

## DOCTRINAL ESSAY

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by

The Rev. David T. Mensing, Pastor • Peace Ev. Lutheran Church, Oak Forest, Illinois

### *The Difference between Scriptural Separation and Sinful Separatism*

**Introduction** — In the text of Holy Scripture which we have chosen as the motto of our Fifty-Fourth Annual Convention, namely, I Corinthians 1:10, the Apostle Paul addresses in verse two “*the church of God which is at Corinth*” and speaks specifically “*to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints;*” but he includes also “*all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours*” and says: “*Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ*” (v. 3). Thus, his earnest exhortation in verse ten is not a general and universal appeal for *outward* peace and the mere *guise* of unity among all factious elements in outward Christendom, as a temporal umbrella of *tranquility* under which believers and unbelievers, true Christians and lying hypocrites alike, can huddle together in a pretense of spiritual coziness and fellowship. On the contrary, his plea for unity is directed to penitent and believing Christians, both then and now in these latter days of sore distress, for whom the Law of God as a “rule” or “straightedge” is intended to show them what true unity IS, and in whom the precious Gospel serves as the powerful and only proper motive for MAINTAINING it. Paul therefore *beseeches* us “*in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,*” in view of all that He vicariously accomplished to purchase us peace with God and membership in His household, “*that there be **no divisions among [us]***” (v. 10). For “*divisions*” are the fruit of *DISunity* and therefore *UNcharacteristic* of those for whom *true peace* — “*peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Romans 5:1) and “*the bond of peace*” (Ephesians 4:3) among *true brethren*, created as the fruit of unity by His indwelling Spirit— is a most cherished commodity.

However, we, who by God’s grace both recognize and cherish *true peace* for ourselves and

among ourselves, are compelled to acknowledge that such peace is not without its cost; for the unity upon which it rests is unity or perfect oneness in the doctrines of Holy Scripture—both as they are diligently and faithfully preached and taught (Jeremiah 23:28) and as they are correctly and consistently applied in practice (II Timothy 4:2ff.). It is, therefore, necessary to “*keep the unity of the Spirit*” in order to enjoy and keep “*the bond of peace*” which is “cemented” and held together by true unity in doctrine and in practice (Ephesians 4:3). For this reason, St. Paul beseeches us in I Corinthians 1:10 “*that [we] all speak the same thing,*” that our preaching and our practice be “*the same*”—consistently *orthodox*, not inconsistent and therefore, of necessity, *heterodox*. Churches and church bodies which claim that fellowship, like so-called “open marriages,” is an “open” relationship between professing Christians in which there should be room for what they call “honest disagreement” without judgment, without controversy, and without doctrinal discipline, are, BY DEFINITION, “*heterodox*” bodies. Within their ranks, as the price of temporal peace, “other-than-true” doctrine is taught and practiced OR “other-than-true” doctrine is permitted to stand side-by-side with the truth without being challenged, condemned, and rooted out. Such erstwhile disciples, who no longer continue in Christ’s Word in its truth and purity (John 8:31-32), have deluded themselves into believing the cunning lie of Satan that peace must be preserved at any price (even if it is a *false* peace)! We, on the other hand, strengthened by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ (II Corinthians 12:9) which is mediated to us in and through His Word (Acts 20:32), know that “peace” at the cost of unity is *no peace at all*; and we must be willing and able and determined to stand and fight against the wiles of the devil (Ephesians 6:10-13) “*to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*” (Ephesians 4:3) and to be unwilling to sacrifice either **true unity** or **true peace**, the fruit of true unity. Therefore we hasten to confess with our fathers in the Thorough Declaration of the *Formula of Concord* (*Triglotta*, p. 1095):

We have no intention of yielding aught of the eternal, immutable truth of God for the sake of *temporal* peace, tranquility, and unity (which, moreover, is not in our power to do). Nor would *such* peace and unity, since it is devised against the truth and for its suppression, have any permanency. Still less are we inclined to adorn and conceal a corruption of the pure doctrine and manifest, condemned errors. But we entertain heartfelt pleasure and love for, and are on our part sincerely inclined and anxious to advance, that unity according to our utmost power, by which His glory remains to God uninjured, nothing of the divine truth of the Holy Gospel is surrendered, no room is given to the least error, poor sinners are brought to true, genuine repentance, raised up by faith, confirmed in new obedience, and thus justified and eternally saved alone through the sole merit of Christ.

In the text adopted as the motto of this year’s convention, we recognize the declaration of **the will of God** and not merely the opinion of the Apostle Paul; for he writes in the fourteenth chapter of this same epistle: “*If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord*” (v. 38). Therefore, when Paul beseeches us by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ “*that there be no divisions among [us],*” he declares that “*divisions among [us]*” are **not Godpleasing**.

We recognize the very same principle regarding Holy Marriage according to the declaration of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 19:6 and Mark 10:9, “*What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder,*” and state that the breaking of Holy Marriage is not God pleasing.. The fact that the Lord Himself permits the innocent party to procure a divorce does not militate against or contradict the principle enunciated by our Savior according to the Sixth Commandment of the moral law; for “*He abideth faithful; He cannot deny Himself*” (II Timothy 2:13); “*God is not the author of confusion*” (I Corinthians 14:33). The divorce is

not “the breaking of the marriage vow” (Catechism Q/A 62) forbidden by God; but it merely recognizes and publicly declares the fact that the marriage covenant was in fact broken, not by the innocent party but by the guilty party, who **sinned** by doing so, both against God and against he former spouse.

In like manner, “*divisions among [us]*” are NOT Godpleasing, as the Apostle clearly states, and as Scripture clearly teaches in many other passages (as we shall presently discover); but it is not faithful Christians who “*cause divisions and offenses*” among us and who therefore are the “guilty party” in any schism or split that occurs, but those who pervert the Word of God and teach and practice *their own* doctrine “*contrary to the doctrine which [we] have learned*” (Romans 16:17). As we shall now see in the first part of our essay, it is “*from such*” that we are to “*withdraw [ourselves]*” (I Timothy 6:5b) —not thereby causing “*divisions among [us]*” but only standing aside from those who cause them by engaging in a truly necessary, in a truly God-ordained and therefore Godpleasing, Scripturally mandated separation.

### I. Scriptural Separation

For the sake of complete clarity, let us first of all reiterate **two basic principles** that are central to our discussion. The *first principle* is that it is God’s will and ordinance that **only His Word** in its truth and purity be preached, taught, proclaimed and consistently applied —not only in the assemblies of the local congregations but wherever, in “*all the world*” (Mark 16:15), there are sinful men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth (I Timothy 2:4) —the *painful* truth concerning their sins and their hopeless condition by nature, the *aweful* truth concerning their well-deserved lot for time and eternity according to God’s justice, the *blessed* truth that, for Christ’s sake, God has graciously forgiven all men their trespasses and declared them righteous in His holy sight, and has made known this *saving* truth to the ends of the earth in the Gospel, and the *reassuring* truth that He earnestly desires all men to cling to it in childlike confidence for their salvation. The perversion of any of these truths, either in teaching or in practice, not only profanes the name of God but works contrary to His good and gracious will. For only the Law of God, correctly taught and applied, truly indicts and convicts the sinner, terrifies him with the prospect of reaping God’s wrath and displeasure, works true contrition or sorrow over his sins, and shows him the need for salvation apart from his own merit and worthiness. And only the Gospel in all of its sweetness, properly set forth and preached as soothing balm to those who are troubled in their minds because of their sins, proclaims God’s love for all sinners in Christ Jesus, reveals the Savior’s vicarious atonement as the price of man’s redemption, declares God’s objective justification (or forgiveness) of the entire world of sinners for Christ’s sake and His imputation of righteousness to the ungodly, and assures every believer of peace with God through his Lord Jesus Christ and his inheritance of glory with the saints in light. Lack of proper distinction between the Law and the Gospel does more harm than good; for a perverted Law is NOT the Law of GOD (Matthew 15:9); and a perverted Gospel is NOT the Gospel of CHRIST and the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). Indeed, any perversion of divine truth, as was the perversion of God’s truth to Eve in Genesis 3, is a vicious lie, designed to “deceive us and seduce us into misbelief, despair, and other great shame and vice” (Luther).

The Psalmist states in Psalm 119:105, “**Thy Word** is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path,” not a smoking lamp and an obscured light, but “*a light that shineth in a dark place*”

(II Peter 1:19); and in Jeremiah 23:28, the Lord declares through His prophet: “*He that hath My Word, let him speak My Word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord.*” Only the pure and unadulterated Word of God is nourishment to the souls of men, while false doctrine is empty chaff devoid of nutrition. The Lord also promises through Isaiah that “[*His*] *Word that goeth forth out of [His] mouth,*” His true and perfect Word, regularly and consistently preached and taught the way rain and snow water the earth, “*shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it*” (Isaiah 55:10-11). Those who in unbelief are on the road to everlasting damnation “*have Moses and the prophets. Let them hear them*” (Luke 16:29), said Abraham to the rich man in hell; and the Lord Jesus prays in John chapter 17 for them which shall believe on Him through **the word** of His chosen apostles (John 17:20). “*So then, faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God,*” Paul writes in Romans 10, verse 17, NOT by hearing a *perversion* of the Word of God, nor a *caricature* of the Word of God, nor a twisted *paraphrase* of the Word of God, nor a *mixture* of the Word of God and “*the commandments of men*” (Matthew 15:9), nor a *substitute* for the Word of God.

This does not mean, however, that a mere oral or written *citation* of the words of Scripture identifies a church or church body or a pastor and teacher of religion as *orthodox*; for the devil himself cites Scripture, and so do false prophets who use Scripture as their “*sheep’s clothing*” (Matthew 7:15). We know in fact of pastors who regard the preaching of God’s Word as the mere stringing together of passages in a *recitation* of Scripture, while they blatantly teach “*contrary to the doctrine which [they had] learned*” from those very same Scriptures (Romans 16:17). St. Paul writes to Timothy: “*Take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine; continue in them; for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee*” (I Timothy 4:16); and, in his second epistle to the young pastor, he outlines specifically how Timothy should go about this. He says: “*Preach the Word; be instant, in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure [that is, tolerate] sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears [wanting to have their ears tickled with what they would like to hear]; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables*” (II Timothy 4:2-4).

The **second principle** is that all those who in any way depart from the pure teachings of God’s inerrant Word, the Holy Scriptures, either in *doctrine* or in *practice* (that is, in the consistent *application* of pure doctrine), and refuse to be corrected are identified by Scripture itself as those who “*cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned*” (Romans 16:17). “*They that are such,*” Paul continues in verse 18, “*serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.*” They do not serve the Good Shepherd of His sheep as faithful undershepherds, “*to feed the church of God which He hath purchased with His own blood*” (Acts 20:28), but they serve themselves, their own agendas here in this world, and their own temporal comfort and security. And the Lord Himself condemns such unfaithful shepherds in the strongest of terms in Ezekiel 34:7ff., saying, for example in verse 10: “*Thus saith the Lord God: I am against the shepherds; and I will require My flock at their hand and cause them to cease from feeding the flock; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves anymore; for I will deliver My flock from their mouth, that they may not be meat for them.*” The Lord Jesus calls them “*false prophets which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves*” (Matthew 7:15); and His apostles condemn them as well, unmasking them and exposing them as the clear and present danger they are to the sheep of Christ’s pasture. St. Paul calls them self-styled “*teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say, nor*

whereof they affirm” (I Timothy 1:3-7), “men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith” (II Timothy 3:8), who “teach otherwise [heterodoxy], and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to Godliness” (I Timothy 6:3), who are arrogant ignoramuses, “proud, knowing nothing...men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is Godliness” (vv. 4-5). Peter calls them “false teachers” who, on the sly, “bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction” (II Peter 2:1). Jude calls them “ungodly men” (Jude 4); and the Apostle John says that such a false teacher is “a deceiver and an antichrist” (II John 7).

And lest anyone minimize the **danger** of false doctrine, not only *adhered to* by the errorists themselves but *peddled to* unsuspecting consumers as wholesome spiritual food; lest anyone claim that, since many errorists are true believers but are merely **misguided** in some non-fundamental doctrine and are therefore to be dealt with “in love” by those who believe and know the truth; and lest anyone delude himself into thinking that such errorists, simply because they are not malicious, are still accomplishing much good, love their Savior, serve His cause, hallow His name, and will surely appear at His right hand on the Day of Judgment, Jesus Himself **indicts** them, saying in Matthew 7:22-23, “Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works??’ And then will I profess unto them, ‘I never knew you! **Depart from Me, ye that work iniquity!**’” And let none of us imagine in foolish, spiritual myopia that, just because one or the other of us does not see the grossness of error, does not recognize the jeopardy into which it leads, and does not understand the anger of God and His righteous displeasure against false prophets, the Lord Himself in Jeremiah 23:30-32 disavows all errorists and declares through His prophet: “Behold, I am **against** the prophets, saith the Lord, that steal My words every one from his neighbor. Behold, I am **against** the prophets, saith the Lord, that use their tongues and say, He saith. Behold, I am **against** them that prophesy false dreams, saith the Lord, and do tell them, and cause my people to **err** by their lies and by their lightness; yet **I sent them not, nor commanded them; therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the Lord.**” They are “liars,” says our God, who never lies; and “by their lightness,” by their lack of concern, by their easy-going attitude, and by their indifference to the truth, they show that they are NOT on His “payroll” and that absolutely nothing good will come of their so-called “ministry”!

If a church or church-body, according to the **first principle**, desires to be truly **orthodox** and not merely give lip-service to the concept of orthodoxy; if it is to be **orthodox** not only in doctrine but in practice, **and** not only “on paper” but “in fact,” it must not only hold to true doctrine in its official statements, written confessions, published books and periodicals, and on its Web site; but it must also exercise **DOCTRINAL DISCIPLINE** in its midst, not permitting indifferentism, unionism (or ecumenism), modernism, secularism, humanism, relativism, or any other such tendency toward laxity to invade its constituency. All of the spiritual “watchdogs” in an orthodox fold or fellowship must be on the same page and be ready, willing, and able to “bark” (Isaiah 56:10), that is, to warn against error and errorists coming at their sheep from without, but also from within (Acts 20:30). “Silence gives consent,” says the old adage; and the lack of aggressive doctrinal discipline gives tacit permission to false prophets to “eat” Christ’s sheep and lambs!

Dr. J. T. Mueller in his *Christian Dogmatics* rightly distinguishes between orthodox and heterodox churches and church-bodies (and, incidentally, brands as *heterodox* the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod for violating these principles with impunity, even though, at the time

of its writing, he did not see it coming). He writes:

A church is orthodox, or pure, not simply when it acknowledges the divine truth in general through confessions which are in accord with Scripture, but when it actually teaches the divine truth without qualification and prevents or suppresses all error. In other words, a church must be pure, or orthodox, not only in principle, but also in practice, so that it earnestly reproves and disciplines all who teach false doctrine. But this is not all. If a church wishes to be truly orthodox, it must not only teach in conformity with Scripture, but also insist upon a practice that is in strict accord with whatever the Word of God inculcates (conditions of church-membership, attendance at Holy Communion, regulation of the Christian life of its members, opposition to religious indifferentism and unionism, etc.) A church which is orthodox in theory only, but not in practice, cannot be considered as being truly orthodox, since it disregards Holy Scripture in its insistence upon the proper application of the divine truth to life, 1 Cor. 5,13; 11,20-22; 6,1-6; 14,34-40; etc. ...Hence a church becomes impure, or heterodox, only when it ceases to apply God's directions given in Rom. 16,17; 2 John 10. 11; Matt. 18,17; etc., and so permits error and ungodliness to exist side by side with the truth or even to gain ascendancy over truth. (p. 557).

Since *heterodox* churches and church-bodies exist not by the will of God (John 8:31-32; Matthew 28:20; Jeremiah 23:28b; etc.) but in opposition to His will (Romans 16:17; I Corinthians 3:11; Ephesians 2:19; etc.), believers should regard them as clear and present dangers to the true and saving faith. Not only errors in so-called “fundamental” doctrines of Scripture, but every error is a veritable *stumblingblock* [σκάνδαλον] that jeopardizes the spiritual health, safety and ultimate salvation of sheep who are targeted for deception by the “good words and fair speeches” of errorists (Romans 16:18). And the Savior says, not only of such *stumblingblocks* or “offenses” themselves but also of those who lay them like spiritual land-mines in the path of the unwary: “Woe unto the world because of offenses; for it must needs be that offenses come. But woe to that man by whom the offense cometh!” (Matthew 18:7).

As we well know, much is made of the notion that, since true believers *may* in fact exist in heterodox churches or church-bodies —not *because of* the heterodoxy preached, taught, and practiced among them but rather *in spite of it*— that is, because, by the grace of God, individual members of heterodox bodies may *reject the errors* they are taught and *hold only to the saving truth* of the Scriptures, that therefore we should “in charity” leave well enough alone and not presume to sit in judgment of one another’s religious views, which are, they say, after all, a matter of personal preference. Nothing could be further from the truth!! True Christian “charity” or love never turns a blind eye to error, to spiritual danger, or even to his neighbor’s “personal preference” to “sit in darkness and in the shadow of death” (Luke 1:79). “Love worketh no ill toward his neighbor,” writes St. Paul in Romans 13:10; and in I Corinthians 13:6, “[Charity] rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth.” Moreover, true love toward God (which takes precedence over love toward our neighbor) requires faithfulness to His Word (John 14:23). The Savior’s prayer to His heavenly Father in John 17:21 is horribly abused by those who defend religious relativism and unionism in the name of Jesus Himself; for He did NOT pray, “that they all may be one in *externals* but divided in *principle*,” but He compares the unity that He fully expects of His believers to the unity that He and His Father share, namely, “as Thou, Father, art in Me and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us.” THAT unity can only be achieved by us here in this world by perfect conformity to the only source and standard of divine truth, the **Word of Truth** (John 17:17), the **Holy Scriptures** (II Timothy 3:15ff.), the **Foundation of Faith** (Ephesians 2:19-20), the **Truth** that makes us free from error (John 8:31-32), the **means** through the Holy Spirit of God keeps us in true, Godpleasing unity. THAT unity *among men* here in this world is not,

as some have blasphemously called it, “a pipedream of the Holy Ghost;” but it is what the Apostle Paul enjoins upon us and commands in I Corinthians 1:10, saying: “*Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak **the same thing**, and that there be **no divisions** among you, but that ye be **perfectly joined together in the same mind** and in the same judgment.*”

It is those who speak *different things*, who are of a *different mind*, who make a *different judgment* than the Word of God allows—it is THEY who, St. Paul says in Romans 16:17, not only “*cause*,” but, according to the Greek, “**keep on causing** (or *making*) [ποιῶσθε] *divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned.*” The “*divisions*” or *splits* against which the apostle warns, both in Romans 16:17 and in I Corinthians 1:10, are **not** in externals, **not** in matters of *adiaphora*, **not** in details of structure and of organization. They are divisions **in doctrine and in practice**, which therefore cause or create “*offenses*” because they lead into *spiritual jeopardy* the precious sheep and lambs of the Lord Jesus. Therefore, at the risk of redundancy, we cannot repeat too often this plain and unvarnished statement of Scriptural truth: IT IS NOT THOSE WHO **HOLD FAST** IN DOCTRINE AND PRACTICE TO THE WORD OF GOD IN ITS PURITY WHO CAUSE DIVISIONS IN CHRISTENDOM ON THE CONTRARY, IT IS THOSE WHO **DEPART FROM** THE WORD OF GOD IN DOCTRINE AND PRACTICE WHO CAUSE (AND KEEP ON CAUSING) SUCH DIVISIONS OR SPLITS.

And those divisions or splits have *already occurred* before true believers are called upon to exercise *Scripturally-mandated separation* from those who **CAUSED** them (just as, in the example cited earlier, the *innocent party* in a broken marriage, who is *not guilty* of breaking the marriage covenant and vow by fornication or malicious desertion, is entitled to **procure a divorce**, not to break the marriage—inasmuch as it is already broken by the action of the *guilty party*— but simply to **separate** from the guilty party and thus from the danger of becoming partaker of his sins). In the same manner, we Christians have been **mandated** or **commanded** by Holy Scripture to exercise a deliberate **separation** from all such as “*make*,” “*occasion*,” “*bring about*,” and therefore “**cause**” to occur any split between Christian brethren, from all such as destroy their “*unity of the Spirit*” and the “*bond of peace*” that, by God’s grace, exists between all those who enjoy complete agreement in the doctrines of His precious Word and their faithful and consistent application. It is not the **separation** that “*cause(s) divisions and offenses*,” as those dare to claim who refuse to obey the simple, forthright, clear, plain, and unmistakable **COMMAND OF GOD** in His holy Word and seek to justify their disobedience; but it is the divisive action of those who **depart** from “*the doctrine which ye have learned*” and thus lay *stumblingblocks* in the way of simple, trusting, and spiritually naive Christians who are “*taken in*” and *deceived* by the “*good words and fair speeches*” of errorists (Romans 16:18), the orthodox-sounding vocabulary and the smooth-talking arguments of those who “*serve **not** our Lord Jesus Christ, but their **own belly!**”*

“WHERE IS THIS WRITTEN?” we ask with Luther, as we “*search the Scriptures*” for verbally-inspired evidence to support God’s mandate that we separate from errorists. And the Bible, both in the Old Testament and in the New, is literally FULL of supportive passages which establish what the will of the Lord is in this matter and tell us loudly and clearly exactly what we are to do.

In the Old Testament, for example, we have the following record which was “*written for our learning*” (Romans 15:4) concerning God’s EXPLICIT COMMANDS to separate from errorists, from the impenitent, from the heathen, from worldly people, from those in general who posed

a clear and present danger to God's people. Consider these as typical out of many possible examples:

1. God told Abram, whose father, Terah, served other Gods (Joshua 24:2): *"Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee"* (Genesis 12:1).

2. Moses said unto the Lord: *"For wherein shall it be known here that I and Thy people have found grace in Thy sight? Is it not that Thou goest with us? So shall we be separated, I and Thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth"* (Exodus 33:16).

3. The Lord said unto Moses: *"Take heed to thyself, lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the Land whither thou goest, lest it be for a snare in the midst of thee, ...lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they go a whoring after their gods, and do sacrifice unto their gods, and one call thee, and thou eat of his sacrifice. And thou take of their daughters unto thy sons, and their daughters go a whoring after their gods, and make thy sons go a whoring after their gods"* (Exodus 34:12, 15, 16).

4. The Lord said unto the people of Israel: *"I am the Lord your God, which have separated you from other people; ... and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine"* (Leviticus 20:24, 26). [Note in connection with this passage that even God's institution of ceremonial laws and restrictions was intended to keep His people separate from the heathen.]

5. Warning His people of the spiritual jeopardy to be encountered in romantic alliances with the heathen: *"Of the nations concerning which the Lord said unto the children of Israel, 'Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you; for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods,' Solomon clave unto these in love"* (I Kings 11:2).

6. The Psalmist praises the great satisfaction that it is to a child of God to sacrifice temporal advantages among the wicked for the sake of a humble life separate from them, saying: *"I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness"* (Psalm 84:10).

7. The Lord asks rhetorically: *"Can two walk together, except they be agreed?"* (Amos 3:3); and the answer is emphatically in the negative!

...And there are literally hosts of other examples, of other clear directives, of other pointed warnings given to God's people to exhort them to *separation* from the wicked—for His sake, for the sake of the promised Savior, for their own sake and spiritual safety.

In the New Testament we read similar warnings, admonitions, directives and outright commands, making *Scripturally-mandated separation* from the wicked, from errorists, from ungodly men, from the world, and from false brethren NECESSARY and by no means optional. As we often hear the expression in our pop culture today, "What part of 'No!' do you not understand??" Consider the following examples; and, as you hear each one, ask *yourself* (and then later ask those who, in the name of a false sense of "love," or out of fear, or because of insecurity, or as the result of misplaced loyalty refuse to obey these clear injunctions of God's Word—ask also *them*), "What part of this simple God-breathed directive do you not understand??"

1. *"Beware of false prophets which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves!"* (Matthew 7:15).

2. *"Be not deceived: Evil communications corrupt good manners,"* or, more properly rendered



from the Greek: “*Be not led astray: Evil associations corrupt good morals*” (I Corinthians 15:33).

3. “*But shun profane and vain babblings; for they will increase unto more ungodliness*” (II Timothy 2:16).

4. “*Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them; for they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by good words and faith speeches deceive the hearts of the simple*” (Romans 16:17-18).

5. “*A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump*” (Galatians 5:9).

6. “*If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed; for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds*” (II John 10-11).

7. “*But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the Law; for they are unprofitable and vain. A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject*” (Titus 3:9-10).

8. “*And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother*” (II Thessalonians 3:14-15). [Note in this passage the application of admonition “in a state of confession” (*in statu confessionis*), that is, recognizing that even a “casual intrusion of error” destroys “*the unity of the Spirit*” (Ephesians 4:3) and requires urgent admonition, though it does not *immediately* and *terminally* destroy fellowship PROVIDED the admonition is heeded and the error or offense is promptly removed. (See *Brief Statement*, §29; also Titus 3:10 above, #7, with reference to *persistence* in error.)]

9. “*If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to Godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmizings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is Godliness. From such withdraw thyself*” (I Timothy 6:3-5).

10. “*Be not unequally yoked together\* with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God, as God hath said, ‘I will dwell in them and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate,’ saith the Lord, ‘and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you; and ye shall be My sons and daughters,’ saith the Lord Almighty*” (II Corinthians 6:14-18).

\*The imagery of the *unequal yoke* is that of two oxen hitched together to work as one. But one ox is dominant, and the other a weak follower. The dominant ox will cause the weak one to follow his lead and to plow in the direction *he* chooses. The danger inherent in an *unequal yoke* is that the flesh, being weak, will yield to the wicked lead or dominance of the unbeliever or errorist or worldling, and the temptation to “go along in order to get along” will cause the believer who is caught in such a yoke to be “deceived and seduced into misbelief, despair, and other great shame and vice.” (Luther)

In all of the passages cited above, conditions are described which demand *action*, not just observation of error, not just the recognition of error, not just the refutation of error, indeed, not just the condemnation of error, but the deliberate, concerted, and complete *separation* from both error and errorists as dangers to our souls, as destructive of our faith, of potentially fatal to our spiritual life!

As you heard (or read) those passages, was there anything in ANY of them that 1) indicated lack of urgency? 2) permitted them to be simply ignored? 3) applied them only to professed unbelievers? 4) allowed for selective application? 5) inserted an unspecified “time element” which would, in effect, *remove* all urgency and permit *inaction* to replace action?? Was there anything in ANY of those passages that indicated the specified action to be *optional*?? Was there anything in ANY of those passages that indicated the specified action to be only *advisory*?? The simple and inescapable answer to ALL of these questions is a resounding “No!” Separation from error and errorists is *Scripturally mandated*, not merely suggested.

Why?? Oh, because “[we] are bought with a price,” St. Paul writes in I Corinthians 6:20. Our redemption came with a hefty price-tag! And not to SAFEGUARD our blood-bought souls, not to give due heed to spiritual SECURITY by barring the door, as it were, to those who would “deceive us and seduce us into misbelief, despair, and other great shame and vice” [Luther], and to ignore the urgent warnings and commands of our God and Lord DELIBERATELY “after that we have received the knowledge of the truth,” after having understood the gravity of God’s warnings and exhortations and the clear words which mandate action on our part as Christians, and after having understood the Gospel motive of the love of Christ for us when we were spiritually dead in trespasses and sins — “if we [thus] sin willfully, ...there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries” (Hebrews 10:26ff.). If “the love of Christ” does not “constrain us” willingly and cheerfully to take the action demanded of us by God Himself and to do it, not merely as grudging obedience, but because of God’s free grace to us wretched sinners in and through Christ Jesus and His vicarious satisfaction of our guilt, then we’re not only disobedient children; we’re plain unbelievers; and by our despal of God’s grace and its value, we have “trodden underfoot the Son of God and [have] counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith [we] were sanctified, an unholy thing, and [have] done despite unto the Spirit of Grace!” (Hebrews 10:29). If we think that avoiding error and errorists, **Scripturally-mandated** as it is, is a hard thing to do, there’s something a whole lot worse: “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!” (Hebrews 10:31).

We pray in the Fifth Petition of the Lord’s Prayer ‘that God would guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our flesh may not deceive us or seduce us into misbelief, despair, and other great shame and vice; and, though we be assailed by them, that still we may finally overcome and obtain the victory.’ To that end, the Lord commands us to beware of errorists as we would beware of ravenous wolves, to be mindful of how deceitful their “good words and fair speeches” are so that we are not taken in by their subtlety, to “mark” or identify them according to God’s inerrant Word, to admonish them if they will hear us, to “avoid them” as poison to our souls, and to “be separate” from them for our own spiritual welfare according to the will of our heavenly Father for Jesus’ sake. “We cannot do otherwise! God help us! Amen.”

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## II. Sinful Separatism

The term “*separatism*” —as the suffix “-ism” often implies— denotes a negative, inappropriate, false, or sinful action, conduct, or principle which violates or contradicts a positive action, conduct, or principle that has been established as appropriate and Godpleasing by Holy Scripture. We therefore recognize such *sinful* “-isms” as “materialism,” “deism,” “unionism” or “ecumenism,” and “modernism.” And yet, in the case of the term “separatism,” we add the adjective “sinful” to make our reference unmistakably

clear. Thus the term “*sinful separatism*” refers to the violation of the divinely-inspired injunction of the Apostle Paul in the motto-text of our 54<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention, namely, “*that there be NO divisions among you*” (I Corinthians 1:10). A “separatist” is one who *splits* or causes a *rift* between brethren. He is often referred to as a “schismatic,” from the Greek word *σχίζειν*, meaning “to split.” A *schism*, usually pronounced [*sizz*5• *um*] and occasionally [*skizz*5• *um*], is a split, division, or rupture in a fellowship, in a church or church-body, or in a denomination. As such, a *schism* is what the Lord of the Church, does NOT want to occur among His sheep. A *schism* occurs when an individual, or a partisan faction, no longer hears the Good Shepherd’s voice and follows Him (John 10:27), is no longer concerned about “*endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*” (Ephesians 4:3), and refuses to “*speak the same thing*” and to be “*perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment*” (I Corinthians 1:10). A *separatist* or *schismatic* destroys the unity that *should* exist between professing Christians who recognize the will of the Lord Jesus “*that they all may be one, as Thou, Father, art in Me and I in Thee; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me*” (John 17:21), which the true “*unity of the Spirit*” clearly witnesses and declares.

A *separatist* or *schismatic*, therefore, **SINS** when he destroys “*the unity of the Spirit*” and ruptures “*the bond of peace*” (Ephesians 4:3), both of which are created and preserved by the Holy Ghost in and through the Means of Grace. In contradistinction, however, to *errorists* who, by their departure from true doctrine “*cause [and keep on causing] divisions and offenses*” (Romans 16:17) in outward Christendom, *separatists* or *schismatics* usually effect divisions and cause splits by leaving and by not coming back. Concerning such, the Apostle John states both what they *do* and *why* they do it in his first epistle, chapter two, verse nineteen: “*They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.*” Separatists are guilty of *spiritual* malicious desertion when they act in such a manner; and those who are left behind are, as in the case of *marital* malicious desertion, usually unable to do anything to stop it. People suddenly leave a church, defect from a fellowship, resign from a conference — usually without warning; and they don’t want to “talk about it” or to be convinced of their sinful folly.

What has happened?? The symptoms which indicate an imminent *schism* or act of “sinful separatism” are often quite evident, although they may not have been noticed in advance of the break simply because they festered beneath the surface and were permitted to spread like gangrene until the infection could not be arrested in time to prevent the “walk-out.” Jesus Himself experienced such a *schism* when in John 6:66ff. “*many of His disciples went back and walked no more with Him*” because He had taught the Jews that He was the “*living Bread which came down from heaven,*” whom they would have to “*eat of*” by faith if they were to have eternal life. “*This is an hard saying,*” they complained; “*who can hear it?*” Unwillingness or refusal to hear the Word of God on any matter is very often the fuse on the powder keg. Because of the stubbornness of their flesh, they do not want to be convinced, by a Christian brother or sister, by their God-given shepherd, by Scripture itself, of any error, or weakness, or sin, or even a misunderstanding of what the will of the Lord is. And they would rather walk away, they would rather “split,” than be informed, enlightened, corrected, and edified. What is the real problem? The Apostle John states it with deliberate redundancy so as to make this crystal-clear: “*They were not of us!*” (I John 2:19). They weren’t of “*the same mind*” and of “*the same judgment*” (I Corinthians 1:10) because they refused to hear their Savior’s voice (John 10:27). Had they been in “*the unity of the Spirit*” (Ephesians 4:3) and truly been of His sheep (John 10:26), “*they would no doubt have continued with us*” (I

John 2:19), “*assembling [themselves] together*” (Hebrews 10:25) and “*grow[ing] in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ*” (II Peter 3:18). “*But they went out, that they might be made **manifest** [made known clearly to all] that they were not all of us*” (I John 2:19), but **now** we **know**, don’t we? And THEY revealed **THEMSELVES**.

Such *schisms* are NOT God-pleasing; they are not enjoined by His Word; there is no command to leave the *orthodox* — anywhere in the Bible. *Schisms* are begun and carried out by sinful men for ***carnal reasons***, and therefore they are, in and of themselves, ***sinful***. “*The carnal mind is enmity against God*” (Romans 8:7), and therefore it sets itself against God’s Word, goes its own way, and refuses to be corrected. Our dogmaticians (Pieper, Mueller, and the “older men”) distinguish between separatists who act out of **spite and bitterness**, and those who act out of **weakness** in Christian knowledge and are prompted perhaps by an erring conscience. In either case, however, the separation is a SIN because it results in keeping the separatist away from the ministration of God’s Word, the only means whereby the erring is converted, edified in the true faith, and saved eternally.

It is ***improper***, however, to label as “schismatics” those who separate from a church or church body because it tenaciously adheres to false doctrine, or because it “bends the rules” in false practice, or because it permits error to exist side-by-side with the truth. *Such* separation, as we noted in the first part of our essay, is **commanded by Scripture**, and has the salutary effect of keeping us from being partaker of other men’s sins (I Timothy 5:22) and of preserving in us “*the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*” (Ephesians 4:3). This charge, incidentally, was preferred against our fathers who left the Missouri Synod in 1951 and formed the Orthodox Lutheran Conference as a fellowship of the truth. Rubbish! It was obedience to the Word of God, “*which liveth and abideth forever*” (I Peter 1:23).

In practical application, we observe the following as *common examples* of sinful separatism, although these are not to be regarded as comprising an exhaustive list beyond which no other scenarios may present themselves:

a) One of the most common is simply resigning from an orthodox Christian congregation **with no stated reason**. Such resignations are often accompanied by the express desire that the separatist not be contacted further by anyone in any way to dissuade him from his sinful action. Thus the door to admonition and remonstrance is effectively closed both to the pastor and to the congregation. Such separatism cannot be characterized as anything short of *carnal, fleshly behavior* (Romans 8:7 and 7:18) and therefore sinful and displeasing to God (Romans 8:8).

b) Another common scenario is a resignation from an orthodox congregation or fellowship **for stated reasons** which result from ***an erring conscience*** in a matter of doctrine or practice arising out of a misunderstanding of Scripture truth. Such misunderstanding may be due to a poor foundation in Christian doctrine (Hebrews 5:12), weakness in its apprehension and application (Hebrews 5:13-14), or misinformation caused in whole or in part by the cunning interference of a false prophet (Romans 16:18). Especially where the erring conscience “speaks” (Romans 2:15b) and seemingly justifies his position, a separatist is truly convinced of the “righteousness” of his action, even though in fact there is no Scriptural basis for it.

c) One may leave an orthodox church or fellowship, **charging it with false doctrine and practice**, not merely because of ignorance or misunderstanding but because he himself has

*consciously* and *deliberately* rejected or perverted Scripture contrary to better knowledge. Such a separatist often also mounts a concerted effort to convince *others* that his accusation is just and has legitimate merit and thus *sows discord* among those who otherwise would not make themselves partakers of his sin (I Timothy 5:22).

d) Some resign from an orthodox church or fellowship for **stated reasons** which have *nothing to do* with sound doctrine and practice. Rather they are sinful and ill-conceived notions often involving highly-charged **emotional issues** which, though they are purely *rationalistic* in nature, are represented by the separatists as “legitimate” justification for their sinful action and sufficiently compelling to outweigh any influence to the contrary—even that of the Word of God Himself.

e) Members sometimes “resign” from an orthodox congregation **while under Christian admonition** for manifest sins and impenitence. Such a resignation often results from the misguided idea that, if an erring brother is no longer a “member” and therefore cannot be dealt with by the congregation, the church is prohibited from taking action against him; and he cannot be “branded” “*an heathen man and a publican*” since face-to-face admonition was rendered impossible. Such separatists deceive themselves! “*God is not mocked*” (Galatians 6:7) by such manipulation of His church, the local congregation, by a patently transparent effort to avoid the pronouncement of God’s judgment. One who *refuses to hear* the church—even by means of precipitous resignation—IS what the Savior Himself declares him to be (Matthew 18:17); and the fact that his name is no longer included on the membership roster does not affect God’s own assessment of his spiritual estate (Matthew 18:18).

f) It is also sinfully separatistic to **stand aside** from those who in all respects “*speak the same thing [and are] perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment*” (I Corinthians 1:10) on the basis of God’s Word. Such standing aside may be occasioned by **fleshly weakness** and **cowardice** or by arrogant **spiritual aloofness**. But whether one is fearful of persecution, censure, deprivation or isolation here in this world and therefore avoids the confrontation and personal cost that inevitably accompanies a break with the heterodox and a stand with the orthodox, **or** whether one has withdrawn himself from the heterodox but arrogantly considers himself to be above the need for fraternal counsel, instruction, exhortation and the companionship of true brethren and chooses to be “independent” and alone, *in either case* such **spiritual isolationism** is sinful separatism contrary to the Word of God (Mark 14:66-71; Matthew 24:9-10; II Timothy 1:8; Proverbs 18:24; 17:17; Hebrews 10:25).

g) Finally (and this scenario plays itself out more frequently than most would admit), many refuse to join and to participate in the work of an orthodox local Christian congregation because of **purely temporal exigencies**, concern for which *dare never* stand in the way of confession and faith (Luke 14:33; Matthew 19:29; II Timothy 4:10a; etc.). Jesus Himself mentions several of them in His parable of the Great Supper in Luke 14:18-20. —For some there are EMPLOYMENT concerns: Can a person find work (or the *kind* of work for which he is suited or the *career* he really desires) in the locality of an orthodox congregation? Would he have to change jobs, lose his seniority, forfeit his pension benefits, and start at the bottom of the ladder “just” to join an orthodox church? —For others there are LOCATION concerns: What if a person lives in a certain geographical region and there is no orthodox congregation in that area with which to unite? Perhaps he has lived there all his life, prefers the climate and scenery, and has his “roots” there. Is he really expected to *move*?? —For still others, it

is SOCIOECONOMIC considerations, aside even from employment, that come into play: Real estate values, proximity to urban areas, accessibility to mass transportation, the quality of neighborhoods and schools, and the crime rate must *surely* be considered, right?? —And some beg off because of HEALTH concerns: Their allergies, asthma, arthritis, and a whole host of other physiological (and even psychological) conditions may be adversely affected by having to relocate “just” to join a truly orthodox church; and some are frankly just “too old” to make any changes in their lives. These and still other factors are, of course, *overriding issues* for the Mammon-fixated children of this world (Matthew 6:32); but the Lord Jesus bids us set aside all anxiety over such purely temporal considerations in favor of “*the kingdom of God and His righteousness*” (Matthew 6:33), promising that He Himself will address and take care of the earthly needs of His children. Indeed, when the Savior chided Martha for her misdirected priorities and praised Mary for her single-minded love for God’s Word and her concern for spiritual growth, He caused that to be written for our admonition and warning, not to be cast aside as useless chatter (Luke 10:38-42). Moreover, it is particularly reprehensible when people lay the blame for “*overriding temporal circumstances*” upon God Himself, as if HE were ultimately the cause of *sinful separatism* by permitting those conditions to exist (Romans 9:20; Psalm 25:4-5).

May the Lord of the Church graciously grant that we remain ever grateful for the spiritual advantages He has provided us in our orthodox local congregations and in our blessed fellowship of the truth, so that we, now and in the years to come, continue properly to regard and treasure them as precious gifts of God and as blessings to which we assign the highest priorities in our daily lives! “*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!*” (Psalm 133:1), as “[we] all speak the same thing,” as “*there [are] no divisions among [us],*” and as “[we are] perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (I Corinthians 1:10) on the basis of the inerrant, clear, and authoritative Scriptures of our God. To the end that we **continue** in that blessed fellowship of the truth, may He grant us the courage and determination to maintain and practice **doctrinal discipline** in our midst, “*endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*” (Ephesians 4:3), to “*come out from among,*” “*be separate*” from, and “*avoid*” all such as “*cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which [we] have learned*” (II Corinthians 6:17; Romans 16:17), and, at the same time, give due heed to the **destruction** of Godpleasing unity fomented by *sinful separatism* from true brethren, whereby the devil, the world, and our flesh would rob us of our precious fellowship, divide the visible flocks of Christ’s sheep, and destroy the blessed heritage which is ours for Jesus’ sake!

**SOLI DEO GLORIA!**