



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

Lesson 13.7 – The Doctrine of Church and Ministry

The Church Is One – Its Members Are United Spiritually

Members of Christ's Church on earth may be separated from one another in many ways. Believers in Christ may be separated physically from other believers, living on opposite sides of the world, speaking different languages, following different customs, belonging to different denominations and different church bodies. The bond that unites Christians with one another is a spiritual bond. All believers in Christ are joined to Christ by faith in Christ. All of them are branches attached to the Vine which is Christ. Through their attachment to Christ, they are also attached to all the other branches. They are all members of the same body. There is only one Church of Christ, and all of its members are united with one another spiritually.

The apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesians stresses the oneness of Christ's Church in these words: **"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all"** (Ephesians 4:4-6). To the Christians in Philippi Paul wrote: **"You all are partakers with me of grace"** (Philippians 1:7). **"Faith in Christ Jesus"** is what all members of Christ's Church have in common, even though they may not have much else in common (Galatians 3:26). Paul says, **"You are all one in Christ Jesus"** (Galatians 3:28). When a person no longer believes in Christ for salvation but trusts in himself or in someone or something other than Christ, he is then **"estranged from Christ"** and **"fallen from grace"** (Galatians 5:4), and thus no longer a member of Christ's Church.

The apostle John shared the Gospel of Christ with his readers, so **"that you also may have fellowship with us"** (1 John 1:3). John says: **"Our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ"** (1 John 1:3). When we have this connection with Christ, we are connected to all the others who are connected to Christ. But **"if we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin"** (1 John 1:6-7). As soon as our connection with Christ is broken, our connection with other Christians is also broken. The bond that joins us with other Christians in Christ's Church is a spiritual bond, namely, faith in Christ.

The Roman Catholic Church has a different understanding of Christ's Church. In their view a person belongs to Christ's Church if he is outwardly a member of the Roman Catholic Church and follows the outward practices of the Roman Catholic Church, regardless of whether they have spiritual faith in Christ in the heart. In other words, the Roman Catholic idea of unity in the Church is an external union, membership in the same external organization. The alleged unity of the Roman Catholic Church under the one pope and demands unity in outward observances is an external union without any real spiritual unity.

Many Protestants also seem to be more interested in external union rather than spiritual unity by faith in Christ. Much emphasis is placed on the union and merger of church bodies and congregations into one united organization. This is the aim and purpose of the ecumenical movement among Christians. The desire is to have all Christian groups, and even sometimes non-Christian groups, unite as one religious organization. External union is stressed rather than true spiritual unity. The ecumenical movement minimizes the dangers of false teaching and false practice. They want all those who call themselves Christians to worship together, to pray together, to work together, to preach the Gospel

together, even though they are not agreed in what the Bible actually teaches about worship and prayer and church work, and even though they are not even agreed in what the Gospel of Christ is. The many warnings of Christ and His apostles concerning false teaching and ungodly living are mostly ignored in the interest of external union.

Questions

1. Who are the members of Christ's one Church?
2. What is it that unites Christians with other Christians?
3. What are some of the external things that divide Christians?
4. What is the difference between external union and spiritual unity?
5. When does a person lose his membership in Christ's one Church?
6. What is the Roman Catholic understanding of the one Church?
7. What is the aim of the ecumenical movement among Protestants?
8. How is the ecumenical movement contrary to the Scriptures?
9. What would you say to someone who tries to convince you to become a partner with churches or groups that teach or allow false teaching?