

A BRIEF

Complaint or Apology

OF THE

DESPISED CHRISTIANS

AND

EXILED STRANGERS,

TO ALL THE THEOLOGIANS AND PREACHERS OF THE GERMAN NATIONS,
CONCERNING THE BITTER FALSEHOODS, SLANDERS AND ABUSES WITH
WHICH THEY, WITHOUT TRUTH, BURDEN THESE SUFFERING CHRIS-
TIAN AND EXILES, TOGETHER WITH A FRIENDLY REQUEST TO
HAVE A FREE DISCUSSION OF THE SCRIPTURES, IN ACCORD-
ANCE WITH THE RULES OF CHRISTIAN LOVE.

BY

MENNO SIMON.

“The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient,” 2 Timothy 2:24.

“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ,” 1 Corinthians 3:11.

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Complains of Apology

DESPISED CHRISTIANS

LETTERS

TO THE THEOLOGICAL FACULTY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF GIESSEN

WE, poor and despised christians, who have to endure and suffer so much, on account of the testimony of the word of the Lord, wish to all theologians and preachers of all countries who boast of the gospel, whoever and wherever they are, a new, penitent heart; a true, active faith in Christ Jesus; an unfeigned, ardent love; a salutary doctrine; a sound doctrine according to truth, and a pious, unblamable life, in the fear of the Lord, of God our heavenly Father, in the operation and power of his Holy Spirit, through Christ Jesus, his beloved Son, our Lord and eternal Savior, Amen.

LETTERS

A BRIEF COMPLAINT OR APOLOGY.

It is a fact well known to all, dear men and brethren, how very much the pure, divine truth is disregarded in our Netherlands, caused by the envious crying and clamor of the Papists and Monks; and that the innocent blood is shed like water; on account of which we, miserable children, are forced to flee from the sword of the tyrants, and to seek refuge in foreign lands, with our weak women and little ones, and to earn our bread in tribulation and misery, according to the prophecy of God's word. Many of you, it appears, cry against us, perhaps with good intentions, through misunderstanding, and instigate the magistracy (part of whom should be reasonable and discreet) to persecution, by false accusations, and contrary to all reasonableness and christian love; and you warn every body against us, as being disposed like the Munsterites; that we would take countries and cities, if we had the power; that we are rebels, and use the sword; steal; are polygamists; have our women and possessions in common; will not obey the magistracy; that we murder our children bodily and spiritually; are anabaptists, and profaners of the sacraments, deceivers, and hypocrites; that we boast of being without sin; self-complacent; heaven-stormers; who trust in being saved by our own good works and merits, that we are ungodly heretics and conspirators, new monks, rogues, miscreants and possessed of the devil. In short, we are alas, portrayed by you, in such colors, that all who are not acquainted with our foundation and faith, must shut their mouths and noses at the sight of us, and must have a horror of us; although, before God and his angels, we seek nothing upon earth, but that we, in our weakness, may be cordially united in the Spirit, word and example of

the Lord, through his grace, as all the Scriptures teach and imply.

The Almighty, great Lord, who knows all hearts, knows that we are clear, before the Lord and his judgment, of all the beforementioned abominations and slanders, of which we are ever accused by you; also, that we are clear and innocent before all the world. Yea, if any one under the whole canopy of heaven, can prove, by the firm truth, that we, and our adherents, are guilty of one of these capital crimes, or that we were ever guilty thereof, then we will lay our hands upon our mouths and will be bound by life and possessions to the accuser, all our days; with this exception, however, that we do not wish to obey the magistracy, when they command things contrary to the word of God. Is it not a deplorable thing that we are slandered and accused of such inhuman disgraces, while we never even thought of doing them, and much less commit them?

O, dear men and brethren, if you knew what we seek, and how, by the grace of God, we are disposed towards you all, you would not have such hard feelings against us as you have had hitherto; or else you are abandoned to a state of ungodliness and perversity; something which, we trust, is not true of many of you.

Since you are so lamentably mistaken in our intentions, heap one falsehood upon another, and since, alas, we are not allowed at any place, verbally to defend ourselves, therefore we are forced to present a defense in writing, and would humbly pray, and fraternally admonish you all to consider these four things:

First, that you would consider in sincerity of heart, that lies are of the devil, that the lying mouth killeth the soul, that

a liar has no part in God's city, that the backbiters are deserving of death, that they shall not abide in the tabernacle of the Lord, and not dwell in his holy hill, Psalm 15: 1.

Secondly, that nearly all of your accusations against us are capital crimes. If we did not fear the Lord, but would strictly ask our rights, according to the law of the world, and retaliate, what would at last become of us; since you publicly accuse us of such accursed abominations, which no man ever can prove against us by the power of the truth.

Thirdly, that this, your action, is directly opposed to all nature, reason, christian love and the word of God; for where was there ever a person of pious nature who did not pity the outcast and sympathize with the afflicted? All the Scriptures teach that we shall receive, serve, protect and console the afflicted and strangers, in love; and you see plainly how lamentably we poor, pitiable people are every where hated, despised, banished, oppressed, and in some places judged and murdered; yet your hearts are not so much moved as to accost us once with a friendly word, in our sore temptations and tribulations, and to examine our foundation, faith and actions, in a paternal spirit, according to the word of the Lord. But you still cause more enmity against us, that we may find no rest upon earth. You cry, write, falsify, upbraid, clamor, add tribulation to tribulation, drag us to dungeons and prisons, as if you never had read a syllable of the word of the Lord, with understanding minds, nor received a spark of his Holy Spirit. We will leave to your own judgment, if this can be called acting in accordance with unfeigned, christian love, with the doctrine and usage of the apostles, and in accordance with the Spirit, word and example of the Lord.

Say, beloved, where do the Holy Scriptures teach that we shall rule the consciences and faith of others, in the kingdom and church of Christ, by force of the sword, violence, and tyranny of the magistracy—something which is left entirely to the judgment of God? In what instance has Christ and the apostles ever done, recommended or commanded this?

Christ says, "Beware of false prophets;"

and Paul commands that we shall shun an heretic after one or two admonitions; John teaches that we shall not greet nor receive the transgressor into our houses, who does not bring the doctrine of Christ, Matt. 7: 15; Tit. 3: 10; 2 John 1: 9; they say not: Down with the heretics, accuse them before the magistrates, imprison, exile and cast them into the fire or water, as the Romans have done for many years, and as many of you would do, you who pretend to preach the word of God.

Fourthly, we would sincerely pray you, for Christ's sake, to consider and examine whether your spirit accords with the Lord's Spirit, and whether your faith accords with his holy word; whether the Spirit of the Lord, and the love of your neighbor constrain you to the service, or whether it is the love of gain and the temporary sustenance of your bodies; whether you preach the pure word of God in sincerity of heart, use his sacraments aright, and whether you lead a pious and unblamable life, as the Scriptures teach; and whether you shun open transgressors, the pompous, drunkards, misers, extortioners, liars, deceivers, contenters, adulterers, fornicators, swearers and unrighteous, and separate them from the communion, without respect to persons, according to the word of the Lord. For we see such living and acting, O Lord, as if neither prophet, apostle, Christ, nor the word of God was ever upon earth. Nevertheless you men, want to be called the holy christian church, and preachers of sound doctrine, as if Christ did not require more of his church than mere reading, singing, crying, infant baptism, breaking of bread, and calling themselves after his name; and, as if spirit, knowledge, faith, love, repentance, righteousness, works, power and truth were no longer necessary.

No, no, dear men, no. This is required of the church of Christ, to preach his unadulterated word in the power of the Spirit, to believe it sincerely, and to obey it in every particular; to use his holy sacraments, such as baptism and the Holy Supper, according to his own command and ordinance; to seek, fear, love and serve God sincerely; to be born of God; to love, serve, console, help and protect his neigh-

bor; to shun all false doctrines and works of darkness; to die unto carnal lusts, which are contrary to the word of God; to forsake ourselves and the world; to lead a pious, peaceable, chaste, sober and humble life, in righteousness, according to the truth. In short, to be of one mind with Christ Jesus. For it is incontrovertible, that where these are, there are also the kingdom and church of Christ. But the deceivers, hateful, liars, slanderers, backbiters, rebellious, blood-thirsty, avaricious, unmerciful, cruel, proud and impenitent, are of the wicked one. The Scriptures teach that their part shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, eternal death and everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels, John 15: 12; 3: 5; Mark 7: 15; Tit. 3: 5; 2 John 9; Matt. 16: 23; 13: 42.

O men and brethren, if you would take to heart this brief reference, in the sincere fear of God, and would reflect thereon, and judge according to the Spirit of the Lord, you would doubtless find such a great beam in your own eye, that you would not regard the small splinter which may, perhaps, be in your brother's eye (for we are all of Adam's seed). But to know ourselves is understanding, and to conform ourselves in all things to the Lord's word, is a salutary understanding and wisdom.

Inasmuch as we are thus indiscreetly and falsely accused by you, and as you boast to be servants of God who teach his word and works, therefore we would pray you all, for the sake of the blood of Christ, with which we are besprinkled, to consider how you treat us, poor, afflicted ones, that you no more sin by such open falsehoods and tyrannies, as you have hitherto done; but that you may show such a paternal disposition as conforms to the divine operation, and to the christian name; for we testify before him who knows our hearts, before you, and before the whole world, verbally and by writing, by our possessions, and blood, life and death, that we, in our weakness, are prepared and willing to obey the word and will of God, from the innermost of our souls; and we shall ever be prepared as we ever have been from the commencement of our faith and actions, willingly to hear and obey any one who can instruct us in a more

powerful spirit and truth, and who can point out a more godly life; but if he can not instruct us for the better, then we ask again, for Christ's sake, to leave us undisturbed in the truth, and not persecute and afflict the pious who walk in it. We hereby give notice to you all, that we are desirous to meet, at any acceptable time and place, with one or two of our members (no matter whether teachers or not), with you before a full assembly, or before twenty or thirty reasonable and pious witnesses, just as you choose, to discuss the following points (for herein we differ), according to the Spirit, word, life, example, command, prohibition, usage and ordinance of God, in sincerity of heart, namely:

Of the right evangelical preachers and teachers—how they should, according to the word of God, be minded and fitted, before they can rightly preach the word of God and serve his sacraments.

Of the doctrine of Christ and his apostles—that it does not change, but must remain unchanged until his coming again.

That Christ is a perfect teacher, and that his offer is a perfect offering.

Of true regeneration; what it is, of whom it is, and what are its natural fruits and disposition.

Of true evangelical faith and love; their proper qualities, power and operation.

Of God's commandments and their keeping.

Of true christian baptism—how it was commanded of the Lord, and how taught and practiced by the apostles.

Of the Lord's Holy Supper—what it is—by whom it was instituted and ordained, and what it implies and represents.

Of the true apostolic Ban or Separation—its proper fruits and usefulness.

Of the pious christian life which is of God.

If you have anything else to discuss, you may present it, and have it criticized according to the word of God.

Behold, dear men and brethren, this is what we would gladly have you accept, if it can be obtained in sincerity of heart, under safe conduct, without any trickery and strategy, according to the rules of christian love, and the word of God, as Origen, Augustin, Hilarius and others have done in their times, with those who were suspected in their doctrine. You can not think hard of us for asking safe conduct and freedom, for it is evident that they cry vindictively and madly against us, on every side.

If you are servants of Christ, and seek the

praise of the Lord and the salvation of your brethren, as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Peter and Paul, did in their times, then you would rejoice; praise the Lord; again restore our respect with the people; and henceforth leave off such slanderous language, as has been mentioned; you would reform your life, accept, and advise and aid in the offered discussion, in christian faith; because we do not propose to have the discussion judged according to human philosophy, wisdom and ideas, as some do, but according to Christ's own Spirit, word, command, prohibition, ordinance, usage and example. But, in case you reject and refuse it, and still continue in your bitterness, falsehoods, slanders, upbraiding, backbiting, and disgrace as you have hitherto done, then we poor, miserable souls, must leave it to the Lord, as has been hitherto done; and possess our souls in patience; suffer ourselves to be punished, and console ourselves with this saying, "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you

falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven," Matt. 5: 11, 12. But you must fill the measure of your fathers, and make yourselves manifest, that you seek not the sheep, but merely their milk, wool and fat, Ezek. 34: 3. There are but two ways open, namely, You must either cease your false accusations, and slandering, and enter into a discussion with us, or you must acknowledge that you are not the true teachers, and let go your gospel fame and *christian* name.

We would herewith commend you all to the Lord, and desire to say that none should take offense at this; for we have done so for the advancement of the holy word, and for the defense of our respectability, and we would reiterate, that we are, at all times, prepared, and willing for the discussion, on the conditions mentioned.

May the merciful Lord grant you all a sincere, pious heart to love the saving truth of Christ, and to walk in accordance therewith, to the praise of God, and to the salvation of your souls. Amen.

DESCRIPTION OF A TRUE PREACHER.

"A bishop, then, must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach." He "must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre. But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate;

holding fast the faithful word, as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine, both to exhort, and to convince the gainsayers," 1 Tim. 3: 2; Titus 1: 7—9.

By us despised strangers and scattered christians, for the sake of God's word and its testimony. A. D. 1552.