

## An Exegesis of 2 John 7-11

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### Introduction

The eternally unbroken circle, that mysterious *perichoresis* of divine persons...

“Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’ Don’t you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?” (John 14:9-10)

...was broken when sin, with its awful power to separate, was laid upon the Son of God.

“God made him who had no sin, to be sin for us.” (2 Corinthians 5:21)  
“*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachtani?*” (Matthew 27:46)

The horror of sin was taken up into the Trinity itself, there to be atoned. By the death and resurrection of God’s Son come in flesh, the world was justified in Jesus. This you can believe: the circle was broken *to let you in*.

“May they also be in us...I in them and you in me.” (John 17:21,23)

“I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” (John 20:17)

This is what we mean by “fellowship.”

“I pray also for all those who believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.” (John 17:20-21)

“We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.” (1 John 1:3)

We have *κοινωνια* with God. It is because of, and not apart from, the *κοινωνια* we have *simultaneously* with Peter, Paul, James, John and all the apostles, by their apostolic Word. The One they “looked at and their hands have touched,” this they declare by the Spirit’s inspiration. And by standing in *their* circle—by *remaining* and *holding* to the apostolic teaching—we have God just as they do. Brothers, think of all this when you think of “fellowship.” “We write this to make our *joy* complete,” John wrote.<sup>i</sup>

Then, immediately, John took up the matter of our “walk” (“in the light, as he is in the light”) and our “talk” (“if we claim...,” “if we confess...”).<sup>ii</sup> When it comes, then, to our practice and our confession, we’ve been given every tree in the garden of fellowship for our enjoyment—worship, prayer, communion, ministry, mutual support, brotherly affection—and only one thing really that we are *not* to do. *Don’t pretend you’re one with someone when you’re not*. Why not?

If one thing becomes clear throughout John’s writings, it is that the “apostle of love”...

“Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God.” (1 John 4:7)

...is no less the “apostle of truth.”

“Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist—he denies the Father and the Son...See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. And this is what he promised to us—even eternal life. I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray.” (1 John 2:22-26)

### **Background of 2 John**

2 John is an antilegomena; but not *much* is spoken against it. Its late date (90 AD?) and small size caused some to be cautious about it. But a very large part of the early church accepted it wholeheartedly as John’s letter.<sup>iii</sup> If we were sifting through sheets of music, we wouldn’t *decide* which ones were written by Bach, so much as we would *recognize* them. Here, the style, vocabulary, subject matter, *everything* is clearly all John. He is “the elder.”

He was most likely writing from Ephesus, to a Christian congregation referred to as “the chosen lady,” her “children” being its members. (This interpretation nods at John’s metaphor of the Church as the “bride of Christ,” not only in Revelation, but beginning already in John’s Gospel when John the Baptist thinks of himself as the “soshben”—the “best man.”<sup>iv</sup> This interpretation is strongly supported by the plurals throughout 2 John, by the subject matter, and by the closing greeting from “the children of your chosen sister.”) The matter so heavy on John’s heart is that of false teachers who have gone out for the purpose of deceiving the children of God about the person of Jesus, among other things. The practical matter is that of hospitality—the necessary support given to faithful teachers and the strongest prohibition not to aid or abet spiritual killers.

2 John was likely written at the same time as 3 John, the latter being delivered to a trusted friend, Gaius, within the jeopardized fellowship (thanks to Diotrephes), the former was intended to be read publicly. This precise scenario is debatable, but it fits the internal evidence, not to mention the ever-persuasive Lenski.<sup>v</sup> Certainly, the spirit of the two letters is identical.

We have no disagreement with those who identify Cerinthus as the main opponent of the apostle John, and that the spread of the heresy of Cerinthus to a large degree occasioned John’s letters. Irenaeus has the description from John’s disciple, Polycarp, of the day, John left a public bathhouse so as not to bathe in the same place with such an enemy of the truth<sup>vi</sup> (an application of fellowship you may not have thought of.) Irenaeus described the heresy in detail. Cerinthus,

“represented Jesus as having not been born of a virgin, but as being the son of Joseph and Mary according to the ordinary course of human generation, while he nevertheless was more righteous, prudent and wise than other men. Moreover, after his baptism, Christ descended upon him in the form of a dove from the Supreme Ruler, and that then he proclaimed the unknown Father, and performed miracles. But at last Christ departed from Jesus, and that then Jesus suffered and rose again, while Christ remained impassible, inasmuch as he was a spiritual being.”<sup>vii viii</sup>

Some scholars prefer to see the twin heresy of Docetism in the background, that Jesus only “seemed” like a man, because John so eloquently emphasized the human nature of Jesus.<sup>ix</sup>

The one who gave us “the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us”<sup>x</sup> rejects all who “do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in flesh.” (2 John 7) However, we would scarcely expect John to emphasize only Jesus divine nature, in response to Cerinthus, without keeping the full teaching of Christ, his hypostatic union, in view. Neither a “Jesus” that is one of us and nothing more, nor a “Jesus” that isn’t really one of us at all, could be our Redeemer.

## Context

1 Ὁ πρεσβύτερος ἐκλεκτῆ κυρία καὶ τοῖς τέκνοις αὐτῆς, οὓς ἐγὼ ἀγαπῶ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ, καὶ οὐκ ἐγὼ μόνος ἀλλὰ καὶ πάντες οἱ ἐγνωκότες τὴν ἀλήθειαν, 2 διὰ τὴν ἀλήθειαν τὴν μένουσαν ἐν ἡμῖν καὶ μεθ’ ἡμῶν ἔσται εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα. 3 ἔσται μεθ’ ἡμῶν χάρις ἔλεος εἰρήνη παρὰ θεοῦ πατρὸς καὶ παρὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐν ἀληθείᾳ καὶ ἀγάπῃ. 4 Ἐχάρην λίαν ὅτι εὔρηκα ἐκ τῶν τέκνων σου περιπατοῦντας ἐν ἀληθείᾳ, καθὼς ἐντολὴν ἐλάβομεν παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς. 5 καὶ νῦν ἐρωτῶ σε, κυρία, οὐχ ὡς ἐντολὴν καινὴν γράφω σοι ἀλλὰ ἣν εἶχομεν ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς, ἵνα ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους. 6 καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἀγάπη, ἵνα περιπατῶμεν κατὰ τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ· αὕτη ἡ ἐντολὴ ἐστίν, καθὼς ἠκούσατε ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς, ἵνα ἐν αὐτῇ περιπατήτε.

1 The elder, To the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in the truth—and not I only, but also all who know the truth—2 because of the truth, which lives in us and will be with us forever: 3 Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father’s Son, will be with us in truth and love. 4 It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us. 5 And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another. 6 And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love.

Commentary: What no reader can miss is the repetition of the word “truth” (5 times) and the word “love” (5 times) in these 6 verses. John is not only the “apostle of love” but the apostle of “truth-and-love.” This is the pregnant phrase at the end of verse 3. The Greek is: ἐν ἀληθείᾳ καὶ ἀγάπῃ. A single ἐν covering two nouns connected by καὶ is very significant. The construction sees the two items as belonging together, working in tandem, describing the same sphere.<sup>xi</sup> Where one really is, there is the other. What is not in the sphere of love is not the truth either. What is not in the sphere of truth can have little to do with love. It means that in Gospel ministry, we will never be asked to “walk that fine line” between truth and love, needing to delicately choose which of those is called for in a given situation. No, we are called to the center of the sphere that is “truth-and-love,” to “walk in the light as he is in the light.”<sup>xii</sup> *And it is in this sphere of truth-and-love that the very grace, mercy and peace that we have from God the Father and from his Son, will be with us.*

## 2 John 7-11

7 Ὅτι πολλοὶ πλάνοι ἐξῆλθον εἰς τὸν κόσμον, οἱ  
Because many deceivers have gone out into the world, ones who  
(aorist)

μὴ ὁμολογοῦντες Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν τὸν ἐρχόμενον ἐν  
not are speaking the same/agreeing Jesus Christ coming in  
(present active part., with double accusatives) (present part.)

σαρκί· οὗτος ἐστὶν ὁ πλάνος καὶ ὁ ἀντίχριστος.  
flesh *this* one is the deceiver and the Antichrist.  
(emphatic) (not previous reference)

“Ὅτι – because. It is critical to note that what John is about to say is connected by this word to what has come before. Remember not only his often repeated word “truth,” but what follows is specifically an application of the command to walk “in love.”

πλάνοι – deceivers. Basic idea: to lead astray not only into a wrong opinion, but into wrong conduct as well.<sup>xiii</sup> Not content to be deceived themselves, they lead others into error that sets up disaster. They “went out” from Cerinthus, not to bother pagans but to prey on Christians.

κόσμον - the human world. Can be meant merely spatially, but remember all that John has written about “the cosmos”—that which Christ is the light of, which he came to save, the sin of which he took away, that world order which is no longer the point of origin of those who believe in him: “I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world.” (John 17:14)

ὁμολογοῦντες - consistently (not) confessing (present tense). Persistent errorists, habitually and deliberately failing to join in with the confession of the apostles. “Not to confess” = to deny. They speak a different way, for they have “another spirit.”

ἐρχόμενον – coming. This word, not the phrase, “in flesh,” is what Cerinthus denied. We might be surprised by the present tense, expecting an aorist to describe the definitive moment of incarnation. Although Christ does indeed continually come to us in full humanity, and though his future coming could even be meant by this present, it is most likely that the incarnation is in view. The present conveys a sense of the timelessness of that moment (we do something similar in speaking of the “Coming” of Christ); and also testifies that the hypostatic union remains true of him always. This “Coming” indicates the divine nature of Christ as clearly as the next phrase, “in flesh,” establishes his human nature: his birth, though a beginning of something new in terms of his human nature, was a “Coming” in terms of his eternal identity as the Son of God. How few words an apostle requires to distinguish apostolic truth from heresy: “Christ coming in flesh!”

σαρκι - in flesh. Not “sinful flesh” of course, but denoting actual, real, full humanity. It is anarthrous to emphasize that full human quality. “ἐν” describes a full immersion in the sphere of humanity: “Like his brothers in every way.”<sup>xiv xv</sup>

οὗτος - This one. (This pronoun used emphatically is singular). It makes the many deceivers into one awful deceiver—the many are now thought of as the one spirit of antichrist. In these many dangerous itinerant teachers, John sees that the “beast out of the earth” is stirring.<sup>xvi</sup>

ὁ ἀντίχριστος - the “instead-of-Christ”. These articles in combination are not articles of previous reference, though “deceivers” have been mentioned. Rather, the concept of “anti-Christ” is familiar and specific. Remember that “anti” does not mean “against” in Greek, but the more insidious “in place of.”

“(I say all this about walking in that love that is inseparable from the truth)... Because many have gone out into the world of souls who would disastrously lead them astray. I mean the ones who are not blending their voice with ours, that Jesus Christ is come in full humanity. This is that deceiver and Antichrist you’ve heard about.”

Commentary: Someone speaking blatantly *against* Christ would be easily recognized and have little power to deceive committed Christians. The *Instead-of-Christ* is a chilling collective description of those who have *many good things to say about Christ*, but who bring a different understanding of his Person and Work. In the doctrinal license they take, they replace Christ as the One-and-Only Teacher in the Christian Church. The well-meaning but immature Christian, who wants to embrace anyone that seems to love Jesus, is susceptible to such teachers. The apostle, making an application of all that he has been saying about truth-and-love, especially love, wants every “confession” to be examined.

“If any man would preach, let him suppress his own words. He may speak them in the family and state. But here in the Church he must speak nothing but the Word of the rich Head of the family; else it is not the true Church. In the Church the rule should be: God is speaking.”—Martin Luther<sup>xvii</sup>

ὄ βλέπετε ἑαυτοὺς ἵνα μὴ ἀπολέσητε ἅ

Be watching out for yourselves in order that not you may lose the things which  
(pres. pl. imv) (or objective) (aor. act. pl. subj)

εἰργάσαμεθα ἀλλὰ μισθὸν πλήρη ἀπολάβητε.

we labored for but rather a reward full you may receive  
(1<sup>st</sup> pl. aor. mid. indic) (adj) (aor. act. subj)

ἀπολέσητε - you may lose (from: ἀπολλυμι) - With a connotation of being destroyed; the subjunctive holds out the horrible possibility. The name of the “angel of the Abyss” in John’s Revelation is Ἀπολλύων. (“Destroyer”<sup>xviii</sup>) (The verb, βλέπετε, is usually followed by a simple object clause, containing the content of the warning. But this may still be purely final.)

εἰργασάμεθα - we worked (from: ἐργαζόμαι) - The aorist has a constantive sense. “We worked and worked.” The 1<sup>st</sup> person plural (the more difficult reading) is given a “B” rating in the UBS text, contra the NIV. That the readers would lose if they were deceived is self-evident; but so would the community of faith and “the elder” himself. John’s pastoral style prefers this pronoun, even when exhorting them (e.g., “...I ask that we love one another”—verse 5). He switches to “you” only when the sense dictates it.

ἀπολάβητε - you may receive (your due) (from ἀπολαμβάνω) - a purpose or result clause.

“Keep on looking out for yourselves, so that you do not suffer the terrible loss of all that we worked so hard for, but that instead you receive your reward in full.”

Commentary: ‘Be continually watchful because of the many errorists, on account of whose deception everything—the reward of all our work and all our tears, waiting for us in

heaven—could be lost. We’ve worked too hard to let that happen.’ It’s that very reward— hearing his “well done,” being together in heaven with Christ and with all those who received our ministry—that is at stake if we don’t keep our people continually on guard as John did. The very thing that makes all our heartaches and hardships in ministry worthwhile is what would be thrown away, should false teachings result in unbelief.

On the other hand, verses 8 and 9 may have two different situations in view: verse 8 could indicate a *diminished* reward in heaven (versus a “full reward”) due to the effect of being *partially* deceived, while verse 9 would then speak of those who, in fact, suffer the loss of God himself. What a partial deception would be is difficult to describe, considering how the heresy in view “goes for the jugular.” I prefer to remember that God himself is our reward in full<sup>xix</sup>, and let verses 8 and 9 describe the same territory.

9 Πᾶς ὁ προάγων καὶ μὴ μένων ἐν τῇ διδαχῇ τοῦ

Every one who is going before and not is remaining in the teaching of the  
(one article) (pres. part.) (pres. part.) (definite article) (singular)

Χριστοῦ θεὸν οὐκ ἔχει· ὁ μένων ἐν τῇ διδαχῇ,

of Christ *God* not he has. The one remaining in the teaching  
(subj. gen.) (emphatic position) (pres. indic.) (pres. part.)

οὗτος καὶ τὸν πατέρα καὶ τὸν υἱὸν ἔχει.

*This* one both the Father and the Son has/is holding.  
(emphatic) (with coordinating def. articles) (pres. indic.)

*προάγων* - going before (from: *προάγω*) - To “run ahead.” Those who proudly offer “progressive” teachings, who use the Word of God as a springboard to “advance” their own ideas, have advanced beyond the boundaries of the true Christian faith.

*μένων* - remaining (from: *μένω*) - John turns to this word often, being one he heard the night before the cross, when Jesus spoke about the “branches” remaining in “the Vine.” (Recall how Jesus spoke of himself and his words interchangeably.<sup>xx</sup>) One article governs both verbs, “going before” and “not remaining:” to go ahead means to not in any way be remaining.

*τῇ διδαχῇ* - “the teaching” - *a singular unified whole*, that which the Apostles received from Christ and about Christ, what he taught and still teaches through them, and which has now come to us *as a single piece*. This teaching “of Christ,” as subjective genitive, includes both the truth about himself and the command to love. The article stresses its *uniqueness* as well as its *oneness*. (“*In the teaching*” means “in the sphere of, in line with, in accord with.” The objective reality—the truth—has been given to us in words that can be taught, realized and apprehended.) All apostolic teaching has this character: “the sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.”<sup>xxi</sup>

*τὸν πατέρα καὶ τὸν υἱὸν* - the Father and the Son - the repetition of the definite articles is consistent with the content of “the teaching,” i.e., the Son is coordinated with the Father. They belong in the same category. By having one, they have the other. Separation of the two is impossible.

“Everyone who makes so-called ‘advances’ rather than simply remaining in the teaching we have from Christ, does not have God at all. No, it’s the one who is remaining in that teaching, that is the one that has a hold not only on God the Son but on God the Father as well.”

Commentary: We cannot make too much about the singular with the article in this term, “*the teaching*,” namely, that the teaching of the apostles is seen as *a unique, unified whole*. John is not concerned whether the deceivers “got many things right” in their teachings. Having heard a confession, he would classify it as either being or not being in conformity with “the teaching.” We “speak the same” or we don’t. And I would ask, do we really hear anyone else in all the visible Christian church today, that has objective justification permeating, unifying, holding together their every teaching, such as has been handed to us as confessional<sup>xxii</sup> Lutherans?

As to the persistent errorists, they were not in possession of that one, complete teaching. This meant they were not in possession of the Son by faith...which means that what they were so confident they held in their grasp, was not God at all. There is no Father we can have apart from his One and Only Son Come in Flesh. Remain in “the teaching” and have both.

Thus our “unit concept” of church fellowship comes into view. Are there so-called “levels of fellowship,” meaning 1) various levels of doctrinal agreement to correspond to 2) various levels for practicing fellowship? The term “*the teaching of Christ*” as a unique, unified whole speaks strongly to the first aspect (as “*do not even welcome them*,” verse 10, will at least have relevance to the second). It’s not as though we need to find the entire “unit concept” established on the strength of these verses alone. (More than half the books of the New Testament are written to preserve a fellowship that was in jeopardy.<sup>xxiii</sup>) Rather, here is very telling example of the apostolic practice of *κοινωνία* to lay on top of all the others. Here an apostle is speaking as apostles always do, viewing the matter the only way they know:

“A Christian confession of faith is in principle always a confession of the entire Word of God. The denial, alteration, or suppression of any word of God does not stem from faith but from unbelief.” WELS Statement on Church Fellowship, B, 2.<sup>xxiv</sup>

10 εἴ τις ἔρχεται πρὸς ὑμᾶς καὶ ταύτην τὴν  
If anyone is coming toward you and this (very) the  
(condition of reality) (pres. indic.) (pl)

διδαχὴν οὐ φέρει, μὴ λαμβάνετε αὐτὸν εἰς οἰκίαν  
teaching not is carrying, not ever be receiving that one into (your) home  
(pres. indic.) (pres. imv. pl.)

καὶ χαίρειν αὐτῷ μὴ λέγετε·  
or even to “be glad” to him not be saying.  
(pres. infin.) (pres. imv.)

φέρει - is bearing, bringing forth - Note again the repeated present tenses describing the activity of the deceivers.

λαμβάνετε - (λαμβάνω with “into home”) show hospitality to - It was common in the ancient world, especially given the realities of ancient travel, to receive traveling teachers in the home and offer shelter and lodging.

Χαίρειν αὐτῷ λέγετε - give a welcome - The present imperative has an iterative force “whenever the occasion arises;” and the negative means, “not now or ever.”

“If you see someone coming toward you and this very teaching is not the one they’re carrying, don’t you ever be showing them hospitality. Don’t even welcome them.”

Commentary: ‘If someone comes along who does not bring this same, whole teaching of the Christ with him, does not speak the same confession that is in line with the unique apostolic teaching of the Christ...that person must not be aided by you in any way, nor even encouraged.’ It was an absolute necessity that brothers in Christ be supported, fed and housed by the local congregation. But to give those who deny the Son and hate the brethren that place would be to become a fellowship in their unbelief and hatred of the truth.

This much is clear: John includes “speaking a greeting” as a form of fellowship exercised. It does not refer to a bit of politeness or civility, but to any expression, even a mere friendly greeting, that would be misconstrued as an expression of oneness. (Remember the “right hand of fellowship” held out to Paul by the rest of the apostles in Jerusalem, after they had examined his confession.<sup>xxv</sup> It was clear to all who witnessed it, what that handshake meant, or what it’s withdrawal would have. Remember also, “Greet one another with a holy kiss” in Romans 16:16.)

Certainly a greeting is less than a prayer.

11 ὁ λέγων γὰρ αὐτῷ χαίρειν κοινωνεῖ τοῖς ἔργοις  
the one saying For to him to “be glad” is having a share in the works  
(pres. act. indic.)

αὐτοῦ τοῖς πονηροῖς.  
of him the evil ones.  
(subj. gen.)

κοινωνεῖ - (from: κοινωνεω) fellowships/participates. The root word is “to have in common.” The word used for the mysterious union of the body and blood of Christ with the bread and wine<sup>xxvi</sup>, for the blessed communion of the saints with each other and with God<sup>xxvii</sup>, for the bond of those who have worked together in Gospel ministry<sup>xxviii</sup>, and for our connection to Christ, in particular when we suffer with him<sup>xxix</sup>...is now used for the moment when a Christian is merely greeting someone who does not have “the teaching.”

πονηροῖς - (from πονηρῶς) wicked. Not too strong a word for that with potential to sever a soul from Christ.

“For the one giving such a welcome becomes a full participant in his evil works.”

Commentary: This verse contributes further to our “unit concept” of church fellowship. We might have thought of the giving of a warm, religious greeting as the lowest level of fellowship imaginable, if the concept of “levels of fellowship” had merit. Here, the strongest



possible warning is attached to the least form of expressing fellowship. This is the only way we ever find the apostles acting: namely, we are in fellowship or we are not. If we are not, then no expression of fellowship is appropriate. There is no “don’t ask don’t tell policy” here; but implicit is the responsibility to test every confession. Note that John does not make this application indiscriminately to all people outside our faith (as if my love for my Muslim neighbors should be cautious, hesitant and have limits), nor to the weak brother who remains *willing to be instructed*, but to *proselytizers* who seek entrance among Christians to do their proselytizing. These are spiritual murderers and thieves. “Don’t give them the time of day.” To support them is to have a share in their work.

We can only celebrate the divine preservation of the gospel through the apostolic Word as we become aware of the opposition of antichrist that was there from the very beginning. And, humanly speaking, we are the beneficiaries of the spiritual discernment and moral courage of John, the apostle of truth-love, and others like him.

Is this what it means to “walk in love?” Yes. It is love for God. It is love for His word of truth. It is love for the gospel, for the handling of it with utmost precision. It is love for the Church. For us to even know what the love of God is, for us to know what it is to express this love for another human being, ever, we must be “in the teaching.” There is no love in this entire cosmos except that which comes from God, in Christ, by means of and never apart from “τῆ διδαχῇ τοῦ Χριστοῦ.”

### Closing Verses

12 Πολλὰ ἔχων ὑμῖν γράφειν οὐκ ἐβουλήθην διὰ χάρτου καὶ μέλανος, ἀλλὰ ἐλπίζω γενέσθαι πρὸς ὑμᾶς καὶ στόμα πρὸς στόμα λαλῆσαι, ἵνα ἡ χαρὰ ἡμῶν πεπληρωμένη ᾖ. 13 Ἀσπάζεται σε τὰ τέκνα τῆς ἀδελφῆς σου τῆς ἐκλεκτῆς.

12 I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy maybe complete. 13 The children of your chosen sister send their greetings.

Commentary: John breaks off this brief letter in favor of completing the needed work “face to face” (literally: “mouth to mouth”). Who can say how many such letters were written? Only 2 and 3 John were preserved by God, and in them we catch a glimpse of John’s activity in his old age. They present a little piece of church history. John has an unpleasant task and he performs it. And yet he does so in the name of, and for the sake of... *joy!* While we must learn to recognize the absence of fellowship in every other-minded confession, fellowship remains a positive concept. Faith produces the desire to join with other Christians, our energy and concern for fellowship primarily has to do with finding the opportunities to give it full, lively, loving expression with kindred hearts and minds. Joy!

### Conclusion

I remember the story of an old man who repaired shoes. When a pair was brought to him to work on that he deemed to be beyond repair, he wrapped up two cookies, placed one in each shoe and returned them to the customer, saying, “Anything not worth doing, is worth not doing well.” To withhold fellowship causes a groan within any pastor with a beating heart. But there are some things we are simply not to do. How do we not do them well?

Very early in my ministry, I faced my first “fellowship crisis” with 2 of the 10 members of my exploratory mission. 20% of my congregation wanted me to commune their Missouri Synod grandma. In panic, I wrote them a paper/epistle nearly as long as the one you’re reading, and took it to them and began to walk through it. About halfway through, the man looked up and said, “Pastor, I can’t believe you did this just for us.” And not long after that, they “got it.”

And if they don’t? We won’t think institutionally about the Christian Church: (Can you imagine the thought crossing John’s mind that he might have a larger congregation if he could smooth things out with Cerinthus? Did he wonder if “fellowship” would hurt the success of his church? That doesn’t even make sense!) Instead, we’ll draw strength from *this* fellowship we’re enjoying today. Here are those who understand us and why we do the things we do. We return to our exegetical skills, and to the precision with which we’ve learned to handle the law and gospel—understanding original sin and objective justification, what “grace” is and what “faith” is in the ways that take our breath away. You have to *love* the Gospel of *truth*...if you are going to be *true* to the Gospel of *love*. And then we will be saying things to our people that they can hear no where else in your little corner of the cosmos, what no other “shepherd” will say to them, such as that God has actually reconciled the world to himself in Jesus his Son. And while, for a time, people find fellowship to be “a hard teaching, who can accept it?” they may also say, but “to whom shall we go, you have the words of eternal life.”<sup>xxx</sup> And in time, fellowship will make sense—even its most difficult applications will be a price gladly paid—in the light of the Gospel, when seen for what it really is. Who was the man dying on the cross? What did it mean? Brothers, no one can answer those questions better than you. It is to die for.

If they never “get it,” those weak ones who cannot perceive the difference between the grace we give them and the burdens elsewhere, who do not humbly submit to the Word but throw up sentimental arguments against fellowship and question our love, we receive their rebuke. Draw deep encouragement from it. In the same way they treated our Lord. But we will draw no false distinction between love and truth, between “now I will show you the most excellent way”<sup>xxxi</sup> and “I adjure you before the living God, preach the Word.”<sup>xxxii</sup> We don’t walk a fine line between ἀγάπη and ἀλήθεια. “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.”<sup>xxxiii</sup>

“As the Lord liveth, if any king or prince imagines that this man Luther humbles himself before him in the sense that he repents of his doctrine, pleads guilty of false teachings and begs for mercy, such a one is deceiving himself. In the domain of doctrine the greatness of men means nothing to me; there the greatest of them is a mere bubble or even less. That is not going to be changed. Whoever is afraid, let him flee. They are free to go. My Supporter is strong enough and safe enough for me; that I know. Whether all the world follows me or deserts me, that is all the same to me; for I recall that it did not side with me when I stood alone.”<sup>xxxiv</sup>—Martin Luther to King Henry VIII

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<sup>i</sup> 1 John 1:1-4.

<sup>ii</sup> 1 John 1:5-10.

<sup>iii</sup> “An Exegesis of 2 John”—a fine paper by WELS pastor, Dale Schulz.

<sup>iv</sup> In the instructions for the “soshben” in the Talmud, when the groom arrived at the wedding chambers, the “best man” who had been standing watch had only one task left: “to go away rejoicing.” John, who could not be tempted to jealousy or resentment of Jesus, said, “That joy is

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mine.” (John 3:29). Another allusion may even be found in this: when a young Jewish man proposed to a young woman, some say it went something like this, “In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so I would have told you. I go and prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. (John 14:2-3)

<sup>v</sup> p. 549-560, *Interpretation of Peter, John, Jude*, R.C.H. Lenski, Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, 1966.

<sup>vi</sup> p. 300, *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, volume 12, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1981.

<sup>vii</sup> 28.1 *Contra Haereses*

<sup>viii</sup> One cannot help but think of *Christian Dogmatics* by Jensen and Braaten, e.g., volume 1:527, 546 “The notion of the pre-existent 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...The primary interest of dogmatics is to interpret the virgin birth as a symbol and not a freakish intervention in the course of nature.”

<sup>ix</sup> p. 295-296, *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, volume 12.

<sup>x</sup> John 1:14.

<sup>xi</sup> “An Exegesis of 2 John”—Dale Schulz.

<sup>xii</sup> 1 John 1:7.

<sup>xiii</sup> My major exegetical sources are: *Theological Dictionary of the Greek New Testament* (Kittel), *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Rienecker, Rogers), *A Grammatical Aid to the Greek New Testament* (Hannah), and *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Baur, Arndt, Gingrich).

<sup>xiv</sup> Hebrews 2:17.

<sup>xv</sup> Paul wrote, “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God,” (1 Cor. 15:50), meaning that flesh must be transformed from it’s present fallen state, and that the “fleshy body” must become a “spiritual body.” John, as well as Luke, emphasize “human flesh” as defining the human reality of a person (Luke 24:39), and assure us that Jesus rose (John 20:17) and was glorified (John 20:17) in that same body. We only want to recognize a difference in their use of these terms.

<sup>xvi</sup> Revelation 13.

<sup>xvii</sup> *Luther’s Works*, St. L. XII: 1413.

<sup>xviii</sup> Revelation 9:11.

<sup>xix</sup> Genesis 15:1.

<sup>xx</sup> John 15:4-5,7.

<sup>xxi</sup> 1 Timothy 1:11.

<sup>xxii</sup> I’ve learned to see this precious word through the eyes of a former Bob Jones’ University Graduate and former Baptist minister now in the WELS.

<sup>xxiii</sup> p. 23, *Church Fellowship, Working Together for the Truth*, John F. Brug, NPH, Milwaukee, 1997.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Brug, p. 163-172, “WELS Statement on Church Fellowship” (1970)

<sup>xxv</sup> Galatians 2:9.

<sup>xxvi</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:16.

<sup>xxvii</sup> 1 John 1:1-4.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Philippians 1:5.

<sup>xxix</sup> Philippians 3:10.

<sup>xxx</sup> John 6:60, 68.

<sup>xxxi</sup> I mean to refer to 1 Corinthians 13, in its entirety.

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<sup>xxxii</sup> I mean to refer to the pastoral epistles in their entirety.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> 1 John 1:7.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> St, K, XIX:413,422.