view their freedom as the right to do whatever God does not expressly forbid.
4. Christians give serious thought to the impact of their actions on their fellow believers and take pains to demonstrate patient love, even to the point of giving up something they may have the right to do, yet they will not insist that everyone else must do the same or be guilty of sin.
5. Christians don't assume that every past practice in the church was both correct and universally applicable. Instead they take the time to study the Scriptures anew and to apply them to the current setting and situation.
6. Christians don't make applications on the basis of applications others have made, but return to the Scriptures to grasp the doctrine more completely. Yet they do not isolate themselves from applications that have been made in the past, seeking instead to understand why fellow believers would have made those applications.
7. Christians are unyielding in the realm of doctrine, resisting the encouragement of the world and the visible church to compromise on the teachings of God's Word. Yet Christians are consistently yielding in the realm of love, resisting the temptation towards self-interest and self-service.
8. Christians recognize that refusing to express doctrinal unity with those who do not share a common confession is an act of love. Yet, understanding that some may consider it judgmental and unloving, they will want to explain their practice with gentleness, patience, and respect.
9. Christians understand that gospel ministry is not about hard and fast rules that must be strictly applied in every situation, regardless of circumstances, yet will not for that reason resist the establishment of general guidelines to assist in the careful application of the principles.
10. Christians recognize that there are some applications of doctrinal principles that must be made, or the principle itself will be undermined, yet they will not consider every application that might be made absolutely necessary for the preservation of the principle.

Glossary of Terms

- Christian fellowship:** The spiritual (invisible) union which we enjoy with God and with all those who trust in Jesus as their Savior.
- Church fellowship:** The status which exists when individuals or groups, on the basis of a common confession of faith, have mutually recognized one another as Christian brothers and sisters. That status properly shows (is visible) in those joint activities which express and demonstrate their common confession of faith in Christ. This allows Christians to give a clear confession of the truth, as well as a clear testimony against error.
- Prospect:** An individual who holds no church affiliation (unchurched), whose affiliation is tenuous or virtually nonexistent, or who of his own volition expresses interest in learning more about what we teach, with a view toward membership in our church body.
- Willing learner:** An individual who may or may not be connected to another church body through membership and may or may not be active in his present congregation, who is willing to be instructed in the teachings of God's Word, and has a willingness to learn in the area of academics. Being a willing learner is not equivalent to being one in faith and fellowship. A willing learner may discover through study that he is or is not one with us in faith, confession, and fellowship.
- Proselytize:** To coax an individual away from membership in another church body. We recognize the divine call of the clergy of another church body, and we do not wish to infringe upon that relationship. If we encourage (or require) families to attend a Bible Information Class, our goal is not to take them away from their current congregation or church body, but to help them know what their children are learning as students in our school. In any situation involving a willing learner, it is never our goal to proselytize.
- Persistent errorist:** An individual who consistently holds to a false teaching or belief even after being instructed, admonished, and warned concerning his error.
- Weak brother:** An individual who outwardly is a member of a church of our fellowship, but holds to a false teaching out of ignorance or weakness. A weak brother accepts instruction and renounces his error when shown he is wrong. He does not persistently adhere to an error in doctrine or practice, demand recognition for his error, or promote it.
- Worship:** The opportunity to gather with fellow believers to be served by God with Word and Sacrament, whether in a congregation or school setting, and to respond jointly with thanksgiving, prayer, and song.
- Spiritual care:** Responsibility for the spiritual welfare of a soul or group of souls. Parents are primarily responsible for the spiritual care of their children. Pastors are primarily responsible for the spiritual care of the members of their flock. Teachers exercise spiritual care of individuals in a more narrow sense as they instruct their students in God's Word, use law and gospel to carry out Christian discipline, and maintain a

positive learning environment in their classrooms. Being under our spiritual care is not always equivalent to being one in faith and fellowship.

- Spiritual instruction:** More limited than the responsibility of parents and pastors, this is the part of the school-student relationship in which religious instruction and modeling are practiced. Spiritual instruction is more limited in scope than the relationship that exists for those who exercise primary spiritual care. The primary focus of a Lutheran school is spiritual instruction, not spiritual care.
- Membership:** The fellowship relationship that an individual enters when he becomes a member of a congregation through confirmation or profession of faith. This relationship is entered after instruction has been given, consent has been given, and a confession of faith has been made publicly in a congregation. A Lutheran school is not a congregation. It is part of the ministry of a congregation or a federation of congregations. Enrollment in a Lutheran school does not make an individual a member of a congregation.
- Legalism:** Misuse of the law. Legalism occurs when human laws are given the same force as Scripture, when the law is brought to bear in a situation where the gospel should rightly be applied, and when things are forbidden which Scripture clearly permits. Using the law correctly is not legalism.
- Laxity:** Neglect of the law. Laxity occurs when God's law is ignored, when biblical principles are applied loosely or not at all, and when applications diverge from biblical principles.
- Evangelical:** Using the gospel correctly. An evangelical practice does not undermine biblical principles but applies them in a spirit of encouragement and forgiveness, motivated by love for Jesus. In evangelical practice the gospel is predominant.

Lesson One

This Blessed Fellowship

Opening Worship

Read together **Psalm 133**.

How does the psalmist describe the unity that believers enjoy? How do you feel when you are in the company of like-minded believers in Jesus Christ?

Opening prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, Lord of the Church, you have called us out of darkness into your wonderful light. You have made us part of your family and heirs of eternal life. We thank you for the blessed unity you have created among us through the forgiveness of our sins, through unity of teaching, and through our shared faith. We ask you to bless your church, so that we may always be perfectly united in mind and thought, and we may support and encourage one another on the path to eternal life. Amen.

Introduction

Christian fellowship is a wonderful blessing for God's people to celebrate! We cherish the unity that binds us together as members of one body of Christ. When all our doctrine agrees with Scripture, we are spared the wrangling and division that arise from internal doctrinal disputes. We enjoy peace and harmony, as we stand together on God's Word.

We celebrate true peace and harmony only when our teaching and our practice are consistent with Scripture. Where true Christian unity is exchanged for a watered-down belief system that agrees to disagree on much of what the Bible teaches, genuine peace and harmony are compromised. Where pure teaching takes a back seat to emotional attachment, or the Word of God is subordinated to human reason, there can be no true unity.

Because Christian unity is so precious, we appreciate Scripture's teaching on how that unity is preserved. We see Scripture's fellowship principles as instruction on preserving something precious, not merely as a set of rules that limit what believers can do. If we fail to appreciate the blessing of unity, we may take it for granted. Only later, after that unity is broken and lost do we look back wistfully and remember the blessing of fellowship we once enjoyed.

Our lesson today leads us to appreciate the blessings that we share as members of one body, joined by a common teaching and practice that rests not on human reason, rules or emotions, but is built squarely on the solid foundation of God's Word.

Two-minute discussion:

Define the term *Christian fellowship*. Do you normally have a positive, celebratory view of fellowship, or do you tend to see it in more limiting, restrictive terms? Explain why you answer as you do.

God's Word says . . .

The concept of Christian fellowship is woven throughout the Bible, so it is not something taught in just a few places. Looking at select Bible passages leads us to some key concepts.

We were brought into this Christian fellowship

Read Ephesians 4:4-6. How did we become part of the one Holy Christian and Apostolic Church? What unites us in this Christian church?

Read Isaiah 55:10, 11 and Matthew 28:19, 20. Through what instruments does God bring us into the church?

If God uses these instruments to bring people into the church, what must we conclude about *where* the Holy Christian Church is found on earth?

We celebrate and practice Christian fellowship

The bond of faith and fellowship that ties us together is not just something invisible and internal. It is something that we demonstrate externally and visibly when we practice and celebrate Christian fellowship. Read each of the following passages and answer the question: *How do Christians celebrate and practice Christian fellowship in true unity with one another?*

- 1 Corinthians 1:10
- Hebrews 10:24,25
- Colossians 3:16
- James 5:13-16
- James 5:19,20
- 1 Corinthians 10:17
- Acts 2:42
- Romans 12:4-8
- 3 John 4-8
- Joel 1:3
- Psalm 78:4-7
- Mark 16:15

Two-minute discussion questions.

For each of the following, identify the weakness or misunderstanding regarding the Christian faith and the practice of Christian fellowship:

Ronny works hard all week and considers weekends his time to relax. As a result, he rarely goes to church. "I believe in Jesus as my Savior," he says, "and I read my Bible at home."

Mark and Maria always arrive at the worship service 5 minutes late, just as the first hymn is ending. During the worship service they sit quietly and reverently at the back of the church, and then they leave during the last hymn.

Julia is a straight-A student at a Christian high school. She sings loudly in chapel services and participates eagerly in discussions in religion class, but she rarely attends church or the youth study at her church.

"I served my time on the church council," says Sam. "Yes," chimes in Louise, "I used to be president of the ladies' guild. We don't volunteer for those things anymore. It's time for people of the younger generation to step up and do their share."

Read Amos 3:3. The word "synod" comes from the Greek word *synodos*, meaning "walking together." Discuss some of the blessings that we enjoy as a result of our walking together as members of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

For study at home

For a deeper understanding of the Holy Christian Church and the blessings of fellowship that we enjoy in the body of believers, read the book of **Ephesians**.

As you read, take note of the following:

- How often the Apostle Paul speaks of people being brought together by Christ into one family.
- How we Christians celebrate our oneness in Christ by avoiding things that might damage our connection to Jesus.

Next lesson: *Factions and schisms*

Lesson Two

Factions and schisms

Opening Worship

Read together **Psalm 50**.

In this psalm, God describes the privilege of communion with him, but he also describes how that connection is weakened and broken. How does this happen?

Opening prayer: Merciful God and Father, you have called us to be yours through faith in Jesus. Keep us from false beliefs in our hearts, from lies on our lips, and from every temptation and deception of Satan. Keep us firm in your grace and truth, and lead us to grow and mature, so that we may serve you in single-minded devotion until we rest from our earthly struggles and see you in heaven. Amen.

Introduction

Today's common view of truth says that "truth" is whatever you want it to be. One person's "truth" may be of little interest to another person, who has his own personal "truth."

As Christians we recognize the deadly fallacy of this worldly notion. Truth, by definition, is absolute. Something is either true, or it is false. If it is false, then it is untrue. The perception that truth is whatever someone wants it to be is just one more deception: The notion itself is untrue.

Truth is revealed in the Bible. Jesus said to his heavenly Father, "Your word is truth" (John 17:17). When the Holy Spirit opens the eyes of our hearts, truth can be recognized, known, embraced, believed, and lived.

Two-minute discussion:

Have you ever had a discussion or interaction with a person who responds to your testimony by saying, "Well, that's what *you* believe!" How do you respond to a relativistic view of truth?

God's word says . . .

Damage to the ties that bind

Jesus had some very strong words for people who were holding onto lies as if they were truth. **Read John 8:42-45**. What is the origin of every false teaching?

Read Luke 12:51-53. What causes divisions and schisms in the world and in the church?

Break out into groups of up to four people. Read each of the following passages and describe the phenomenon or the circumstances that cause the unity of the body to be damaged. Come back together and discuss your findings.

- Matthew 7:15
- 1 Corinthians 1:10-12
- 1 Corinthians 11:17-22
- 1 Corinthians 5:1-5
- Galatians 5:4-10

Can we agree to disagree?

Many churches today insist that there are some doctrines that matter and others that are not important. For example, a *fundamentalist* church insists that there must be agreement in certain *fundamental* Christian teachings (the Triune God, the virgin birth of Christ, etc.) but that there can be disagreement in other teachings (Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, conversion, etc.). Identify some possible reasons why people might take this approach to doctrine:

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How does understanding the origin of every false teaching (remember John 8:44) change our approach to “differences of opinion” and “differences in interpretation” in spiritual matters?

Read 1 Corinthians 1:10. Explain the difference between *unity* and *union*. Which one is Paul encouraging here? How is this achieved?

Read Ephesians 4:11-15. According to the Apostle Paul, what is the Lord’s plan for achieving this objective?

Closing discussion:

What are some practical things each of us can do to encourage and foster true unity with other believers in our homes, our congregations, our schools, and anywhere else we interact with fellow Christians?

For study at home

A quick read of **1 Corinthians** reveals some of the challenges and obstacles these new Christians were facing. Prior to our next discussion, read **1 Corinthians chapters 1-6**.

As you read through these chapters of 1 Corinthians, consider:

- What kinds of serious problems had arisen among this group of believers?
- How does the Apostle Paul address these problems? What approach does he take? What spirit does he demonstrate? What tools does he use?

Next lesson: *Watch out and keep away*

Lesson Three

Watch out and keep away

Opening Worship

Read together **Psalm 46**.

In the midst of earthly turmoil, conflict, division, temptation and tribulation, where does the confidence of Christians lie?

Opening prayer: O God, our Refuge and Strength, eternal, ever-living and all-powerful Lord and Master, your domain extends over all creation. The whole earth is full of your glory. Preserve us in the face of doubt and uncertainty, conflict and compromise, and keep us always faithful to you. Keep our feet on the path of truth that leads to eternal life. Amen.

Introduction

Three watchwords of today's thinking are: *relativism, interpretation, and tolerance*.

We saw in our last lesson that today's secular thinking starts with the belief that there are no absolutes. All truth is relative to a person's own experience or frame of mind. In other words, "truth" is whatever a person wants it to be. Today's thinking also preaches tolerance for dissenting viewpoints. According to prevalent thought today, the only viewpoint not to be tolerated is intolerance itself.

The Bible is a book of absolutes. The teaching of Scripture is a still, small voice proclaiming the truth, even as secular philosophy turns up its own volume and tries to drown out the Bible.

Our lesson examines how we are to respond to the lies all around us, as we strive to thank, praise, and glorify Christ, the living Word.

God's Word says . . .

Check out the truth

Read 1 John 4:1 and 1 Thessalonians 5:21, 22. What does God tell us to do when we encounter others who profess to be Christians?

Read John 8:31 and John 14:15. Faithfulness to the Lord Jesus is not a matter of good intentions or sentimental feelings. How does Jesus himself define faithfulness to him?

Read 2 Timothy 4:3, 4. What sad reality are we facing in these last days?

Respond appropriately to error

Break out into groups of up to four people. Read through each of the following passages, and from each passage identify at least one way we are to respond when we encounter teaching that does not agree with God's Word. Discuss your findings with the larger group.

- 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1
- Hebrews 13:9
- Romans 16:17
- Titus 3:10
- Psalm 101:1-4

- 2 John 10, 11
- Amos 3:3
- 2 Timothy 4:5

But... why?

God not only tells us *what* we are to do when we encounter false teaching and wrong practice; he also tells us *why* we are to obey these directions from his Word. God gives us the instructions above for at least three important reasons. Take turns reading through the following passages to identify why God has given us these principles to follow:

Reason #1:

- Psalm 119:103-105
- John 8:31
- 2 Corinthians 13:8

Summarize: _____

Reason #2:

- Matthew 7:15
- 2 Corinthians 11:3
- 2 Timothy 2:17, 18
- Galatians 5:9

Summarize: _____

Reason #3:

- Titus 3:10
- Titus 1:11
- Titus 1:13,14
- James 5:19,20
- James 3:1
- Luke 17:1-4
- 1 Peter 3:15

Summarize: _____

For study at home

Paul grieved over the false doctrine that was already appearing in the church at his time. In his second letter to Pastor Timothy, he gives some very practical instructions for dealing with problems that arise in the church. Prior to our next discussion, **Read 2 Timothy**.

2 Timothy was the last of the Bible books that Paul wrote before he died. How was Paul honest about the challenges the church would face after he was gone? How does he express confidence for the church's future?

Next lesson: *Fellowship in practice*

Lesson Four

Fellowship in Practice

Opening Worship

Read together **Psalm 97**.

List at least four blessings of walking with the LORD that the psalmist outlines in the verses of Psalm 97:

Opening prayer: Gracious Savior, your mercies are new every morning, and your compassions never fail. We praise and thank you for your loving kindness, your peace, forgiveness and salvation, and for all the blessings that flow from your loving hand. Keep us in the path of life, and lead us to life everlasting. Amen.

Introduction

It's so easy to compartmentalize our faith.

The tongues that beautifully praise God during the church service may spout obscenities at a sporting event. The hearts that celebrate Christ's love and peace on Sunday may fill with bitterness, malice, greed, and lust during the week. The family that worships together in church may be torn apart by an argument on the drive home. All the fine-sounding religious rhetoric can shatter into a thousand pieces when it hits the "real world." It happens when we place expediency above consistency, pragmatism above Christian practice, and compromise ahead of faithful commitment.

If it's so easy to compromise in the face of "big" temptations, imagine the challenge to remain faithful in all of the "little" things! We run into just such challenges as we strive faithfully to apply principles of Christian fellowship in a world that wants to undermine our faith and devotion from all sides.

God's Word says . . .

Find out where others stand

In **Luke 17:20,21** Jesus teaches us that the kingdom of God is not outwardly visible. The kingdom of God is within us, in our hearts. Since we cannot see into a person's heart, we must look at other, visible things to know whether a person believes, teaches, and puts God's Word into practice correctly.

Read Matthew 7:15-23. To determine whether we are one in faith, or not, what visible things should we look at?

Read Ephesians 4:1-3. How does Paul encourage us to deal with fellow believers who are struggling with sin or false teaching?

Read 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1. How are we to deal with those who willfully persist in sin or in false teaching?

Two-minute discussion questions:

Based on the passages above, we must draw a distinction between someone who is a *weak brother* and someone who is a *persistent errorist*. Describe the difference between a weak brother (sister) and a persistent errorist.

What does a person's church affiliation or his worship practice tell us outwardly and openly about whether he holds to the truth of Scripture, or not?

Is it possible that a person may hold to some false teaching in certain areas but still remain a Christian? What implications does this have for expressing Christian fellowship on this side of eternity?

Preaching and teaching

Read Romans 16:17,18. What direction does this give us when it comes to choosing preachers, teachers, and worship leaders for our worship services and Bible studies?

Scenario for discussion:

Your pastor is going on vacation and needs to find a preacher to preach while he is gone. Would there be anything wrong with your pastor writing a sermon, then calling a local Roman Catholic priest or Baptist minister to deliver the sermon?

As you discuss this scenario, take the following into consideration:

- If the fill-in preacher agreed not to depart from the manuscript prepared by your pastor, you could be confident that the content of the sermon would contain no false doctrine.
- Apart from what is actually spoken in the sermon, is there another message that is being communicated by having this preacher fill in?
- What reactions might be expected from the people who are sitting and listening to the fill-in preacher?
- Can someone be a “false teacher,” even if he does not teach falsely on a given day or in a specific situation?
- What purpose do fellowship principles serve here?

Apply biblical principles

Let’s recap the principles that God’s Word has taught us. Take turns reading through the following bullet points aloud:

We want to stand up for God’s Word in its entirety because . . .

- We love Jesus, and it is *his* Word. We honor him by believing, teaching, and practicing *everything* he says.
- We are concerned for the welfare of our own soul. We do not want to be misled by Satan’s dangerous lies.
- We love our neighbor and are concerned about others being misled by Satan’s dangerous lies.

In dealing with others, we must ask ourselves . . .

- Are we dealing with a weak brother or sister who needs encouragement?
- Are we dealing with a persistent errorist whose teaching must be avoided?

As we express fellowship with others are we . . .

- Celebrating true unity with others who are one in faith with us, or practicing false union with others who are not really one in faith with us?
- Giving a clear and consistent confession and testimony about where we stand (for the truth, against error), or blurring the lines between truth and error, creating confusion, and allowing error to stand alongside truth?
- Honoring God with a clear, loving witness—even when it’s hard and unpopular—or compromising our testimony, for the sake of ease, popularity, and expediency?

Case studies

Additional case studies are included as companion materials to this Bible study. Use the principles above to evaluate the scenarios presented in the case studies, and discuss proper application of fellowship principles in each case.

For study at home

The phrase “A little yeast works through a whole batch of dough” appears more than once in Scripture. Use a concordance or Bible software to find each instance where it occurs. Study the context in each case.

What do church history and practical experience tell us about the real warning contained in that phrase? What happens when we disregard God’s warnings and seek our own solutions?

Next lesson: *Fellowship in practice* (continued)

Lesson Five

Fellowship in Practice (continued)

Opening Worship

Read together **Psalm 119:9-16**.

Psalm 119 is an *acrostic* psalm. The psalm is divided into sections, with all the verses of each section starting with the same Hebrew letter. Verses 9-16 all start with the Hebrew letter *Beth*, which corresponds to our letter B.

Psalm 119 is about the value of God's Word. Since the psalm goes through the Hebrew alphabet, we might say that the psalm is about "God's Word from A to Z."

Why is God's Word so precious and so important, according to Psalm 119?

Opening prayer: O Lord, your Word is truly a lamp to my feet and light for my path [Psalm 119:105]. Please keep me faithful to your Word, so that I hear it, listen to it, obey it, defend it, proclaim it, and walk in it. Your Word is my faithful hope, my confident joy, and my certain promise of forgiveness and life. Teach me your Word of truth, and let it always be my love and my delight. Amen.

Introduction

God's Word reveals both the law and the gospel to us. Knowing when and how to apply each of these central doctrines is the highest theological art. It calls for discernment and wisdom, firmness and faithfulness, patience and grace.

Whenever we use and apply God's Word, we are to do so in love. Love is the fulfillment of the law (Romans 13:10), and love is the embodiment of the gospel (1 John 4:10). The opposite of *legalistic* is not always *evangelical*. The opposite of *legalistic* can be *lax*, and both legalism and laxity are wrong. If we err on the side of the law or err on the side of the gospel, we are still erring. Our goal is always to apply God's Word consistently and faithfully, giving a clear and honest confession, and glorifying God as we sincerely love our neighbor.

This is not a popular position in today's world. In today's thinking, being gracious or loving means letting anything go, always giving people what they want, being tolerant of any sin, and accepting of any error. True love stands against this worldly nonsense and stands firmly on God's truth, striving to apply it honestly and faithfully, always in love for souls.

God's Word says . . .

Holy Communion

Read 1 Corinthians 10:17. What are we celebrating when we gather for Holy Communion?

Read 1 Corinthians 11:27-31. What occurs when someone communes unworthily? What consequences may follow?

The term we use to describe the practice of admitting only qualified communicants to the Lord's Table is *Closed Communion*.

Two-minute discussions:

How can we know for certain whether someone is a worthy or unworthy communicant?

Is every card-carrying member of a congregation or synod in fellowship with ours prepared to take Communion, simply by virtue of his or her church membership?

Since we can't look into people's hearts, what must we look at?

Some people might feel that it should be their choice alone to participate in or abstain from Communion.

What responsibility do the men serving Communion have toward the communicants?

What responsibility does a congregation collectively have toward those who commune?

Worship and prayer

Read Revelation 8:3,4. Prayer is an act of _____.

Read Isaiah 29:13 and Matthew 6:5-8. Regardless of who offers a prayer, what dangerous possibility always exists when someone is leading a prayer?

Remember the Word of the Lord in **2 Corinthians 6:14-18**. With whom alone are we to engage in the practice of worship and prayer?

Application discussions:

What message does praying together send to those who participate in the prayer and to those who observe?
When is that message honest? When is it dishonest?

Proclamation and participation, soloists and instrumentalists

As we explore some of the possible situations that we might encounter in the practice of fellowship, we realize quickly that Scripture doesn't give us quick answers in the form of "You shall do this" or "You shall not do that." Yet the principles taught in Scripture can all be brought to bear. It requires a great measure of Christian maturity to apply principles consistently and lovingly. Remember the inspired Word in **2 Timothy 4:1-5**.

Application discussions:

A wedding couple would like to have the bride's cousin sing "The Lord's Prayer" at their wedding. The bride's cousin is a member of a church that teaches unbiblical doctrine (or is not a member of any church). There is nothing wrong with the text of the song, so no false doctrine will be proclaimed. What message would be communicated to the soloist if she were permitted to sing?
What message would be communicated to those in the congregation who know the soloist's religious views?
Would the message change if the bride's cousin were an instrumentalist, instead of a soloist?

A high school student auditions to sing in the high school choir that participates in and sometimes leads worship in area churches. The student is an active member of a church that teaches unbiblical doctrine.

The student and the student's family have expressed a deep appreciation for the Lutheran high school and its Christian environment and teaching, but they have made it clear that they are happy with their church and are not interested in leaving their church to affiliate with a congregation of our fellowship.

What message would be communicated to the student if he or she were permitted to participate in carrying out the choir's role?
Would the message change if the student were only part of a large group and only not permitted to sing solos or read lessons?

Conclusion

We could never make a rule to govern every situation that might arise, nor would we want to. That approach would be an abuse of the law, it would do violence to Christian freedom, and it would be legalistic.

We do want to take to heart the core principles that God's Word teaches us. Once we have learned and appropriated them, we want to apply them consistently, honestly, and graciously.

May God give you wisdom, as you honor him in all you do to celebrate this blessed fellowship we share!

<p>Core biblical principles</p> <p>We want to stand up for God's Word in its entirety because . . .</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We love Jesus, and it is <i>his</i> Word. We honor him by believing, teaching, and practicing <i>everything</i> he says. • We are concerned for the welfare of our own soul. We do not want to be misled by Satan's dangerous lies. • We love our neighbor and are concerned about others being misled by Satan's dangerous lies. <p>In dealing with others, we must ask ourselves . . .</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are we dealing with a weak brother or sister who needs encouragement? • Are we dealing with a persistent errorist whose teaching must be avoided? <p>As we express fellowship with others are we . . .</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebrating true unity with others who are one in faith with us, or practicing false union with others who are not really one in faith with us? • Giving a clear and consistent confession and testimony about where we stand (for the truth, against error), or blurring the lines between truth and error, creating confusion, and allowing error to stand alongside truth? • Honoring God with a clear, loving witness—even when it's hard and unpopular—or compromising our testimony, for the sake of ease, popularity, and expediency?

Lesson One—Teacher’s Guide

This Blessed Fellowship

Lesson Objective

At the conclusion of Lesson One, participants should have a deeper, more complete appreciation for the positive aspects of Christian fellowship, including the tremendous blessings that we enjoy as members of one fellowship.

We start with this emphasis on the blessings of fellowship, because they are so easily taken for granted. When we take these blessings for granted, we lose our motivation to retain them. When our exercise of Christian fellowship becomes lax, we lose these blessings of unity, and only later do we realize what we have lost.

Opening Worship

Read together **Psalm 133**.

All of the lessons include an opening worship. The purpose of this section is to focus participants on key concepts that will be presented in the lesson itself.

All participants should have their own Bible, preferably all the same translation. For this opening worship, have the participants read together in unison the text of Psalm 133.

How does the psalmist describe the unity that believers enjoy? How do you feel when you are in the company of like-minded believers in Jesus Christ?

Unity among believers is pleasant, like the fragrant aroma of anointing oil. It is refreshing like the dew of Mount Hermon (a high, snow-covered mountain range to the north of Israel). In a desert climate like Israel, water means refreshment and life.

The group leader can read the opening prayer, or the leader can invite the group to pray aloud together:

Opening prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, Lord of the Church, you have called us out of darkness into your wonderful light. You have made us part of your family and heirs of eternal life. We thank you for the blessed unity you have created among us through the forgiveness of our sins, through unity of teaching, and through our shared faith. We ask you to bless your church, so that we may always be perfectly united in mind and thought, and we may support and encourage one another on the path to eternal life. Amen.

Introduction

The group leader may read the following introductory paragraphs, or he may invite participants around the table to read. Read the Introduction aloud.

Christian fellowship is a wonderful blessing for God’s people to celebrate! We cherish the unity that binds us together as members of one body of Christ. When all our doctrine agrees with Scripture, we are spared the wrangling and division that arise from internal doctrinal disputes. We enjoy peace and harmony, as we stand together on God’s Word.

We celebrate true peace and harmony only when our teaching and our practice are consistent with Scripture. Where true Christian unity is exchanged for a watered-down belief system that agrees to disagree on much of what the Bible teaches, genuine peace and harmony are compromised. Where pure teaching takes a back seat to emotional attachment, or the Word of God is subordinated to human reason, there can be no true unity.

Because Christian unity is so precious, we appreciate Scripture’s teaching on how that unity is preserved. We see Scripture’s fellowship principles as instruction on preserving something precious, not merely as a set of rules that limit what believers can do. If we fail to appreciate the blessing of unity, we may take it for granted. Only later, after that unity is broken and lost do we look back wistfully and remember the blessing of fellowship we once enjoyed.

Our lesson today leads us to appreciate the blessings that we share as members of one body, joined by a common teaching and practice that rests not on human reason, rules or emotions, but is built squarely on the solid foundation of God’s Word.

Several two-minute discussions appear throughout the lessons, along with other discussion questions that may generate considerably more conversation than is allowable in a two-minute window. The purpose of the two-minute discussions is not to develop comprehensive answers to weighty questions. The purpose is to invite participants to give initial consideration to application questions, and to encourage sharing and discussion around the table. Don’t necessarily feel bound by the two-minute time constraint. Do keep the discussion focused, and be prepared to move on.

Try not to allow stronger personalities to dominate the discussions. If some group members are not participating in the discussions, draw them out with specific questions directed toward the non-participants. Example: "Mrs. Schmidt, how would you answer the question?"

Two-minute discussion:

Define the term *Christian fellowship*. Do you normally have a positive, celebratory view of fellowship, or do you tend to see it in more limiting, restrictive terms? Explain why you answer as you do.

God's Word says . . .

The concept of Christian fellowship is woven throughout the Bible, so it is not something taught in just a few places. Looking at select Bible passages leads us to some key concepts.

This is a very important point that cannot be overlooked: The concept of Christian fellowship is woven throughout the Bible. Sometimes we might be tempted to reduce doctrine to a collection of proof passages that can be cited for or against a particular position. Some doctrines cannot be reduced to a collection of passages, because the teaching is intricately woven into Scripture and simply assumed throughout the context of Scripture.

The Bible passages we will look at here teach some specific truths about the blessings of fellowship, but the blessings of fellowship are really much broader than what is articulated in a few passages.

We were brought into this Christian fellowship

Read Ephesians 4:4-6. How did we become part of the one Holy Christian and Apostolic Church? What unites us in this Christian church?

We were called by God into one hope to be part of the body of Christ. We are united in one body by one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father over all.

Read Isaiah 55:10, 11 and Matthew 28:19, 20. Through what instruments does God bring us into the church?

Isaiah tells us that God's Word does not return empty but accomplishes his purpose. It is through the Word that the Lord touches people with his grace. In Matthew Jesus gives us the Great Commission, telling us that he works through the good news in Word and sacrament.

If God uses these instruments to bring people into the church, what must we conclude about *where* the Holy Christian Church is found on earth?

The Holy Christian Church is found wherever God's Word is preached and the sacraments are administered rightly. Our own synod is not the only place where Christians are found, and we do not claim it is. We recognize that there are Christian disciples of Jesus in other church bodies, even if we do not share complete unanimity in doctrine. We rejoice that these people love and follow Jesus, and we look forward to being truly and completely one with them when we reach heaven.

We celebrate and practice Christian fellowship

The bond of faith and fellowship that ties us together is not just something invisible and internal. It is something that we demonstrate externally and visibly when we practice and celebrate Christian fellowship. Read each of the following passages and answer the question: *How do Christians celebrate and practice Christian fellowship in true unity with one another?*

- 1 Corinthians 1:10—*Paul urges us to be completely united in mind and thought. While this ideally includes not having disagreements about anything (even the color of the carpet), the important context here is that we be united in our teaching, Christian practice, and understanding of God's truth.*
- Hebrews 10:24,25—*We are to worship together and encourage each other. We are not to separate ourselves from the body of believers by giving up meeting together.*
- Colossians 3:16—*We are to admonish one another with God's Word, accept admonition, and worship with one another, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.*
- James 5:13-16—*We pray together, we are spiritually served by our pastors and elders. Our prayers for one another are powerful and effective.*
- James 5:19,20—*We want to keep one another on the path of truth. Our loving concern for each other can prevent us from straying into eternal death.*

- 1 Corinthians 10:17—*We partake of Holy Communion together and eat one bread as members of one body of Christ.*
- Acts 2:42—*We worship, pray, and celebrate Holy Communion together.*
- Romans 12:4-8—*Our differing spiritual gifts complement each other. One person's weaknesses are complemented by another's strengths. Together we form one body in service to the Lord and one another.*
- 3 John 4-8—*We are filled with joy, as we show love and hospitality to one another. We work together to support the preaching of the gospel.*
- Joel 1:3—*We tell the truths of God's Word to our children, so they can pass it along to their children. From generation to generation, we work together in the Christian education and training of our youth.*
- Psalm 78:4-7—*This passage reinforces the Joel passage. From generation to generation, we work together and provide for the Christian education of our youth. As members of one fellowship, we collaborate in our operation of Christian preschools, elementary schools, Sunday schools, high schools and colleges.*
- Mark 16:15—*We share in the task of spreading the gospel. As members of one fellowship, we work together to carry out mission work.*

Two-minute discussion questions.

For each of the following, identify the weakness or misunderstanding regarding the Christian faith and the practice of Christian fellowship:

Ronny works hard all week and considers weekends his time to relax. As a result, he rarely goes to church.

"I believe in Jesus as my Savior," he says, "and I read my Bible at home."

Ronny is missing the fellowship of believers, and he is disobeying God's Word in Hebrews 10:24, 25. God did not intend for believers to remain isolated from other believers. (Chances are, he probably isn't reading his Bible much at home, either.)

Mark and Maria always arrive at the worship service 5 minutes late, just as the first hymn is ending. During the worship service they sit quietly and reverently at the back of the church, and then they leave during the last hymn.

Mark and Maria are missing out on the encouragement and interaction that comes from fellowship with other believers.

Julia is a straight-A student at a Christian high school. She sings loudly in chapel services and participates eagerly in discussions in religion class, but she rarely attends church or the youth study at her church.

Julia is neglecting the fellowship of believers in her congregation. Her Christian high school is not a substitute for membership and participation in a congregation. She needs to repent of her disobedience to the Third Commandment. Sooner or later, her involvement in a Christian school during the week will come to an end. At that point her bad weekend worship habits will catch up with her, as she has no more spiritual encouragement or contact with God's Word in a worship setting.

"I served my time on the church council," says Sam.

"Yes," chimes in Louise, "I used to be president of the ladies' guild. We don't volunteer for those things anymore.

It's time for people of the younger generation to step up and do their share."

We don't cease being members of Christ's body with talents to offer in service, just because we've "done our time." As long as the Lord gives us the ability and opportunities to serve, we are to continue using our gifts in service to the Lord and others.

Read Amos 3:3. The word "synod" comes from the Greek word *synodos*, meaning "walking together." Discuss some of the blessings that we enjoy as a result of our walking together as members of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

We enjoy a long list of blessings as members of one fellowship in our Wisconsin Synod. You might go around the table and ask each group member to list one blessing that we celebrate together. Make a list of your answers.

For study at home

Encourage all of the participants to complete the outside reading and to come prepared for the next lesson. While the outside reading is not essential to gaining an understanding of the concepts taught in each lesson, the outside reading does reinforce key concepts and present a broader picture of what Scripture teaches.

At the beginning of each subsequent lesson you may wish to ask if anyone has any questions that arose from the outside reading. That encourages accountability and invites participants to raise questions about anything they might not have completely understood. You may also wish to point out special insights that you gained from the outside reading.

As the group leader, make sure you complete the outside reading and are prepared to field any questions that might arise.

For a deeper understanding of the Holy Christian Church and the blessings of fellowship that we enjoy in the body of believers, read the book of **Ephesians**.

As you read, take note of the following:

- How often the Apostle Paul speaks of people being brought together by Christ into one family.
- How we Christians celebrate our oneness in Christ by avoiding things that might damage our connection to Jesus.

Next lesson: *Factions and schisms*

Lesson Two

Factions and schisms

Lesson Objective

At the conclusion of Lesson Two, participants should have a clear understanding that there are false teachings and aberrant practices that destroy the unity and bond of Christian fellowship.

It is very important to understand the dangerous nature of teaching and practice that runs contrary to God's Word. Today there is strong pressure from the world around us to view false teaching as "differences in interpretation" or "some people's opinion." Participants should be able to recognize the malevolent and dangerous source of all spiritual lies.

At the beginning of your study time, ask the group if there were any questions that arose from last week's outside reading assignment (Ephesians). If there are no questions, ask if there were any highlights that anyone wishes to discuss (things that they found personally edifying, etc.). Feel free to take as much time as you can allow for open discussion on the outside reading.

Opening Worship

Read together **Psalm 50**.

In this psalm, God describes the privilege of communion with him, but he also describes how that connection is weakened and broken. How does this happen?

God is transcendent. He does not need anything from us. Rather, we need him.

God is the one who defines the terms of our relationship with him. When we think that we can approach God on our own terms, we are deluded and blind. Under such circumstances we can have no relationship with God.

Sin breaks the connection between a human being and God. Where that sin is atoned for (covered and removed), it no longer stands as a barrier between a sinner and God. We enjoy the fullness of oneness and fellowship with him.

Opening prayer: Merciful God and Father, you have called us to be yours through faith in Jesus. Keep us from false beliefs in our hearts, from lies on our lips, and from every temptation and deception of Satan. Keep us firm in your grace and truth, and lead us to grow and mature, so that we may serve you in single-minded devotion until we rest from our earthly struggles and see you in heaven. Amen.

Introduction

Today's common view of truth says that "truth" is whatever you want it to be. One person's "truth" may be of little interest to another person, who has his own personal "truth."

As Christians we recognize the deadly fallacy of this worldly notion. Truth, by definition, is absolute. Something is either true, or it is false. If it is false, then it is untrue. The perception that truth is whatever someone wants it to be is just one more deception: The notion itself is untrue.

Truth is revealed in the Bible. Jesus said to his heavenly Father, "Your word is truth" (John 17:17). When the Holy Spirit opens the eyes of our hearts, truth can be recognized, known, embraced, believed, and lived.

These introductory remarks are extremely important, and they set the tone for the entire lesson. One of the real challenges that we face is that we are surrounded by a world that is tolerant and pluralistic. It is easy for worldly thinking to make its way into our worldview, and we can become improperly tolerant of other points of view that are contrary to Scripture.

Additionally, as we see other Christians around us also standing up for some, but not all, of the truth, it is tempting to find solidarity with them. After all, they are contending for some of the same issues we hold dear: marriage, family, and life.

While we may find agreement with other Christians on certain points, we want to remember that the basis for genuine fellowship is agreement in all the truth.

Two-minute discussion:

Have you ever had a discussion or interaction with a person who responds to your testimony by saying, "Well, that's what you believe!" How do you respond to a relativistic view of truth?

The best way to confront a relativistic view of truth is to appeal to a higher standard. While not everyone accepts the Bible as God's Word, we have no other source of absolute truth to which we can appeal. Many people still respect the Bible, and we simply present it as truth.

The concept of relativistic truth is really a slippery slope that leads to some very bad places. If truth is relative, then who decides what the standards are for behavior, morality, life, etc.? Does society? Does a majority of voters? Finally, the norms that govern conduct and morality become a moving target, and anything goes.

God's word says . . .

Damage to the ties that bind

Jesus had some very strong words for people who were holding onto lies as if they were truth. **Read John 8:42-45.** What is the origin of every false teaching?

The devil and his lies are at the root of every false teaching.

Read Luke 12:51-53. What causes divisions and schisms in the world and in the church?

People's reaction to Jesus Christ and the Word of truth that he proclaims. The truth is the dividing line. People are either with Jesus and walk in the truth, or they are on the other side and reject his truth.

Break out into groups of up to four people. Read each of the following passages and describe the phenomenon or the circumstances that cause the unity of the body to be damaged. Come back together and discuss your findings.

- Matthew 7:15—*False teaching from false prophets damages unity.*
- 1 Corinthians 1:10-12—*Things such as petty factions, squabbles, and personality cults destroy unity.*
- 1 Corinthians 11:17-22—*Discrimination and divisions over matters like the Lord's Supper destroy unity.*
- 1 Corinthians 5:1-5—*A tolerant attitude toward sin destroys unity.*
- Galatians 5:4-10—*False doctrine, disagreement, and tolerance of false teaching destroy unity.*

Can we agree to disagree?

Many churches today insist that there are some doctrines that matter and others that are not important. For example, a *fundamentalist* church insists that there must be agreement in certain *fundamental* Christian teachings (the Triune God, the virgin birth of Christ, etc.), but that there can be disagreement in other teachings (Baptism, the Lord's Supper, conversion, etc.). Identify some possible reasons why people might take this approach to doctrine:

This is open to discussion, but some possible reasons why people might take this approach include:

- *The belief that it is impossible to get Christians really to agree on all matters of doctrine.*
- *The belief that some doctrines are more important than others, and that there is no need to worry about doctrines that are perceived as "unimportant."*
- *The belief that the Bible is an obscure book, subject to many "interpretations," instead of a clear testimony from God's Word.*
- *The belief that in order to reach people we have to water down God's Word to include only those elements that are palatable and perceived as acceptable.*
- *The belief that it is better that a person believe some of God's Word, even if they can't be brought to believe all of it.*
- *A failure to remember that all of God's Word is verbally inspired.*

How does understanding the origin of every false teaching (remember John 8:44) change our approach to "differences of opinion" and "differences in interpretation" in spiritual matters?

We recognize that such notions of opinion and interpretation are really fallacies brought by the devil and the world around us. The Bible is not a matter of opinion and interpretation, but of truth and faithful testimony.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:10. Explain the difference between *unity* and *union*. Which one is Paul encouraging here? How is this achieved?

Unity is true togetherness based upon unanimity of belief. A union is joining disparate elements, usually for a common purpose, whether they agree or not.

Read Ephesians 4:11-15. According to the Apostle Paul, what is the Lord's plan for achieving this objective?

The Lord uses his called servants, whom he himself gave—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers—to teach and instruct people, so that they are built on the solid foundation of truth. When the church is built upon the rock of truth and maturity, we will no longer be spiritual infants, and we will no longer be swayed by every thought that comes along.

Closing discussion:

What are some practical things each of us can do to encourage and foster true unity with other believers in our homes, our congregations, our schools, and anywhere else we interact with fellow Christians?

Open this question up for discussion. Building up one another in truth and love should be a big part of the focus of this discussion. Have the group explore how this might look in practice. This is more than just emotional support in times of difficulty. It calls for instruction, growth in understanding, and growth in Christian maturity that is grounded in God's Word. God's Word needs to be at the heart and center of any growth in unity.

For study at home

A quick read of **1 Corinthians** reveals some of the challenges and obstacles these new Christians were facing. Prior to our next discussion, read **1 Corinthians chapters 1-6**.

Once again, encourage completion of the outside reading. You may wish to suggest that participants read a chapter a day. The outside reading can also help participants develop the personal discipline of a regular devotional life centered in God's Word.

As you read through these chapters of 1 Corinthians, consider:

- What kinds of serious problems had arisen among this group of believers?
- How does the Apostle Paul address these problems? What approach does he take? What spirit does he demonstrate? What tools does he use?

Next lesson: *Watch out and keep away*

Lesson Three

Watch out and keep away

Lesson Objective

At the conclusion of Lesson Three, participants should have a clear understanding of how faithful Christians are to respond to those who adhere to false doctrine and practice.

While there is an opportunity to encourage someone who is straying to return to the right path, we should seize that opportunity and use God's Word to teach and guide. Such a person may be considered a "weak brother," and in patient love we want to strengthen that person with the truth.

When someone commits to false doctrine or practice and refuses to be guided further by God's Word but insists upon adhering to it, then we must follow God's Word and separate from that person or group of people. God's Word tells us what we are to do and why.

At the beginning of your study time, ask the group if there were any questions that arose from last week's outside reading assignment (1 Corinthians 1-6). If there are no questions, ask if there were any highlights that anyone wishes to discuss (things that they found personally edifying, etc.). Feel free to take as much time as you can allow for open discussion on the outside reading.

Opening Worship

Read together **Psalm 46**.

In the midst of earthly turmoil, conflict, division, temptation and tribulation, where does the confidence of Christians lie?

God is our solid rock, the anchor of our soul, the foundation of our faith. While the whole world around is falling to pieces and straying off in every possible direction, God remains firm and constant.

Opening prayer: O God, our Refuge and Strength, eternal, ever-living and all-powerful Lord and Master, your domain extends over all creation. The whole earth is full of your glory. Preserve us in the face of doubt and uncertainty, conflict and compromise, and keep us always faithful to you. Keep our feet on the path of truth that leads to eternal life. Amen.

Introduction

Three watchwords of today's thinking are: *relativism, interpretation, and tolerance*.

We saw in our last lesson that today's secular thinking starts with the belief that there are no absolutes. All truth is relative to a person's own experience or frame of mind. In other words, "truth" is whatever a person wants it to be. Today's thinking also preaches tolerance for dissenting viewpoints. According to prevalent thought today, the only viewpoint not to be tolerated is intolerance itself.

The Bible is a book of absolutes. The teaching of Scripture is a still, small voice proclaiming the truth, even as secular philosophy turns up its own volume and tries to drown out the Bible.

Our lesson examines how we are to respond to the lies all around us, as we strive to thank, praise, and glorify Christ, the living Word.

It is tempting to develop our own response to what we see all around us. We might be tempted to disengage completely and retreat to a place of complete safety where the corruption of the world cannot touch us. That might be appealing, but we would remove our testimony from a world that desperately needs what Christians have to offer.

Another temptation is to think that we can immerse ourselves in the world and interact with the world on our own terms, because we are strong enough in our own faith to be immune to the dangers swirling around us. This is presumptuous and foolish.

Scripture tells us that we are to testify faithfully, to teach diligently, and to admonish lovingly whenever we have the chance, but there also comes a time when we must separate ourselves from corrupting influences, not only for our own sakes but for the sake of giving a clear testimony to those who are caught in error.

God's Word says . . .

Check out the truth

Read 1 John 4:1 and 1 Thessalonians 5:21, 22. What does God tell us to do when we encounter others who profess to be Christians?

God tells us that we are to test what they teach and practice, to determine whether it agrees with Scripture.

Read John 8:31 and John 14:15. Faithfulness to the Lord Jesus is not a matter of good intentions or sentimental feelings. How does Jesus himself define faithfulness to him?

Faithfulness is adherence to all of Jesus' Word and continuing in his Word. We obey Jesus' Word and walk in his commands, because we love him and want to serve him faithfully.

Read 2 Timothy 4:3, 4. What sad reality are we facing in these last days?

People refuse to put up with sound doctrine. Instead, they gather around themselves false teachers who "scratch where it itches" and tell them what they want to hear.

Respond appropriately to error

Break out into groups of up to four people. Read through each of the following passages, and from each passage identify at least one way we are to respond when we encounter teaching that does not agree with God's Word. Discuss your findings with the larger group.

- 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1—*We are to come out from them and be separate. We are not to touch anything that is unclean or false but are to avoid it diligently and scrupulously.*
- Hebrews 13:9—*We are not to allow ourselves to be carried away by strange teachings. We are to test what is being taught and determine whether it conforms to God's Word. If it does not conform to the truth, we are to reject it and not allow ourselves to be persuaded by it.*
- Romans 16:17—*We are to watch out for those who cause divisions and put up stumbling blocks (offenses) with their false teaching, and we are to keep away from them.*
- Titus 3:10—*We are to warn a divisive person, and then we are to separate from that person and have nothing to do with him. A divisive person is someone who breaks the unity of the body by teaching or believing things that are untrue. (The point is not that we adhere to a rigid "once or twice" schedule, but that we actively try to win a person over, while at the same time recognizing that the time comes when we must acknowledge a separation is necessary.)*
- Psalm 101:1-4—*We will strive to lead a blameless life. We will avoid things that are corrupting. We will set before our eyes no vile thing. We will despise the sin and wickedness of people who are faithless.*
- 2 John 10, 11—*We are not to welcome or support those who propagate false teaching. Doing so would lend credence to their cause and lend support to their error.*
- Amos 3:3—*We are to walk together in faith and in unity of doctrine and practice only with those who are in agreement with us on all the teaching of Scripture. **Important note:** The translation of the New International Version (both NIV 1984 and NIV 2011) does not accurately render the sense of this passage. The proper sense is communicated better in the translation of the King James Version, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" The NIV translation may leave the impression that the only agreement required is the agreement to take a walk together. The correct sense of the passage is that agreement is necessary as two people walk together.*
- 2 Timothy 4:5—*We are to use good judgment in all situations. We are to endure hardship when our stand for the truth is unpopular. We are to continue giving a clear and faithful confession.*

But . . . why?

God not only tells us *what* we are to do when we encounter false teaching and wrong practice; he also tells us *why* we are to obey these directions from his Word. God gives us the instructions above for at least three important reasons. Take turns reading through the following passages to identify why God has given us these principles to follow:

Reason #1:

- Psalm 119:103-105—*God's Word is delightful and sweet to our souls. It is a lamp to our feet and a light for our path.*
- John 8:31—*Jesus instructs us to continue in his Word.*
- 2 Corinthians 13:8—*We want to adhere completely to the truth. We are striving to be strong in God's Word and perfect in our obedience to God's Word.*

Summarize: *We obey God's direction, because we love Jesus and his Word, and we do not want to stray from it.*

Reason #2:

- Matthew 7:15—*False prophets are dangerous. We are not to tolerate them or become cozy with them. We are to watch out for them and stay away from them, because like ferocious wolves they can tear us to pieces.*
- 2 Corinthians 11:3—*There is the very real danger that we will be deceived and led astray from sincere and pure devotion to Christ.*
- 2 Timothy 2:17, 18—*False teaching spreads like a putrid disease (gangrene). It corrupts and rots, as it eats away at the truth.*
- Galatians 5:9—*Like yeast in a batch of dough, false teaching spreads and infects everything.*

Summarize: *We follow God's directions out of concern for our own souls, because false teaching is dangerous and infectious.*

Reason #3:

- Titus 3:10—*We are to warn those who become divisive by departing from God's truth. We caution them that their path is dangerous.*
- Titus 1:11—*We are to silence those who are teaching falsely, so that their teaching doesn't have a ruinous effect on others.*
- Titus 1:13,14—*We are to rebuke those who teach falsely, so that they remain sound in the faith and reject error.*
- James 5:19,20—*We are to testify to those who are straying, so that we can turn them from their errors.*
- James 3:1—*We are to take very seriously the responsibility of teaching, because the welfare of souls is at stake.*
- Luke 17:1-4—*We are to be careful that we do not cause others to sin. In response to repentance we are to forgive freely.*
- 1 Peter 3:15—*We are always to give a clear testimony, a clear confession of the truth, to anyone we encounter, especially when we are asked what we believe. We are to do this with gentleness and respect.*

Summarize: *We follow God's directions out of love for our neighbor, always wanting to give a clear confession that points that person to the truth and away from error. Love for our neighbor does not permit us to tolerate his error or allow him to remain on a false path.*

For study at home

Paul grieved over the false doctrine that was already appearing in the church at his time. In his second letter to Pastor Timothy, he gives some very practical instructions for dealing with problems that arise in the church. Prior to our next discussion, **Read 2 Timothy**.

2 Timothy is one of the Pastoral Epistles. The counsel the Apostle Paul leaves Pastor Timothy here is practical and down-to-earth.

2 Timothy was the last of the Bible books that Paul wrote before he died. How was Paul honest about the challenges the church would face after he was gone? How does he express confidence for the church's future?

Paul was very clear that false teaching and sinful practice would arise in the church. He clearly instructs Timothy and us how we are to deal with such situations as they arise. Paul remains confident that the Lord Jesus will continue to protect and care for his church. We do not need to be afraid of the challenges that we confront.

Next lesson: Fellowship in practice

Lesson Four

Fellowship in Practice

Lesson Objective

At the conclusion of Lesson Four, participants should have a clear understanding of how to evaluate certain fellowship situations and how to apply biblical fellowship principles to certain situations they might encounter. Participants should understand the difference between a “weak brother” and a “persistent errorist.”

The challenge as we encounter every situation is to avoid becoming pragmatic—that is, taking a practical, easy way out—instead of applying Scripture faithfully. There is always the temptation to take shortcuts or to overlook important principles for the sake of an expedient outcome. We want to remain solidly grounded on God’s Word, so that as we evaluate situations that arise, we are doing so on the basis of what God says, not on the basis of human opinion.

At the beginning of your study time, ask the group if there were any questions that arose from last week’s outside reading assignment (2 Timothy). If there are no questions, ask if there were any highlights that anyone wishes to discuss (things that they found personally edifying, etc.). Feel free to take as much time as you can allow for open discussion on the outside reading.

Opening Worship

Read together **Psalm 97**.

List at least four blessings of walking with the LORD that the psalmist outlines in the verses of Psalm 97:

Psalm 97 praises the Lord for who he is and for what he does. (1) We can be confident in his justice, his power, and his victory. He rules and governs all things. (2) We don’t need to fear our foes, for they cannot stand before the Lord. (3) We will never be put to shame like those who worship images and boast in idols. (4) We are thankful for God’s righteous judgments. (5) He guards the lives of his faithful ones. (6) He delivers his people from the hand of the wicked. (7) We walk in his light, and the upright in heart are filled with joy. Etc.

Opening prayer: Gracious Savior, your mercies are new every morning, and your compassions never fail. We praise and thank you for your loving kindness, your peace, forgiveness and salvation, and for all the blessings that flow from your loving hand. Keep us in the path of life, and lead us to life everlasting. Amen.

Introduction

It’s so easy to compartmentalize our faith.

The tongues that beautifully praise God during the church service may spout obscenities at a sporting event. The hearts that celebrate Christ’s love and peace on Sunday may fill with bitterness, malice, greed, and lust during the week. The family that worships together in church may be torn apart by an argument on the drive home. All the fine-sounding religious rhetoric can shatter into a thousand pieces when it hits the “real world.” It happens when we place expediency above consistency, pragmatism above Christian practice, and compromise ahead of faithful commitment.

If it’s so easy to compromise in the face of “big” temptations, imagine the challenge to remain faithful in all of the “little” things! We run into just such challenges as we strive faithfully to apply principles of Christian fellowship in a world that wants to undermine our faith and devotion from all sides.

The faithful practice of fellowship falls into the realm of Christian sanctification. It is a matter of giving a faithful, consistent testimony to those around us. It is consistency between principle and application, between theory and practice.

God’s Word says . . .

Find out where others stand

In **Luke 17:20,21** Jesus teaches us that the kingdom of God is not outwardly visible. The kingdom of God is within us, in our hearts. Since we cannot see into a person’s heart, we must look at other, visible things to know whether a person believes, teaches, and puts God’s Word into practice correctly.

Read Matthew 7:15-23. To determine whether we are one in faith, or not, what visible things should we look at?

We can only evaluate external things. These include a person's teaching and his outward confession.

Read Ephesians 4:1-3. How does Paul encourage us to deal with fellow believers who are struggling with sin or false teaching?

Bear with one another's weaknesses in gentleness and humility. If someone has questions and is willing to be instructed, we should teach. We should not immediately write someone off because they say something that is incorrect or have questions about what Scripture teaches. We want to pull out all the stops to try to prevent schisms (divisions) from fragmenting the body of Christ.

Read 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1. How are we to deal with those who willfully persist in sin or in false teaching?

If someone commits to a false or otherwise sinful path and refuses to depart from it, we must separate from him. We cannot continue to pretend to be one with someone, when in reality no true unity exists. We cannot be "unequally yoked" with people who believe differently, who have rejected what God's truth says on a given issue, and who adamantly persist in error.

Two-minute discussion questions:

Based on the passages above, we must draw a distinction between someone who is a *weak brother* and someone who is a *persistent errorist*. Describe the difference between a weak brother (sister) and a persistent errorist.

A weak brother is someone with whom we have and practice Christian fellowship (i.e., we publicly confess that we are one in faith) but who is struggling with questions, doubts, or weaknesses that may threaten understanding of the truth.

A persistent errorist is someone who has been shown the truth and called to turn away from false teaching or sinful practice but who continues to persist in the error or sinful practice.

What does a person's church affiliation or his worship practice tell us outwardly and openly about whether he holds to the truth of Scripture, or not?

Church membership is a public confession of where a person stands. By affiliating with a given church, a person is aligning himself with that church's teaching and practice. This is true whether the person realizes it or not. A person may affiliate with a given church because of programs it offers or personal preferences, but by affiliating he is also giving public testimony about his agreement with what that organization teaches and stands for. It is a form of "confession by association." Because many in our culture do not view church membership in this way, it is all the more important that we patiently and lovingly teach the truth that church membership means something.

Is it possible that a person may hold to some false teaching in certain areas but still remain a Christian?
What implications does this have for expressing Christian fellowship on this side of eternity?

It is possible that some false teaching may not immediately destroy saving faith. Often there exists a "happy inconsistency" between the official beliefs of a church and the private beliefs of its members. For example, a Roman Catholic Church may teach parishioners to pray to the Virgin Mary and count on her to help get them to heaven, but in practice a given Roman Catholic church member might pray only to God and trust exclusively in Jesus for salvation. In other cases, a person may believe something that is untrue but not have his faith completely destroyed by that false belief. An example might be a Christian who believes that he became a Christian by making a decision to accept Christ, and yet in the end he is really trusting in God to save him, not his own decision (in other words, he's trusting God's grace, not his own works).

The implication of this is that we can be sure that there are true Christians in other churches, even heterodox (false teaching) churches. The visible church will always be divided and fragmented by false teaching and false beliefs. Unity in the invisible church continues, but we cannot express that unity here on earth, as long as there is persistent error.

Preaching and teaching

Read Romans 16:17,18. What direction does this give us when it comes to choosing preachers, teachers, and worship leaders for our worship services and Bible studies?

We must constantly watch out for false teachers and be on guard against them. When we identify them, we must keep away from them. We are to affiliate only with preachers, teachers and parishioners who hold to all of God's truth.

Scenario for discussion:

Your pastor is going on vacation and needs to find a preacher to preach while he is gone. Would there be anything wrong with your pastor writing a sermon, then calling a local Roman Catholic priest or Baptist minister to deliver the sermon?

As you discuss this scenario, take the following into consideration:

- If the fill-in preacher agreed not to depart from the manuscript prepared by your pastor, you could be confident that the content of the sermon would contain no false doctrine.
- Apart from what is actually spoken in the sermon, is there another message that is being communicated by having this preacher fill in?

There is a confession being given, a statement being made, simply by having someone of another church fellowship function in this way. The visiting pastor doesn't just represent his own personal, private beliefs; he represents everything that his church stands for. A Roman Catholic priest represents the Roman Church and everything it teaches and stands for. The same is true for the Baptist minister and for anyone of any other church affiliation.

- What reactions might be expected from the people who are sitting and listening to the fill-in preacher?

We might rightly expect people to be confused when confronted with this situation. There is an inherent inconsistency in having a Roman Catholic priest stand and preach from a Lutheran pulpit. The same is true for any minister from any fellowship other than our own.

- Can someone be a "false teacher," even if he does not teach falsely on a given day or in a specific situation?

Yes, because he is a representative of his church body and everything that it stands for.

- What purpose do fellowship principles serve here?

The Bible's fellowship principles help us render a clear confession, for the health of souls. Limiting guest preachers only to those who are affiliated with a church of our same fellowship ensures that there will be no confusion created in people's minds. We will be delivering a message that is consistent both in teaching and in practice.

Apply biblical principles

Let's recap the principles that God's Word has taught us. Take turns reading through the following bullet points aloud:

We want to stand up for God's Word in its entirety because . . .

- We love Jesus, and it is *his* Word. We honor him by believing, teaching, and practicing *everything* he says.
- We are concerned for the welfare of our own soul. We do not want to be misled by Satan's dangerous lies.
- We love our neighbor and are concerned about others being misled by Satan's dangerous lies.

In dealing with others, we must ask ourselves . . .

- Are we dealing with a weak brother or sister who needs encouragement?
- Are we dealing with a persistent errorist whose teaching must be avoided?

As we express fellowship with others are we . . .

- Celebrating true unity with others who are one in faith with us, or practicing false union with others who are not really one in faith with us?
- Giving a clear and consistent confession and testimony about where we stand (for the truth, against error), or blurring the lines between truth and error, creating confusion, and allowing error to stand alongside truth?
- Honoring God with a clear, loving witness—even when it's hard and unpopular— or compromising our testimony, for the sake of ease, popularity, and expediency?

These principles are important, core concepts for all participants to appropriate. These are the principles that we will bring to bear as we evaluate real-life situations that we might encounter. It is important that all of the participants have a clear understanding of the scriptural basis for each of these principles.

Case studies

Additional case studies are included as companion materials to this Bible study. Use the principles above to evaluate the scenarios presented in the case studies, and discuss proper application of fellowship principles in each case.

For study at home

The phrase "A little yeast works through a whole batch of dough" appears more than once in Scripture. Use a concordance or Bible software to find each instance where it occurs. Study the context in each case.

The phrase is found in 1 Corinthians 5:6 and Galatians 5:9. A similar concept is found in Matthew 13:33 and Luke 13:21. In each case the idea is that something proliferates, as yeast does in dough. In 1 Corinthians and Galatians the issues are false teaching and sinful behavior that spread and infect others. In the Gospels, Jesus is talking about the positive spread of the good news of the kingdom of God.

What do church history and practical experience tell us about the real warning contained in that phrase? What happens when we disregard God's warnings and seek our own solutions?

Church history and practical experience teach us that where false doctrine or sinful practice is tolerated, it spreads and corrupts and destroys others. Just as a rotten apple in a barrel soon causes surrounding apples to rot, so it is with false doctrine and tolerated sin.

Despite God's warnings, we might be inclined to think that we can tolerate a certain measure of false doctrine or sin without major consequences. History and experience show that this is not true. We will invariably suffer the consequences, as the error proliferates and the infection spreads.

Next lesson: Fellowship in practice (continued)

Lesson Five

Fellowship in Practice (continued)

Lesson Objective

At the conclusion of Lesson Five, participants should have a clear understanding of how biblical fellowship principles are to be applied faithfully and consistently in a number of situations. Participants should have their understanding of core biblical principles reinforced by repetition and practical application.

At the beginning of your study time, review the results of the outside assignment to evaluate the phrase “A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.” The phrase is found in 1 Corinthians 5:6 and Galatians 5:9. Invite participants to describe how the phrase is used to describe something dangerous and insidious. Invite them to discuss any references they found where the phrase is used in a positive sense (Jesus’ words in Matthew 13:33 and Luke 13:21 describe how the kingdom of God proliferates).

Opening Worship

Read together **Psalm 119:9-16**.

Psalm 119 is an *acrostic* psalm. The psalm is divided into sections, with all the verses of each section starting with the same Hebrew letter. Verses 9-16 all start with the Hebrew letter *Beth*, which corresponds to our letter B.

Psalm 119 is about the value of God’s Word. Since the psalm goes through the Hebrew alphabet, we might say that the psalm is about “God’s Word from A to Z.”

Why is God’s Word so precious and so important, according to Psalm 119?

God’s Word helps us keep our way pure, as we live according to it. God’s Word invites us to seek him with all our heart. God is found in his Word; there he reveals himself, so that we can know him and have a relationship with our Maker. God’s Word is hidden in our hearts to guide our footsteps and keep us from sin. We find great joy in following God’s statutes. We find great riches in God’s Word and delight in his decrees.

Opening prayer: O Lord, your Word is truly a lamp to my feet and light for my path [Psalm 119:105]. Please keep me faithful to your Word, so that I hear it, listen to it, obey it, defend it, proclaim it, and walk in it. Your Word is my faithful hope, my confident joy, and my certain promise of forgiveness and life. Teach me your Word of truth, and let it always be my love and my delight. Amen.

Introduction

God’s Word reveals both the law and the gospel to us. Knowing when and how to apply each of these central doctrines is the highest theological art. It calls for discernment and wisdom, firmness and faithfulness, patience and grace.

Whenever we use and apply God’s Word, we are to do so in love. Love is the fulfillment of the law (Romans 13:10), and love is the embodiment of the gospel (1 John 4:10). The opposite of *legalistic* is not always *evangelical*. The opposite of *legalistic* can be *lax*, and both legalism and laxity are wrong. If we err on the side of the law or err on the side of the gospel, we are still erring. Our goal is always to apply God’s Word consistently and faithfully, giving a clear and honest confession, and glorifying God as we sincerely love our neighbor.

This is not a popular position in today’s world. In today’s thinking, being gracious or loving means letting anything go, always giving people what they want, being tolerant of any sin, and accepting of any error. True love stands against this worldly nonsense and stands firmly on God’s truth, striving to apply it honestly and faithfully, always in love for souls.

See the accompanying Glossary of Terms for definitions of terms like “legalistic” and “evangelical.” It is important for participants to understand that we want to understand and apply God’s Word correctly, without straying to the right or to the left (into legalism or laxity).

God's Word says . . .

Holy Communion

Read 1 Corinthians 10:17. What are we celebrating when we gather for Holy Communion?

We are celebrating our oneness in faith and our unity in the body of Christ.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:27-31. What occurs when someone communes unworthily? What consequences may follow?

When we commune unworthily Scripture says we eat and drink judgment upon ourselves. God's judgment may come in the form of weakness, illness, or even being taken out of this world. God's judgment is a discipline. Its purpose is to correct and train us, so that we will not continue in sin and ultimately have impenitence result in our condemnation with the rest of the unbelieving world.

The term we use to describe the practice of admitting only qualified communicants to the Lord's Table is *Closed Communion*.

Both the terms "Closed Communion" and "Close Communion" have been used. Each term brings a slightly different connotation, although the net outcome is the same, namely that those outside of our fellowship do not commune with us. The term "Closed Communion" has more of a basis in historical usage in the Christian church through the centuries.

Two-minute discussions:

How can we know for certain whether someone is a worthy or unworthy communicant?

Is every card-carrying member of a congregation or synod in fellowship with ours prepared to take Communion, simply by virtue of his or her church membership?

Since we can't look into people's hearts, what must we look at?

We cannot look into a person's heart to know whether he is worthy or unworthy. Not every member of our fellowship, simply by virtue of having been instructed and confirmed, is necessarily a worthy communicant. It is entirely possible that hypocrites, who are secretly unbelievers or secretly living in unrepented sin, may outwardly be members in good standing and thus present themselves for Communion. Finally, such secret dishonesty is a matter between the person and God.

What we can evaluate is a person's outward confession. That confession is declared in a number of ways, including through a person's church membership. Church membership means something important, and it must be understood as meaning something important. Church affiliation is an outward declaration of agreement with that church and everything it teaches, supports, and stands for.

Some people might feel that it should be their choice alone to participate in or abstain from Communion.

What responsibility do the men serving Communion have toward the communicants?

What responsibility does a congregation collectively have toward those who commune?

A pastor serving Communion has a serious and solemn responsibility to commune only those who, to the best of his knowledge, are prepared to be at the Communion table. To knowingly serve someone who is openly impenitent or who clearly holds to a different confession is to aid and abet that person's error and to contribute to that person's falling under God's judgment. A faithful and conscientious pastor cannot be complicit in such behavior.

This responsibility extends to the congregation at large, as well. Every member of the congregation has a responsibility to watch out for the spiritual welfare of those in its midst. Congregation members should faithfully and diligently take measures to ensure that those at the Communion table are indeed prepared.

Worship and prayer

Read Revelation 8:3,4. Prayer is an act of _____.

Prayer is an act of worship.

Read Isaiah 29:13 and Matthew 6:5-8. Regardless of who offers a prayer, what dangerous possibility always exists when someone is leading a prayer?

It is entirely possible that the person leading a prayer is a hypocrite who is simply going through the motions, honoring God with his lips, while his heart is far from the Lord.

Remember the Word of the Lord in **2 Corinthians 6:14-18**. With whom alone are we to engage in the practice of worship and prayer?

We are to separate ourselves from all uncleanness, including false teaching and false practice, so that we unite in prayer and worship only with those who are teaching and walking in the truth.

Application discussions:

What message does praying together send to those who participate in the prayer and to those who observe?
When is that message honest? When is it dishonest?

Praying together says that our hearts and minds are united in worship and conversation with God. The message to each other and to any observers is that we are one in faith.

When we truly are one in faith and confession, then that message is honest. When we are not really united in faith and confession, then the message sent and the impression given are dishonest. At the point we are pretending to be something that we really are not. This is not true unity but false union.

Proclamation and participation, soloists and instrumentalists

As we explore some of the possible situations that we might encounter in the practice of fellowship, we realize quickly that Scripture doesn't give us quick answers in the form of "You shall do this" or "You shall not do that." Yet the principles taught in Scripture can all be brought to bear. It requires a great measure of Christian maturity to apply principles consistently and lovingly. Remember the inspired Word in **2 Timothy 4:1-5**.

Paul exhorts Timothy to preach the Word faithfully, to correct, rebuke, and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.

Application discussions:

A wedding couple would like to have the bride's cousin sing "The Lord's Prayer" at their wedding. The bride's cousin is a member of a church that teaches unbiblical doctrine (or is not a member of any church).

There is nothing wrong with the text of the song, so no false doctrine will be proclaimed.

What message would be communicated to the soloist if she were permitted to sing?

What message would be communicated to those in the congregation who know the soloist's religious views?

Would the message change if the bride's cousin were an instrumentalist, instead of a soloist?

The issue here is not whether false doctrine will be taught or heard. The issue here is the message that is communicated both to the soloist and the congregation. If we were to allow someone not of our fellowship to participate in a worship service, we would be sending a message that church membership and confession don't matter. We would be saying, in essence, "We know that you don't confess the truth that we confess, but that doesn't matter. You can still worship with us and even take a leadership role in proclaiming a message to the congregation." This would not only be dishonest to both soloist and congregation, it would demean all of God's Word that instructs us not to join with people who do not hold to the truth.

The inconsistent message is no different if the person is an instrumentalist instead of a vocalist. By permitting that person to take an active role in the worship service, we are downplaying doctrinal differences and saying that the person's public confession and church affiliation don't matter.

A high school student auditions to sing in the high school choir that participates in and sometimes leads worship in area churches.

The student is an active member of a church that teaches unbiblical doctrine.

The student and the student's family have expressed a deep appreciation for the Lutheran high school and its Christian environment and teaching, but they have made it clear that they are happy with their church and are not interested in leaving their church to affiliate with a congregation of our fellowship.

What message would be communicated to the student if he or she were permitted to participate in carrying out the choir's role?

Would the message change if the student were only part of a large group and only not permitted to sing solos or read lessons?

Again, the issue here is not whether false doctrine will be taught or heard, since the content of the choir's music will be determined by the director, and the student is simply singing along. The issue again is the message that is communicated to the choir participant who remains outside of our fellowship, to the rest of the choir members, and to the congregation members observing the choir's participation in the worship service.

The message to all involved is that doctrinal differences don't matter. We are doing a disservice to the choir member outside our fellowship, because we are not clearly saying, "Your affiliation with a church that teaches unbiblical doctrine is dangerous and sinful. Your false beliefs conflict with God's Word and can be deadly to your soul." Instead, we are essentially saying, "We can agree to disagree. Even though we know your faith and confession are different from ours, it doesn't matter. We can downplay our differences, and we can still have you join us in proclaiming God's Word." There is no example in the Bible where Scripture allows for this kind of tolerance and indifference. To the contrary, God's Word consistently forbids any tolerance of a known false faith and confession.

Participation in a large group or serving as a soloist or reader really doesn't make any difference. The mere allowance of participation in worship leadership at any level can blur the clear distinction between truth and error.

Conclusion

We could never make a rule to govern every situation that might arise, nor would we want to. That approach would be an abuse of the law, it would do violence to Christian freedom, and it would be legalistic.

We do want to take to heart the core principles that God's Word teaches us. Once we have learned and appropriated them, we want to apply them consistently, honestly, and graciously.

May God give you wisdom, as you honor him in all you do to celebrate this blessed fellowship we share!

Rigorously reinforce the core biblical principles below, and encourage all participants to grasp them thoroughly and take ownership of them. If there are any principles that remain unclear, go back to supporting Bible passages and review Scripture's teaching on that point, so that it is clear what God says in his Word.

Thank you for guiding the participants of your group in this study of God's Word. May his name be glorified, as we teach and walk in his truth!

Core biblical principles

We want to stand up for God's Word in its entirety because . . .

- We love Jesus, and it is *his* Word. We honor him by believing, teaching, and practicing *everything* he says.
- We are concerned for the welfare of our own soul. We do not want to be misled by Satan's dangerous lies.
- We love our neighbor and are concerned about others being misled by Satan's dangerous lies.

In dealing with others, we must ask ourselves . . .

- Are we dealing with a weak brother or sister who needs encouragement?
- Are we dealing with a persistent errorist whose teaching must be avoided?

As we express fellowship with others are we . . .

- Celebrating true unity with others who are one in faith with us, or practicing false union with others who are not really one in faith with us?
- Giving a clear and consistent confession and testimony about where we stand (for the truth, against error), or blurring the lines between truth and error, creating confusion, and allowing error to stand alongside truth?
- Honoring God with a clear, loving witness—even when it's hard and unpopular—or compromising our testimony, for the sake of ease, popularity, and expediency?

Case Studies

The case studies that follow are intended for use after participants have worked through the Bible study and been reminded of the principles outlined in Scripture. Each of the case studies provides a ministry situation in which the principles of Scripture need to be applied. Three of the cases studies (numbers 1, 6, and 7) have a sample analysis provided.

The study leader would do well to think through the matter beforehand and to seek counsel from others, whether that's a circuit pastor, district president, or a member of the committee that produced this toolbox. As noted in the introduction, it is often helpful to have the objective viewpoint of an outsider in evaluating ministry situations.

Case 1

A Chinese student attending through an agency as a freshman in your ALHS is clearly skeptical toward Christianity and professes atheism. Because it is a requirement, the student participates in religion classes and through memorization and study skills achieves an A in both semesters. The student returns again as a sophomore in fall, noting his contact with a Friends of China volunteer in his hometown and the great religious discussions they had throughout the summer. His first-semester religion teacher notes the student actually asks questions in class and engages in theological discussions with other students in the school. Shortly before Christmas, the Chinese student requests to sing in the choir beginning in January, to fulfill his fine-arts credit requirement.

Key issues

- Family info – Single young student away from home
- Motivation – placement by agency as an international option
- Religious background – Atheistic
- Reaction to school’s expectations – Duty to comply
- Attitude toward religious instruction – Skeptical at first, increasingly engaged

Key questions

1. What would be key topics to be discussed in the pre-enrollment process?
2. What is the key information about this student that should be applied to a participation decision?
3. Should this student be allowed to participate in a choir that proclaims the gospel in sacred worship?
4. If no, what could be changed in the case study to allow for the student to participate?

Sample analysis of the issues

This case study presents some of the various issues that factor into the decision concerning participation in a choir that is proclaiming the gospel in sacred worship. The Chinese student attending your school arrived as an atheist with little or no interest in Christianity. In your pre-enrollment meeting with the student and his host family, you explained your school’s mission and expectations. He agreed that he would attend religion classes and chapel, and understood that he would not be participating in a choir that would be proclaiming the gospel. It would have been unfair to him if he would have been asked to proclaim a message in worship that he did not believe. It also would have been confusing to his fellow students, since God does not want us to express fellowship with those who do not share our faith. Yet after a year of religion classes, chapel messages, and conversations with Christian friends, it appears that the Chinese student has developed a sincere appreciation for what the Bible teaches. A greater issue than his request to sing in choir is whether or not his appreciation for Christianity is actually a spark of faith. You will want to question him lovingly about his knowledge and understanding of the gospel. God willing, he will seek to be baptized and will continue to be instructed

Core biblical principles

We want to stand up for God’s Word in its entirety because . . .

- We love Jesus, and it is *his* Word. We honor him by believing, teaching, and practicing *everything* he says.
- We are concerned for the welfare of our own soul. We do not want to be misled by Satan’s dangerous lies.
- We love our neighbor and are concerned about others being misled by Satan’s dangerous lies.

In dealing with others, we must ask ourselves . . .

- Are we dealing with a weak brother or sister who needs encouragement?
- Are we dealing with a persistent errorist whose teaching must be avoided?

As we express fellowship with others are we . . .

- Celebrating true unity with others who are one in faith with us, or practicing false union with others who are not really one in faith with us?
- Giving a clear and consistent confession and testimony about where we stand (for the truth, against error), or blurring the lines between truth and error, creating confusion, and allowing error to stand alongside truth?
- Honoring God with a clear, loving witness—even when it’s hard and unpopular— or compromising our testimony, for the sake of ease, popularity, and expediency?

in God's Word. Under such circumstances, you might decide that this infant Christian may very well participate in a choir that proclaims the gospel in sacred worship, but he would not be able to commune with his classmates. (This is not a "different level of fellowship," since Scripture does not speak of levels of fellowship. It's a matter of knowledge, understanding, and Christian maturity as it applies to this young man in his Christian education). His high level of interest may lead to a Bible information class at one of your local congregations. As he grows in his faith and his understanding, he may attain communicant status. On the other hand, if you discover that his interest in Christianity is little more than an open-minded and curious tolerance toward what the Bible teaches, then you will continue to instruct him but refrain from having him participate in a choir that will proclaim in worship beliefs he still does not share. Perhaps he will be able to join choir and earn a credit without participating in sacred worship services.

Case 2

A Buddhist family from India moves to your community because the father has been granted a 5-year fellowship at the medical college. They have two children of high-school age and want to attend. They are very understanding and accepting of all cultures and beliefs. In fact, they know many Christians and consider them to be loving and caring people. Their children want to fully participate in all activities. The family is all about education and wants their children to learn as much as possible about the culture and beliefs of the school and America in general.

Key issues

- Family information –
- Motivation –
- Religious background –
- Reaction to school's expectations –
- Attitude toward religious instruction –

Key questions

1. What would be key topics to be discussed in the pre-enrollment process?
2. What is the key information about this student that should be applied to a participation decision?
3. Should this student be allowed to participate in a choir that proclaims the gospel in sacred worship?
4. If no, what could be changed in the case study to allow for the student to participate?

Core biblical principles

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- We are concerned for the welfare of our own soul. We do not want to be misled by Satan's dangerous lies.
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- Honoring God with a clear, loving witness—even when it's hard and unpopular— or compromising our testimony, for the sake of ease, popularity, and expediency?

Case 3

A single mother wants to enroll her youngest child. Her three older children, all boys, attended the public school and were not extremely successful. Two of them are currently in trouble with law enforcement. The mother wants more for her daughter, and the ALHS seems like the place for her. Back in the day, the family had been Roman Catholic but no longer attends any church. The mother and daughter both mention perceived benefits of getting “more involved” in church. They will do whatever it takes for the daughter to attend. Of course, they want her to fully participate. She is looking forward to learning.

Key issues

- Family information –
- Motivation –
- Religious background –
- Reaction to school’s expectations –
- Attitude toward religious instruction –

Key questions

1. What would be key topics to be discussed in the pre-enrollment process?
2. What is the key information about this student that should be applied to a participation decision?
3. Should this student be allowed to participate in a choir that proclaims the gospel in sacred worship?
4. If no, what could be changed in the case study to allow for the student to participate?

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Case 4

A pastor of ELCA congregation in the community has 4 children. The oldest is beginning the 8th grade, and the father arranges an appointment to visit with principal regarding enrollment next fall. Has heard great things about the school and has no problem with the religious instruction that will take place. He believes his children need to make spiritual decisions on their own and wants them to fully participate in all classes, events, and activities the school has to offer. He agrees with the full compliance expectation and would have it no other way.

Key issues

- Family information –
- Motivation –
- Religious background –
- Reaction to school's expectations –
- Attitude toward religious instruction –

Key questions

1. What would be key topics to be discussed in the pre-enrollment process?
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Case 5

Two married adults from the neighborhood serve as foster parents. Recently, they received custody of a 15-year-old boy from a very difficult home situation. Neither the foster parents nor the foster son have had any connection with church or Christianity in their lives. The foster parents have heard from others in the neighborhood that your ALHS is a great environment for safety and student support. The student grudgingly came at the beginning of sophomore year with no interest in music participation. During the next two years, the student had fewer outbursts, fell in with a great circle of friends, and generally became a solid school citizen. In spring of his junior year, he signs up for choir in preparing his senior schedule.

Key issues

- Family information –
- Motivation –
- Religious background –
- Reaction to school's expectations –
- Attitude toward religious instruction –

Key questions

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Case 6

A family moves into the neighborhood from out of state. They are looking for a quality school with a safe environment for their sophomore daughter. She is gifted musically. The parents were raised Mormon but have not visited a church of any kind since their college days over 20 years ago. Your ALHS interests them due to the academic quality, numerous opportunities for musical performance, and the safe reputation discussed in the community. They fully understand the expectations for their daughter to attend all classes. The couple states they will be encouraging their daughter to keep an open mind regarding all religious instruction.

Key issues

- Family information –
- Motivation –
- Religious background –
- Reaction to school's expectations –
- Attitude toward religious instruction –

Key questions

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Sample analysis of the issues

The student is not a Christian, but her parents are open-minded about her receiving religious instruction in a Christian school. The pre-enrollment process is critical. It will be important in the meeting with the parents that they are told that their daughter will be taught that Jesus is the world's only Savior and Son of God, God is triune, and salvation is by grace alone, not through personal worthiness attained by meritorious good works. (A pre-enrollment discussion with a student who is a Christian but from another denomination would likely touch on issues like the sacraments and decision theology.)

After a year of religion classes and chapel messages as a sophomore, a second interview with her may reveal not just a better understanding of Mormonism's false teachings, but a seed of faith in her Savior. Having a seed of faith, however, is not the same as having a common confession. Her knowledge of the truth is growing, but she is still affiliated with a false church, and her church affiliation is a public testimony to what she believes and stands for. Before she joins in sharing the gospel in a sacred setting, someone from your ALHS will want to meet with her and ascertain her personal confession of faith. If her personal confession aligns with Scripture, she will want to declare so publicly, and she will make it clear that she doesn't consider herself Mormon and is in no way connected with Mormonism. Until that

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happens, some possible courses of action might include allowing her to sing in a choir, but not putting her in the position of proclaiming a message in worship that she does not clearly and publicly confess.

Case 7

The son of a Baptist minister in town has been attending your ALHS since freshman year to avoid the secular humanism of the public school system. The parents commit to their son's silence in regards to doctrinal debate and ask, "Just let him attend." The family understands the differences between Baptist theology and confessional Lutheranism and recognizes from the outset that their son will not participate in choir. Midway through his junior year, the student approaches his religion teacher requesting to be baptized. In addition, the student wants to schedule regular appointments with the campus pastor to discuss a variety of doctrinal topics not covered in religion class. The student is fascinated by the Lutheran teachings. He now wants to join the choir to sing with his many Lutheran friends.

Key issues

- Family information –
- Motivation –
- Religious background –
- Reaction to school's expectations –
- Attitude toward religious instruction –

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Sample analysis of the issues:

The student came to your school as a Christian who is a solid member of a Baptist church. He and his parents understood that his confession of faith was different than that of his Lutheran classmates. They recognized that since he didn't share the same confession of faith, he wouldn't be joining with his classmates in proclaiming the gospel in sacred worship.

After two-and-a-half years at your school, the student is now very intrigued by what he has been taught. You will meet with him and determine to the best of your ability exactly where he stands. Does he share the same confession of faith as his classmates? Does he recognize the efficacy of the means of grace in Word and sacrament? Is he interested in pursuing further instruction and attaining communicant status? Would his parents support this? You would encourage him to pursue membership in an area WELS or ELS congregation. If he declares his agreement with the teaching of Scripture by becoming a communicant member of an area WELS or ELS congregation, even as his parents remain committed Baptists, he would be able to express fellowship with his classmates and participate in a choir that proclaims the gospel in sacred worship.

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On the other hand, if you discover that his interest in the scriptural teachings of the Lutheran church is little more than an open-minded and curious tolerance toward what Lutherans believe, that he does not confess what Scripture teaches, and is not interested in pursuing membership in an area WELS or ELS congregation, then you will continue to instruct him but refrain from having him participate in a choir that will proclaim, in worship, beliefs he still does not share. Perhaps he will be able to join choir and earn a credit without participating in sacred worship services.

Case 8

A single parent family moves into the neighborhood from a neighboring school district seeking a quality school with a safe environment for a freshman son. He is gifted musically. The mother of the family was raised in a non-religious home, with a Jehovah Witness grandmother offering some counsel pertaining to spirituality. Your ALHS interests the family due to the academic quality, numerous opportunities for musical performance, and the safe reputation known throughout the community. All fully understand the expectations for the young man to attend all classes. He promises to keep an open mind regarding all religious instruction, and he joins freshman chorus. After three semesters his grades are above average, except for religion, where he has failed every class. Comments he makes among classmates regarding the “amount of time wasted on religion at this school” are reported to the vice-principal. Registration for junior classes is taking place in April, and he wants to join the choir.

Key issues

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- Motivation –
- Religious background –
- Reaction to school’s expectations –
- Attitude toward religious instruction –

Key questions

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Case 9

A Muslim family from Saudi Arabia moves to your community because the father is in America for a 4-year engineering project. They have two children of high-school age and want to attend. They are very understanding and accepting of all cultures and beliefs. In fact, they know many Christians and consider them to be loving and caring people. Their children want to fully participate in all activities. The family is all about education and wants their children to learn as much as possible about the culture and beliefs of the school and America in general. After about three months the family begins to make demands regarding food options at lunch. Faculty members overhear intense discussions before and after school between the Muslim students and classmates, who are from foundational WELS families of your institution. The Muslim students want to experience choir during their senior year.

Key issues

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- Motivation –
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Case 10

A single mother wants to enroll her youngest child. The mother wants more for her daughter than the public school can offer, and the ALHS seems like the place for her. Back in the day, the family had been Roman Catholic but no longer attends any church. The mother and daughter both state perceived benefits of getting “more involved” in church. They will do whatever it takes for the daughter to attend. Of course, they want her to fully participate. She is looking forward to learning. She enrolls in freshman chorus and participates there and in the sophomore all-girl choir. Throughout the student’s first two years of attending your ALHS, there has been no evidence of the Christian message having any impact on the student. The girl has been in trouble with the law outside of school, is rumored to be a negative leader among other students, and stares at the ground in private discussions with the campus pastor and vice-principal. The one place she seems to have some ability and joy is choir, and she wants to continue in the full high school choir her junior year.

Key issues

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- Motivation –
- Religious background –
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Case 11

The son of an Assembly of God minister is the third member of the family to attend your school. The previous two had been model citizens, gladly participated in all religious instruction, and sang in the choir all four years. The second son, actually became active in WELS campus ministry at the university, met and married a WELS member, and is now a member of a WELS mission congregation in the Carolinas. During the current student's junior year, he privately meets with a pastor on campus indicating his problems with what is being taught. He totally disagrees with the Lutheran view of the sacraments and indicates he is at a higher spiritual level than any at the school, due to his regular speaking in tongues. He is in the choir, where he is preparing for the Christmas concert and the annual Federation congregation tour in January and February.

Key issues

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- Motivation –
- Religious background –
- Reaction to school's expectations –
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Case 12

An unchurched family enrolls their son and has full agreement with all expectations regarding participation and religious instruction. After two years the student is distinguished not only as a good athlete but steals the show performing a minor role in the spring musical. All, including the choir director, are encouraging him to join the choir his junior year. During spring baseball in his sophomore year the coach overhears him ridiculing the “religious do-gooders” so prevalent at the school. The coach reprimands the student but suspects conversations mocking the school’s religious culture are continuing throughout the season out of earshot of adults.

Key issues

- Family information –
- Motivation –
- Religious background –
- Reaction to school’s expectations –
- Attitude toward religious instruction –

Key questions

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Case 13

A German foreign exchange student scheduled to attend his junior and senior year agrees to all expectations regarding participation and compliance while attending your school. All agree that he is a model school citizen, and most are hopeful he will request to be baptized during his time at the school. Some on the faculty are convinced of his love for music, and interaction with the outgoing and ministry-minded choir director are part of the reason. The host family (who speaks German) comes to the principal during the summer between the student's junior and senior year and shares a conversation they heard the student having with his parents back home. The student shared with his parents how he is fooling everyone at school into thinking he believes what they are telling him, that Christianity is for the weak, and the charade is actually amusing to him. He is signed up for choir when he returns from Germany.

Key issues

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- Motivation –
- Religious background –
- Reaction to school's expectations –
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Case 14

A two-year foreign exchange student from Sweden indicates she will do anything expected of her while in school. She is aware of Christianity's teachings and has no interest in learning more. After one year she has a GPA of 4.0 that includes the highest marks in religion class. Since her friends sing in choir, she wants to sing during year two of her enrollment.

Key issues

- Family information –
- Motivation –
- Religious background –
- Reaction to school's expectations –
- Attitude toward religious instruction –

Key questions

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Case 15

Both the husband and wife of a family moving into your area are alumni of your ALHS. They met in high school, fell in love, married, and have lived away for the past 24 years. The last time anyone in their home went to church was 22 years ago, when they attended the funeral of the mother's grandmother. They want their only child to have the same high school experience as they had.

Key issues

- Family information –
- Motivation –
- Religious background –
- Reaction to school's expectations –
- Attitude toward religious instruction –

Key questions

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- Giving a clear and consistent confession and testimony about where we stand (for the truth, against error), or blurring the lines between truth and error, creating confusion, and allowing error to stand alongside truth?
- Honoring God with a clear, loving witness—even when it's hard and unpopular—or compromising our testimony, for the sake of ease, popularity, and expediency?

Case 16

A Roman Catholic student enrolls in your ALHS and is a model citizen. He came to your school because he and his parents were disgruntled with the high emphasis on athletics at the local Catholic high school. Both faculty and students think highly of the young man. He attends all classes and completes all lessons with high degrees of quality. The student wants to sing in choir as he registers for classes his senior year. Most of his classmates and some teachers are aware that this student plans to go in to the priesthood after a pre-seminary course of study at a major Jesuit university.

Key issues

- Family information –
- Motivation –
- Religious background –
- Reaction to school’s expectations –
- Attitude toward religious instruction –

Key questions

1. What would be key topics to be discussed in the pre-enrollment process?
2. What is the key information about this student that should be applied to a participation decision?
3. Should this student be allowed to participate in a choir that proclaims the gospel in sacred worship?
4. If no, what could be changed in the case study to allow for the student to participate?

Core biblical principles

We want to stand up for God’s Word in its entirety because . . .

- We love Jesus, and it is *his* Word. We honor him by believing, teaching, and practicing *everything* he says.
- We are concerned for the welfare of our own soul. We do not want to be misled by Satan’s dangerous lies.
- We love our neighbor and are concerned about others being misled by Satan’s dangerous lies.

In dealing with others, we must ask ourselves . . .

- Are we dealing with a weak brother or sister who needs encouragement?
- Are we dealing with a persistent errorist whose teaching must be avoided?

As we express fellowship with others are we . . .

- Celebrating true unity with others who are one in faith with us, or practicing false union with others who are not really one in faith with us?
- Giving a clear and consistent confession and testimony about where we stand (for the truth, against error), or blurring the lines between truth and error, creating confusion, and allowing error to stand alongside truth?
- Honoring God with a clear, loving witness—even when it’s hard and unpopular— or compromising our testimony, for the sake of ease, popularity, and expediency?

Case 17

The very intelligent 17-year-old son of a former regent member is currently a junior at your ALHS. His parents both come from families attending and supporting the high school for generations, and they remain very active in the federation and local congregation. Beginning in the spring of his sophomore year, the student began dating a Baptist girl from work. He started questioning conversion and the sacraments in assigned essays and then in private discussions with various faculty members. This attitude toward key Biblical doctrines has continued in a downward spiral, and by May of his junior year he states to his parents, pastor, and principal of the school that he has made a decision to believe in Christ, and that those who haven't really aren't believers. The student is very well behaved in school. He is on the honor roll and is a two-sport athlete. He also sings in the traveling choir and plans on doing so his senior year.

Key issues

- Family information –
- Motivation –
- Religious background –
- Reaction to school's expectations –
- Attitude toward religious instruction –

Key questions

1. What would be key topics to be discussed in the pre-enrollment process?
2. What is the key information about this student that should be applied to a participation decision?
3. Should this student be allowed to participate in a choir that proclaims the gospel in sacred worship?
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As we express fellowship with others are we . . .

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- Giving a clear and consistent confession and testimony about where we stand (for the truth, against error), or blurring the lines between truth and error, creating confusion, and allowing error to stand alongside truth?
- Honoring God with a clear, loving witness—even when it's hard and unpopular— or compromising our testimony, for the sake of ease, popularity, and expediency?

Case 18

The very intelligent 17-year-old son of a WELS family in your federation is currently a junior at your ALHS. His parents rarely attend church, and for the most part are seen at Christmas and Easter. They are known to spend most Saturday nights at the casino in the neighboring town. Beginning spring in his sophomore year, the student began dating a Baptist girl from work. He started questioning conversion and the sacraments in assigned essays and then in private discussions with various faculty members. This attitude toward key Biblical doctrines has continued in a downward spiral, and by May of his junior year he states to his parents, pastor, and principal of the school that he has made a decision to believe in Christ, and that those who haven't really aren't believers. The student is very well behaved in school. He is on the honor roll and is a two-sport athlete. He also sings in the traveling choir and plans on doing so his senior year.

Key issues

- Family information –
- Motivation –
- Religious background –
- Reaction to school's expectations –
- Attitude toward religious instruction –

Key questions

1. What would be key topics to be discussed in the pre-enrollment process?
2. What is the key information about this student that should be applied to a participation decision?
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- Honoring God with a clear, loving witness—even when it's hard and unpopular— or compromising our testimony, for the sake of ease, popularity, and expediency?

A Word for Leaders

Holy Scripture, which reveals to us the reality of our lost condition and the remedy that is ours through Jesus, is also a treasure trove of useful and practical information. This document focuses on leadership. More specifically, it focuses on leadership as it relates to establishing and carrying out appropriate processes connected to applying fellowship doctrine and principles to Lutheran School choirs.

God's Word contains many instances in which he has placed people in positions to lead. They are servant leaders, but they do lead. There are many people – in both Testaments – to whom we could point as examples, but the Apostle Paul stands out for the purposes of this document. While serving as a missionary, enduring tremendous physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual challenges; Paul also was shepherding his upstart congregations. We see from his letters that he dealt with many issues. From those letters we see him always testifying to the truth, focusing on and lifting up Jesus, saying the “hard things” when required, writing with a spirit of love, and minimizing himself. These traits provide for our leaders today a tremendous example of how to lead. Leadership does matter. God does put people in position to influence and impact ministry. How vital it is that leaders take on this responsibility and do so in a God-pleasing manner!

So what is the role of leadership connected to enrollment policy and the specific topic of applying fellowship doctrine and principals to Lutheran School choirs? First, there is leadership at the local level. Specific to our high schools, the leadership team is comprised of the administrators charged with the responsibility of running and leading the school (superintendent, president, principal, and others in leadership roles). This also includes the elected Board and committee members. Certainly, pastors on the faculty (and in the federation of congregations) play a role.

Just as in building a home, the foundation must be laid before erecting walls and topping it off with a roof. For our purposes, our foundation is God's holy Word in all its truth and purity. The following are then drawn from and anchored to the Word of God.

Mission of the school

Leaders work to ensure that the school's mission lines up with Jesus' directives to “Feed my sheep,” and “Seek and save what was lost.” They work to make sure that all who serve the school – board members, administrative leaders, faculty members, staff personnel, volunteers, etc. understand the prime reason for the school's existence; and they work to ensure that all embrace and help carry out that mission.

Philosophy and purpose

Leaders work with others to craft clear, Bible-based statements of philosophy and purpose. These important statements lay out the mission of the school with more specificity. These documents serve to remind all what the school stands for, what it is, what it is not, and what it does. They also serve as vital tools to help inquiring families learn about the school, and they establish for the principal or his designee the platform for discussions with families from outside of our fellowship. With a humble and evangelical spirit, school leaders educate others about the school – what it is and what it isn't.

Enrollment policy

Leaders craft an enrollment policy (with explanatory addenda as needed) as drawn from their statements of purpose and philosophy. Clearly spelled out is the priority of the types of families whom our schools serve. Most indicate families in this order: 1) Members of the federation; 2)

WELS/ELS members from outside the federation; 3) Those not being served by a church home; and 4) Others. Leaders will want to make sure that the policy clearly articulates conditions for enrollment (and for maintaining enrollment in good standing from year to year).

Many of our schools face significant challenges and issues – financial pressures, enrollment concerns, and the complexities of ongoing improvement plans, to name a few. When faced with challenging situations, decision making becomes more complex, including decisions related to our enrollment policies. Leaders keep the biblically-based mission of the school as the driver when enrolling students from outside of our fellowship. By intentionalizing this process through practice and by teaching it to others, leaders stay anchored to the foundation. While enrolling students from outside of our fellowship will result in enrollment and financial blessings, those things in and of themselves should not be our drivers. We need to be driven by our mission of nurture and outreach, by our aim to teach Christ and him crucified.

Enrollment procedure and practice

Leadership plays a vital role in this area of school structure as well. Enrollment procedures and practices must clearly be spelled out, from the make-up of the application all the way to the enrollment of a student. Roles must be clearly defined as well so that the school is consistent in how it handles each prospective family and what each family experiences during the enrollment phase. (This document will not lay out examples of steps because those resources are located elsewhere. It is safe to say, though, that leadership plays a key role in ensuring an effective and orderly process, again, based upon the other foundational pieces).

As leaders are always mindful of the above topics, they work to create a school culture that reflects the intentions that have been spelled out in policy manuals and handbooks. They use opportunities to continue teaching this culture both proactively and reactively. They teach proactively through opportunities with current and new families, with current and new teachers, with each other on the administrative team, and with all audiences as they present themselves. They teach reactively when confronted with issues and challenges. To elaborate on this last point, the Lord often lays challenges before us that put us in position to remind and reteach the underpinning mission and philosophy of the school. Every leader is uniquely “wired,” but each, with his unique gifts and personality, will embrace the role in which they’ve been called to serve and will play a key role in shaping the school’s culture and processes upon the foundation that has been set.

This, then, segues into leadership on a wider level, more specifically, among the schools in our Association of Lutheran High Schools. Because each of our high schools serves in a unique setting (location, federation, etc.), and because each school has its unique history and tradition, it is probably unrealistic that each school will have identical practices. Mission statements and statements of philosophy and purpose will likely be similar in nature, but enrollment policies, procedures and practices will likely vary. With that said, our high school leaders can establish a uniform process as to how to approach this topic. From studying God’s Word on the matter, to creating shared documents to assist with carrying out procedures, strong local leadership can evolve into strong team leadership among the high schools. Through these cooperative efforts, it might then be possible for more commonality of practice to emerge.

Applicant's name _____

Date of interview _____

Pre-enrollment discussion checklist

The following topics have been thoroughly addressed with the student and his/her family:

- General enrollment policies for the school
- Summary of foundational doctrinal truths
- Description of Lutheran high school ministry
- Pre-enrollment interview form

Pre-enrollment discussion suggestions

- Be grace-filled.
- Be aware of the religious background of the family.
- Have a member of the school administration and a member of the religion department participate in the meeting.
- The two ALHS representatives should be organized and aligned on the issues of the meeting, with one serving as lead and the other as support.
- Specific curriculum examples of where doctrinal differences will arise and how the differences will be handled should be shared. Assure parents and student that no one is singled out for having different beliefs. Encourage questions and private discussion if there's a lack of clarity.
- Avoiding doctrinal differences or not sharing with them how the doctrines of the respective church bodies differ are not options.

General Enrollment Policies for *[high school]*

These guidelines are intended to supplement enrollment policies already in place for each individual school

- A. Enrollment and full participation in all classes and co-curricular activities is open to all students who are willing to abide by the philosophy and policies of *[insert high school name]*. *[insert high school name]* does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national and ethnic origin, or disability in the administration of its educational programs. Students who are admitted to the school must agree to abide by school regulations and policies and to accept the mission of the school. Parents of students admitted to our school must agree to accept the mission, and they must support the policies, regulations, and programs of the school. Agreement with all policies, regulations, and procedures is implied when the student(s) and parent sign the Application for Admission and/or Registration Form.

Although all inquiring students are welcome to apply for enrollment, unforeseen circumstances may cause overall school enrollment to be limited. In such a case, the following priority for accepting students will be applied:

- i. Children of members of the *[insert high school name]* [Federation/Association]
 - ii. Children of WELS/ELS members from outside the *[insert high school name]* [Federation/Association]
 - iii. Children of families with no church home
 - iv. Others
- B. Should unforeseen circumstances force the school to reduce its enrollment, the above priority in reverse will be used for limiting enrollment.
- C. The *[insert appropriate department or office]* approves the admission of all students entering 9th grade. Families who are non-WELS will meet with *[insert high school name]*'s principal (or his designee) and a pastorally-trained member of the staff. The purpose of this meeting is to give the family a basic overview of our scriptural beliefs and practices and to determine if the student is enrolling as a willing learner.
- D. Admission of all students transferring to *[insert high school name]* during or following their 9th grade year will be reviewed and approved/denied through the *[insert appropriate department or office]* in consultation with *[insert high school name]*'s principal and/or his designee. (Letter B still applies)
- E. Tuition rates are charged based on a family's membership in the *[insert high school association or federation name]*, the partnership of WELS churches that owns *[insert high school name]*. Rates differ for families who are not members of this partnership.
- F. Because the mission of the school is based on the Word of God as found in the Bible, it is necessary that parents and students agree that instruction in the Word of God (through formal coursework and chapel services) is required for the student's enrollment. Because we believe that parents are an important part of a student's education, and because we

believe that parents will want to be somewhat familiar with the basic teachings of the Bible as taught in our school, we will connect families who are not members of a WELS/ELS congregation with congregations in our fellowship that are in their area and encourage them to enroll in a Bible Information Class.

- G. All students may sign up for any classes and programs offered by [*insert high school name*]. Prerequisites and other limiting factors apply equally to all students except as outlined in the several points below. All students are required to enroll in a minimum of 6 credits per year. Any exceptions must be approved through the [*insert appropriate department or office*] in consultation with the principal and/or administrative team.
 - H. The [*insert high school name*] faculty will instruct all students in the teachings of Scripture in all classes. Regarding school worship activities (chapel, special worship services), all students may participate as worshipers.
 - I. At the conclusion of the freshman, sophomore, and junior years, [*the principal, the campus pastor, a pastor of the religion department, etc.*] will meet with any non-WELS student who sings in choir (parents will be invited and are encouraged to attend) to determine their level of understanding of what they are being taught and their willingness to remain under our spiritual instruction, as well as to assess their intention to pursue membership in a WELS congregation. Following this meeting, the [*insert high school name*] representative may consult colleagues, and finally a determination will be made whether the non-WELS student will continue singing in the school's choral worship activities.
 - J. Students who are not members of WELS/ELS congregations will not represent [*insert high school name*] as a leader in worship in our Federation (or Association) churches (*i.e.* as a soloist, instrumentalist, or lector).
 - K. On the campus, the faculty and WELS students lead all worship activities. This includes activities such as devotions, prayers, and piano/organ accompaniment. Vignettes, plays, and the like which may help to illustrate the point of the devotion may be presented by all members of the student body.
 - L. Due to the nature of our school and our concerts, sacred music often will be selected and presented. As a class that is elective and open to all students, the choir may include many non-WELS singers. Soloists for concerts may be drawn from all members of the student body.
 - M. (*If the graduation ceremony is part of the worship service...*) Because [*insert high school name*]'s graduation ceremony is conducted as a worship service, class speakers will be any student in fellowship with the WELS. The faculty chooses the speakers.
- or
- N. (*If the graduation ceremony is not part of the worship service...*) Because [*insert high school name*]'s graduation ceremony is held separately from the worship service, any student at

[*insert high school name*] may serve as a graduation class speaker. The faculty chooses the speakers.

- O. All students may be elected members of the Student Council. (*Insert the following statement as necessary...Since the Student Council President serves as a public representative of the student body, he/she will be a student in fellowship with the WELS.*)

- P. A student should not disrespectfully argue with an instructor in the classroom setting when the student's belief and practice differ from the scriptural teaching and practice taught at [*insert high school name*]. When disagreements arise, all students are encouraged to meet with an instructor privately to clarify and define these differences in light of what the Bible teaches. Students desiring further information regarding the teachings and doctrines of the WELS may receive individual Bible information instruction (BIC) from [*the campus pastor, a pastor in the Religion Department, an area WELS pastor*].

Summary of Foundational Doctrinal Truths

1. The Holy Scriptures are God's infallible Word and are supreme, the only standard for faith and life (2 Peter 1:21, 2 Timothy 3:16, John 10:35, Psalm 119:105).
2. There is only one True God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who reveals himself in the Holy Scriptures (Isaiah 43:11, John 15:26, John 5:39, John 14:7-18, Deuteronomy 6:4, 1 Corinthians 8:4).
3. God created all things and created man as the crown of that creation (Genesis 1-2).
4. Ever since the Fall into sin (Genesis 3) the whole human race is corrupted by sin, making all people guilty before God and subject to damnation (Psalm 51:5).
5. God through his grace, love, and mercy sent his only Son, Jesus, to live, suffer, and die to pay all people's sins; there is no more payment required of people—the entire price has been paid; people are judged righteous in God's sight through the work of Jesus (John 3:16, Isaiah 53:5-6, 1 John 1:7, 1 John 2:1-2).
6. All who, through the work of the Holy Spirit and Gospel, believe that Jesus is their Savior, receive everlasting life (Ephesians 2:8-9, 1 Corinthians 12:1-3).
7. As a believer in Jesus, the Christian will seek to grow in his Christian knowledge and faith through the study of the Holy Scriptures. The Holy Scriptures will be his source of comfort, security, guidance, encouragement, and hope (confidence) for the future (Psalm 119:105, 1 Peter 2:2-3, John 20:31, John 5:39, 2 Timothy 3:15).
8. As a believer in Jesus, the Christian will find joy and blessing in worship (Hebrews 10:25, Psalm 122: 1, Romans 10:17, Colossians 3:16).
9. As a believer in Jesus, the Christian will use prayer regularly as a God-given privilege (Philippians 4:6, 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18, Psalm 50:15, James 5:16).
10. As a believer in Jesus, the Christian will strive to show his love to God by using his gifts and talents to help spread the Word of God. He will help his fellow Christians and all people in every possible way (John 14:15, 1 Thessalonians 2:8, Galatians 5:22-23, 1 Corinthians 10:31, Matthew 28:19-20)
11. The Lord gave parents the primary responsibility for the Christian training of their children (Ephesians 6:4, Psalm 78:1-7, Deuteronomy 4:9-10, Deuteronomy 6:6-9).
12. The Lord gave to his Church on earth the responsibility to train its children according to the Scriptures (Acts 20:28, Matthew 28:20, John 21:12-17, 1 Peter 5:2).
13. The Lord's Church through its various agencies calls pastors and teachers to function in its midst as public ministers of the Word of God (Acts 1:21-26, Ephesians 4:11-12, Romans 10:12-15).
14. Public ministers of the Gospel strive to honor their Lord by serving their students and parents by performing the privilege of their ministry faithfully (2 Corinthians 10:5, 2 Timothy 4:2, 1 Timothy 3:1-13, Titus 1:5-9, Matthew 25:14-30).

15. Baptism is a holy act, instituted by God. Using water and God's Word, it offers and gives the forgiveness of sins, spiritual life, and eternal salvation. It is meant for young and old, including children. Infants are also sinful and therefore need the spiritual rebirth brought through baptism (Matthew 28:19, John 3:5-6, Titus 3:5, Mark 10:14, Acts 22:16, Mark 16:16).
16. Holy Communion is a holy act, instituted by Christ. Together with bread and wine, we receive Jesus true body and blood. In this special meal Jesus gives the forgiveness of sins, strengthens our faith, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe (Matthew 26:26-28, 1 Corinthians 10:16, 1 Corinthians 11:27-28, 1 Corinthians 10:17).
17. Through the atoning work of Jesus, God has declared fellowship with us. This wonderful relationship with him is based on his promises and guidelines. We exercise this fellowship each time we follow his commands, each time we hear of his love, each time we are reminded of his forgiveness. We also exercise this fellowship whenever we gather together as his children and worship him, emphasizing the unity we have based on those same commands and promises.

The Ministry of **[insert high school name]**

1. **[insert high school name]** is a *Christian school*.

What does this mean?

- a. We believe that Jesus is the true Son of God and this world's only Savior from sin. We rejoice with everyone who believes that they are saved eternally by faith alone in Jesus as their Savior.
- b. We seek to love others as Jesus did and to share his Gospel with all who wish to hear it.
- c. We seek to follow God's Word both in our doctrine (teachings) and in our lives.

2. **[insert high school name]** is a *confessional Lutheran school*.

What does this mean?

- a. We believe that all of the Bible is God's inspired, inerrant Word.
- b. Our convictions of what is true doctrine and what is false doctrine are based completely on God's Word.
- c. We believe that God works through his Gospel in Word and Sacrament to create and strengthen faith.
 - i. We exist for the purpose of sharing the Gospel with the members of our [Federation/Association] Lutheran churches and those in fellowship with us. Our goal is to strengthen them in their Biblical Lutheran beliefs and encourage them to practice those beliefs in their lives.
 - ii. We also love to share the Gospel and all aspects of biblical Christianity with others who choose to come to **[insert high school name]**. It is our hope that by the time they leave **[insert high school name]**, they would share our Biblical Lutheran faith.
- d. While we rejoice that other denominations teach the message of the Savior, we recognize that they may also include teachings that are contrary to Scripture.
- e. We reject the use of human reason or human tradition in establishing doctrine.
- f. We believe that God limits certain worship activities to those who confess the same belief in all of what Scripture says. Because of this, there are certain activities that are limited to students who are in fellowship with us (*i.e.* serving as a soloist, instrumentalist, or lector)

3. What **[insert high school name]** is not:

- a. We are not just another "private" school. God's Word is a vital part of all our classes and of all we do at **[insert high school name]**.
- b. We are not an ecumenical Christian school where a person's beliefs don't matter. In our religion classes, students will be taught what is true doctrine and what is false doctrine.
- c. We are not a potential mission field for other religious denominations.

Non-WELS New Student Report Form

Directions: Counselor is to complete this form and provide copies to those listed below.

Student name: _____ Grade: _____ Date of visit: _____

Previous school: _____ City/state: _____

Religious affiliation: _____

Present church membership: _____ Pastor: _____

Is your son/daughter a confirmed (or comparable term) member or intending to become a confirmed (or comparable term) member of your current church? YES NO

Are you familiar with the teachings of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS)? YES NO

Does your family have any interest in learning more about the teachings of the WELS? YES NO

By enrolling your child at [*insert high school name*], you are placing him/her under our spiritual instruction, and your child will be taught the Biblical view of Christ, salvation, and the sacraments in accordance with the scriptural teachings of the WELS. Is this acceptable to you? YES NO

Do you intend to enroll in a Bible information class in a WELS church? YES NO

Would you be willing to consider your student becoming a member of the WELS? YES NO

1. What are your concerns, if any, for the areas listed above?

2. Circumstances leading to school transfer:

3. Why would you like your son/daughter to attend [*insert high school name*]?

4. General reaction to [*insert high school name*] enrollment policy:

5. Specific concerns religion teachers need to know:

Individuals present:

Administrator:

Guidance:

Religion Department:

Parent(s):

Counselor signature

Date

Copies:

Student file

Religion Department Chairman (to be shared with Teacher Mentor)

Principal

Handbook Entry Template

This is a working template. Adjust as needed to suit your specific ministry.

A Bible study, related discussion materials, and templates can be found in a tool box available from your District President. Each school should study these materials as they review and design their policies regarding worship participation, so that this topic may be treated faithfully and evangelically going forward.

Worship Participation Policy (sample 1)

All students at *[insert high school name]* are encouraged to participate in all worship activities at *[insert high school name]*.

Students who are involved in school groups that participate in worship activities away from *[insert high school name]* are under the direction of the group's leader who will monitor their involvement and participation in worship activities. Determination of participation in such groups by students who are not connected by membership to the WELS or to its fellow church bodies will be made after interviews by the principal with the student and perhaps his/her parents.

Students who are not members of a congregation of the WELS, the ELS, or a church body in fellowship with the WELS will not represent *[insert high school name]* in any individual leadership role in worship activities (*i.e.* as a soloist, instrumentalist, or lector), either at school or in any congregation.

Worship Participation Policy (sample 2)

All students at *[insert high school name]* are encouraged to participate in all worship activities at *[insert high school name]*.

Students who are not members of a congregation of the WELS, the ELS, or a church body in fellowship with the WELS are not permitted to join school groups that participate in worship activities away from *[insert high school name]*. Determination of participation in such groups for on-campus performances by students who are not connected by membership to the WELS or to its fellow church bodies will be made after interviews by the principal with the student and perhaps his/her parents.