

Christian Doctrine

#1 - Concern for the truth

Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well. It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth (3 John 1:2-4).

John wrote to Christians of his day, expressing his heartfelt concern that they remain in the truth of God's Word. In this lesson we would echo his concern, which is, in fact, our Lord's concern.

#2 - Logos of different Christian denominations

"Why are there so many churches?" Intending to be neither arrogant nor simplistic, we must answer this question by saying that there are many different Christian churches because there are many false prophets.

#3 - Test the spirits

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world (1 John 4:1).

What happens when we test what people say against what the Lord tells us in his Word?

#4 - Test the spirits

If anyone says that justifying faith is nothing else than confidence in divine mercy, which remits sins for Christ's sake, or that it is this confidence alone that justifies, let him be damned (Council of Trent, Sixth Session, Canon 12).

Roman Catholic Church

#5 - Test the spirits

"As a result the Church, to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation is entrusted, 'does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honoured with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence'[DV 9]."

Roman Catholic Catechism

#6 - Test the spirits

Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer's faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Saviour, the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. It is a testimony to his faith in the final resurrection of the dead. Being a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord's Supper.

Southern Baptist Convention

#7 - Test the spirits

The Lord's Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the church, through partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, memorialize the death of the Redeemer and anticipate His second coming.

Southern Baptist Convention

#8 - Test the spirits

O great and good God, I have come into thy presence to share in offering to thee the great sacrifice of thy Blessed Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ, and to receive the Holy Sacrament of the Body and Blood of the same Jesus Christ in remembrance of his life, death and Passion. I desire to offer and receive [the Lord's Supper] with all the love and contrition of which I am capable 1) to give thee thanks for all the blessings thou hast bestowed, 2) to ask thy help in any matter I have in hand, 3) to ask thee to bless all my friends and relations, and 4) for the dead.

Episcopal Prayer before Mass

#9 - Test the spirits

The Baptism in the Holy Ghost - All believers are entitled to and should ardently expect and earnestly seek the promise of the Father, the baptism in the Holy Ghost and fire, according to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ. This was the normal experience of all in the early Christian Church. With it comes the enduement of power for life and service, the bestowment of the gifts and their uses in the work of the ministry.

Assembly of God

#10 - Test the spirits

The Initial Physical Evidence of the Baptism in the Holy Ghost - The baptism of believers in the Holy Ghost is witnessed by the initial physical sign of speaking with other tongues as the Spirit of God gives them utterance.

Assembly of God

#11 - Test the spirits

Today it is impossible to assume the literal historicity of all things recorded [in the Bible]. What the biblical authors report is not accepted as a literal transcript of the factual course of events. Therefore, critical scholars inquire behind the text and attempt to reconstruct the real history that took place.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

#12 - Test the spirits

The notion of the preexistent Son of God becoming a human being in the womb of a virgin and then returning to his heavenly home is bound up with a mythological picture of the world that clashes with our modern scientific world view.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

#13 - Test the spirits

To gay and lesbian members, we write to you in hope and out of faith. We all live with the pain of a church that experiences sharp disagreements on some issues. Yet we walk beside you and we value your gifts and commitment to the Church. We also call attention to the action of the 1991 Churchwide Assembly that declared "gay and lesbian people, as individuals created by God, are welcome to participate fully in the life of the congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America."

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

#14 - Test the spirits

Jesus Christ wants to have a personal relationship with you. Picture, if you will, Jesus Christ standing at the door of your heart (the door of your emotions, intellect and will). Invite Him in; He is waiting for you to receive Him into your heart and life. When you receive Christ into your heart you become a child of God, and have the privilege of talking to Him in prayer at any time about anything.

Billy Graham

#15 - Test the spirits

Our belief in the sanctity of unborn human life makes us reluctant to approve abortion. But we are equally bound to respect the sacredness of the life and well-being of the mother, for whom devastating damage may result from an unacceptable pregnancy. In continuity with the past Christian teaching, we recognize tragic conflicts of life with life that may justify abortion, and in such cases support the legal option of abortion under proper medical procedures. Therefore, a decision concerning abortion should be made only after thoughtful and prayerful consideration by the parties involved, with medical, pastoral, and other appropriate counsel.

United Methodist Church

#16 - Test the spirits

- On my Honor, I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law; to help other people at all times; to keep myself physically strong, mentally awake and morally straight.
- A Scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, reverent
- Be Prepared
- Do a Good Turn Daily

Scout Oath, Law, Motto, Slogan

#17 - Test the spirits

THE ORDINANCES - We believe the ordinances for the believer are water baptism by immersion and the Lord's supper as a memorial. They are, however, not to be regarded as a means of salvation. But both of which are an evidence of obedience and fellowship with the Lord.

AWANA

#18 - Test the spirits

THE SECOND COMING - We believe in the personal, premillennial and imminent coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We believe in the bodily resurrection of the dead, of the believer to everlasting glory and the unbeliever to judgment and everlasting conscious punishment.

AWANA

#19 - Test the spirits

We accept those areas of doctrinal teaching on which, historically, there has been general agreement among all true Christians. Because of the specialized calling of our movement, we desire to allow for freedom of conviction on other doctrinal matters, provided that any interpretation is based upon the Bible alone, and that no such interpretation shall become an issue which hinders the ministry to which God has called us.

Campus Crusade for Christ

#20 - The Holy Christian Church

- That's a nice white frame church up on the hill.
- Did you go to church last Sunday?
- Which church do you belong to?
- I believe in the Holy Christian Church.

All of the above sentences use the word church. Only the last sentence capitalizes the word church, because in that sentence it is a proper name. When we use this proper name – the Holy Christian Church – we are talking about all those but only those who trust in Jesus as their Savior.

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

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:19-20).

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand (John 10:27-28).

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless (Ephesians 5:25-27).

#21 - The proper name Holy Christian Church can be broken down as follows:

- Holy sinless and pure
- Christian trusting in Christ
- Church group of people

The Holy Christian Church, therefore, properly consists of those people who are sinless and holy before God through faith in Jesus Christ. The Holy Christian Church is all believers everywhere.

Since membership in this Holy Christian Church is solely and exclusively a matter of faith in Jesus Christ, and since faith in Jesus Christ can only be seen by God, the Holy Christian Church is an invisible church. This is why we say in the creed that we believe it exists. We can't see it, but we know that there are people across the globe who in their hearts trust in Jesus for forgiveness and eternal life.

The Holy Christian Church crosses all denominational lines. We are including ourselves in the Holy Christian Church and literally joining together with every other Christian in the world when we pray, "Our Father."

#22 - The question, "Why are there so many different churches?" does not refer to the Holy Christian Church. There is only one Holy Christian Church. It is global, it spans the centuries (for many of its members are already in heaven) and it is invisible. With the term "visible churches," we are referring to local, visible gatherings, congregations, and denominations.

The apostle Paul was speaking about both the Holy Christian Church and a visible church in his opening words to the Corinthians:

Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God... To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ – their Lord and ours: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:1-3).

#23 - A visible church exists where a group of people is gathered around the Word of God. In such a group we know that there are members of the invisible or Holy Christian Church. We know this because of God's promise:

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it (Isaiah 55:10-11).

#24 - We pray that it is never the case, but we realize that there may be some members of a visible church who are not members of the Holy Christian Church, for Christ said:

“Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’” (Matthew 7:22-23)!

#25 - A false teacher may say some things which are perfectly true, but mixed in with his teachings are things which are not true. This accounts for the fact that there are true visible churches and false visible churches.

- A true visible church: People gathered around the Word of God, teaching and using the Word correctly.
- A false visible church: People gathered around the Word of God, mixing some errors into the teaching and exposition of God's Word.

#26 - Fellowship

κοινωνία (often translated “fellowship”) is a Greek word which could be defined as “having a common share in” or “being in agreement.” When confronted with the fact that there are many different visible churches, God speaks clearly about how an individual is to make the decision of which church will be his church. God tells us how to decide with whom we should be in religious fellowship.

#27 - Fellowship Summary

We rejoice over the common faith and fellowship we have with every believer in the Holy Christian Church. But before we practice our Christian faith together with others, we seek to establish complete agreement in all the teachings of God's Word.

#28 - Establishing Fellowship

To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32).

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

“To the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first. Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols (Revelation 2:18-20).

We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us (1 John 1:3a).

Every denial of the Word is a denial of Christ, since it is his Word which is being denied. Christians should take care to affiliate themselves with a church which is consciously striving to teach everything Christ commanded.

The world in which we live has become quite religiously tolerant. Those who point out the errors of other religious groups are labeled as unloving and judgmental. Yet, our Lord has clearly told us that there are no such things as “little false teachings,” that there will be those who teach falsely, and that we are to expose false teachings for what they are and to steer clear of them.

So how can we know what is truth and what is falsehood? We are to test a church body’s published statements, declarations and professions by comparing them with the clear truths of God’s Word. In this regard, the responsibilities for the individual Christian are weighty. In an age of non-denominationalism, examining the beliefs of a Christian group can at times be impossible. Yet, it is agreement on Bible teachings which establishes fellowship.

#29 - “In Fellowship”

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God (Colossians 3:16).

They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers (Acts 1:14).

We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done. He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands (Psalm 78:4-7).

Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you. They have told the church about your love. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans.⁸ We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth (3 John 1:5-8).

There should be true unity before uniting, agreement on all the teachings of the Bible. Uniting without unity, uniting through compromise, “agreeing to disagree” – this is called religious unionism. It is forbidden by God’s Word (cf. Romans 16:17 above). Our primary concern should be for faithfulness to all the teachings of God’s Word. When we find ourselves to be in agreement with what a person or a church body confesses in word and action, we are urged by God to join in with such a group, to show and express this common faith.

Those who share agreement in the Bible’s teachings rightly worship together, study God’s Word together, commune together, pray together, carry out Christian education and mission work together, etc. These are just a few of the joys and blessings which flow out of true religious fellowship which is based on doctrinal agreement.

#30 - “Not in Fellowship”

I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them (Romans 16:17).

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

Romans 16:17 and Titus 3:10 do not mean that if you see walking toward you someone who teaches God’s Word wrongly or someone who has false beliefs about God’s Word that you are to quickly move to the other side of the street. It means that Christians are not to join in religious activity or to join a religious organization where doing so means joining with those with whom they are not in agreement on the teachings of God’s Word.

#31 - Keep away!

Why, in the practice of our religion, do we avoid those who mix in errors with God's Word?

Out of concern for God's Word:

For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth (2 Corinthians 13:8).

You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth? That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough" (Galatians 5:7-9).

Out of concern for one's own faith:

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

Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have wandered away from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some (2 Timothy 2:17-18).

Out of concern for the errorist's faith:

My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins (James 5:19,20).

#32 - Being a member of a Christian congregation is making a statement. It is saying, "The beliefs of this congregation (or denomination) are my beliefs." In our Lutheran congregations, we express this truth when we approach the matter of membership in the congregation.

When individuals either join our congregation or move to another, we follow procedures designed to express what the person professes to believe:

Transfer: When an individual comes to our congregation from another Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod congregation, we recognize that his/her beliefs are the same as those of our congregation. Accordingly, we accept a transfer of membership from the former congregation to our congregation.

Release: When an individual leaves our congregation with plans to join a congregation outside the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, we grant that person a release, indicating that he/she is seeking membership in a congregation with which we are not in religious fellowship.

Profession of Faith: In some cases, when an individual has had a Lutheran background or been confirmed in another Lutheran church body previously, an extensive interview is conducted with the person, explaining the differences between the various Lutheran synods. If an individual is in agreement with what our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod teaches, we would accept the person into membership by profession of faith.

Adult Baptism/Confirmation: If a person has come to our congregation from a different denomination or from an unchurched background, a Bible Information Class is offered to the individual, and, should the person find himself to be in agreement with our congregation's teachings, Baptism is offered (if he/she is unbaptized) and the Bible Information Class is followed by reception into membership through Adult Confirmation (cf. above).

#33 - Walking in the truth

The word synod means walking together. In a synod we are joined together in church fellowship with fellow Christians across the country and around the world.

Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well. It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth (3 John 1:2-4).

#34 - Acronyms for Lutheran Churches

ELCA..... Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

LC-MSLutheran Church – Missouri Synod

WELS Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

ELS Evangelical Lutheran Synod

#35 - Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod**#36 - Sola Fide Evangelical Lutheran Church & School**