

Walk in the Light of Christ

✦ Fellowship high and low (1:1-6)

✦ Forgiveness full and free (1:7 – 2:2)

In the name of Jesus, our resurrected Light to heaven, dearly redeemed children of God:

This past week our Sunday School Teachers discussed two characters in upcoming lessons. These two men illustrate the stark difference between the darkness of unbelief and walking **in the Light of Christ**. The Jerusalem church had a serious problem that threatened their fellowship: *“Grecian Jews... complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.”* God’s people can endure much, but don’t neglect “Mom.” The first church council elected deacons like Stephen, *“a man full of God’s grace and power [who] did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people.”* But when Stephen proclaimed Christ-crucified was risen, he was stoned to death by the same Jewish religious leaders who condemned Jesus. *“And Saul was there, giving approval to his death.”* (Acts 6:1,8; 8:1 NIV) Saul’s vicious campaign tried to wipe out the rest of Christ’s followers. Ever since the first Easter we need God’s counsel to **Walk in the Light of Christ** for...

✦ Fellowship high and low (1:1-6)

Fast forward fifty or sixty years. John is by now the sole surviving apostle, serving as John the Elder in Ephesus. If it’s A.D. 95, as some scholars suggest, nearly thirty years have passed since Peter and Paul were executed by Roman Emperor Nero according to tradition. The other twelve apostles preached as far as Britain, India and beyond. They went into all the world and many legends followed them. Imagine a pagan king finds out his queen “loves Jesus.” He can’t understand how she can love a man who died on a cross, rose from the dead and went away to heaven. But jealousy needs no reason. The king wants his queen for himself. Solution to her conversion? Kill the messenger. The worldly fight for fellowship is bloody and cruel – so very, very different from our **Fellowship high and low** in Christ.

Can you hear the echoes of Genesis 1 and the opening verses of John’s Gospel? This First Epistle of John was probably written a decade or so later: *“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at [closely] and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.”*

Already the dangerous heresy of Gnosticism was spreading like rotting yeast throughout Christendom. The Holy Spirit is fighting back against the lying spirit from hell through John, the disciple Jesus loved. John had been close enough to hear and see and touch the Savior, and no way would he accept the lies of Cerinthus and other Gnostics that *the body is bad, only the spirit is good, and therefore God would never take on a human body. Jesus only seemed like God, and God only seemed like man* according to the Gnostics. Their idea of “salvation” just meant *escaping from this body*.

John is getting old. But you can still see the fire in his eyes and hear it in his voice when they set that chair down in front of the congregation. He teaches a while, then stands up. John stretches out his hands like Jesus on the cross: *“The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. 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.”* As John motions broadly with his arms and heavenward with his hands you can see the horizontal and vertical **Fellowship high and low** that we enjoy in Jesus. *“We write this to make our joy complete.”* Every faithful Christian parent and grandparent, every called pastor and Sunday School teacher knows that “joy” deep down in the soul. Christ-crucified and risen made this **Fellowship** reaching up to God in heaven and soothing the eyes of a child with...

✠ **Forgiveness full and free (1:7 – 2:2)**

Proclaiming this Gospel message is a great joy for all those take it on their lips. But the greatest sadness is when God's people are not hearing. And it's not just pastors who feel this frustration. Sunday School teachers feel deep disappointment when they come prepared for their lesson to be a blessing to the children, but parents don't bring them to hear. A major part of being in fellowship with fellow Christians is to encourage and enable this "declaring" to take place for young and old. If your child is not with his or her teacher in Sunday School, did you ever stop to consider the grief you may be causing a dedicated Christian who is called by God through His Church to "declare" the saving Name of Jesus? How this must hurt our blessed Savior as it would grieve you if your child could not eat and grow.

Years ago a mom in our congregation had to take her daughter through major tests because the little girl just was not eating. Finally a very perceptive doctor found her adenoids were swollen. The poor little girl had to decide whether to eat or to breathe. Can you see why that mother cried tears of joy when a simple procedure by a skilled physician enabled her child to chew and to breathe at the same time?

The Holy Spirit is cutting now with the Good Physician's lighted scalpel, shining the Light of Christ up into your head, down into your heart where pride swells up our ability to breath and eat. Can anyone honestly say, "I love God's Word and this Christian fellowship the way I should"? ***"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."*** Again, ***"If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives."*** Gnostics thought they had perfect knowledge, much like many Lutherans who took Catechism and a few Bible classes. Luther's scathing blast against pastors in his Preface to *The Large Catechism* fits parishioners too:

*"Like pigs and dogs, [pastors] take nothing more from the Gospel than this lazy, deadly, shameful, worldly freedom! The common people also respect the Gospel altogether too lightly, and we accomplish nothing special, even though we work diligently....Many see the catechism as a poor, common teaching, which they can read...once and immediately understand [then] throw the book into a corner and be ashamed to read it again....I am also a doctor and a preacher....Yet I must remain a child and pupil of the catechism....Therefore, for God's sake I beg such lazy bellies and arrogant saints to be persuaded and believe that they are...truly not so learned or such great doctors as they imagine!...The Holy Spirit is present in...reading, repetition, and meditation. He bestows ever new and more light and devoutness...just as the first Psalm declares people blessed who meditate on God's Law day and night (Psalm 1:2). Certainly you will not release a stronger...repellant against the devil...engaged by God's commandments and words [to] speak, sing, or think...(Colossians 3:16)....God Himself is not ashamed to teach these things daily. He knows nothing better to teach. He always keeps teaching the same thing and does not take up anything new or different....They should not stop until they are sure that they have taught the devil to death, and have become more learned than God Himself and all the saints."*¹

"My little children," John writes (NETNT 2:1), ***"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....If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness....My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."*** (NIV)

How comforting that we have a lawyer in heaven's courtroom, God's own Son with His trophies of victory for **Forgiveness full and free**. How refreshing that Jesus keeps breathing on us with His dear Holy Spirit, **Fellowship high and low** through this Word of life! Such love and mercy from God, such joy for Sunday School teachers, such everlasting bliss for your children – baptized and cherished in God's arms now and forevermore! In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

¹ Martin Luther. "The Large Catechism – Preface," *Concordia – The Lutheran Confessions, A Reader's Edition of the Book of Concord*. (Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 2005), pp. 377-382