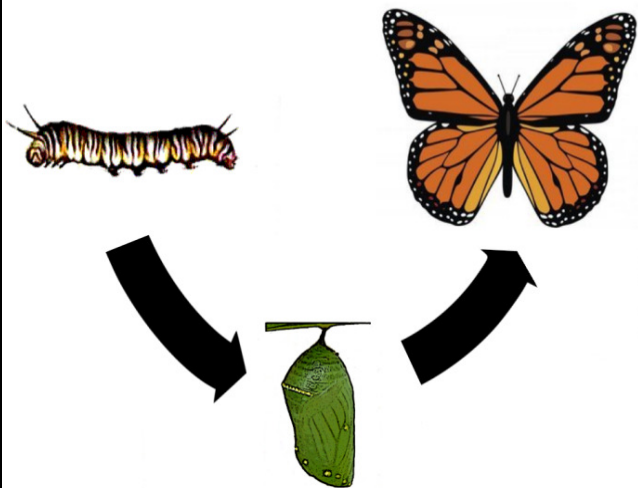


THE NEW BIRTH



by Menno Simons

FORWARD

Menno Simons was an early Anabaptist leader who lived from 1496 – 1561. He spent most of his life in Friesland, now part of the modern day Netherlands. His native tongue was a Dutch dialect. He became a Catholic priest at the age of 28. He never read the Bible until he was 29 because the Bible was considered to be a dangerous book in the hands of ‘the unlearned.’ Even after his own conversion experience, he tried for a few years to serve as a priest in the Church of Rome. Eventually he could no longer stay a secret believer and left the Catholic Church. After being baptized upon the confession of his faith in the Lord Jesus, he became a leader among the Anabaptists and a hunted man. Read what Menno and his fellow ministers believed and taught about what it means to be born again...

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A FUNDAMENTAL DOCTRINE FROM
THE WORD OF THE LORD, OF

THE NEW BIRTH

HEAR my words, all people, and understand them, all you who imagine that you are Christians, and presumptuously boast of the grace, merits, flesh, blood, cross, kingdom and death of the Lord. Notwithstanding, we find among you neither Christian faith, brotherly love, repentance, the right use of the sacraments of Christ, the pure doctrine, nor the unblameable, godly life, which is from God, to which the Scriptures admonish us; neither the true, divine service, evangelical disposition, nor obedience; but throughout, nothing else than abominable, dark unbelief, a lewd, carnal life, false doctrine, false, self-devised sacraments, a devilish heart and mind, an accursed, heathenish idolatry under the name of Christ, blind, blood-thirsty tyranny,

envious and furious revengefulness against all the children of God; yea, open obstinacy, disobedience and rejection of the words of Christ and of his Holy Ghost, as may be very plainly perceived and seen throughout the world.

In order that you may comfort yourselves no longer with lying and vain hopes, contrary to all Scriptures, to your eternal damnation, and not glory in vain, in the aforementioned riches and glory of the children of God, namely of the kingdom, grace, merits, flesh, blood, cross, death and promises of Christ, and so forth, which do not yet pertain to you, because you are yet altogether earthly, carnally and devilishly minded, reject Christ, and do not keep to his Spirit, Word and example, without which no one can be a Christian; therefore I have undertaken through the merciful grace of the Lord, as much as is in my power, to inform you; briefly, by the infallible, powerful, saving

Word of the holy Gospel of Christ, and out of the pure doctrine of his holy apostles, in this my epistle, who they are, or who they are not, that are endowed through the grace of God, and to whom pertain the aforementioned gifts, merits and promises of Christ.

Tell me, most beloved, where or when did you read in the Scriptures, which is the true witness of the Holy Ghost and the plummet of our consciences, that the unbelieving, disobedient, carnal adulterer, whoremonger, drunkard, avaricious, idolatrous or pompous had a single promise of the kingdom of Christ and his church, yea, part or communion in his merits, death and blood? I tell you the truth, nowhere do we read it in the Scriptures, nor ever will we; but thus it is written by Paul, "For if ye live after the flesh ye shall die." Adulterers, whoremongers, buggers (homosexuals), effeminate, unclean, idolaters, drunkards, proud, avaricious, betrayers of the innocent, and bloodshedders,

thieves, murderers, backbiters, perjurers, sorcerers, liars, unmerciful, the disobedient to God and Christ (if they repent not) will not inherit the kingdom of God, yea, their portion will be in the fiery lake which burns with fire and brimstone; which is the second death.

Rom. 8:13; 1 Cor. 6:10; Eph. 5:5

Behold, worthy reader, this is God's irrevocable sentence and judgment upon all who live after the flesh, whoever they are, emperor or king, duke or earl, knight or squire, noble or ignoble, priest or monk, learned or unlearned, rich or poor, male or female, bond or free. All, who live after the flesh, must forever remain under the just sentence and eternal wrath of God, otherwise the whole Scriptures are untrue.

Therefore, are the poor, ignorant people comforted in vain with masses, matins, vespers, confessions, pilgrimages and holy water, and what is more, with Christ's grace, death and blood. The word stands firm, "For if

ye live after the flesh ye shall die; for to be carnally minded is death." Therefore, I advise and entreat you all in general, to hear Christ Jesus, who is sent to us as a witness of the truth from heaven; for thus says he, "Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." At another place, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Again, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

Faithful reader, take heed; these words are not invented or instituted of man, nor are they the resolution of any council; but they are the infallible, precious words, which the Son of God, Christ Jesus, brought to us from the mouth of his Father, and declared unto pious Nicodemus, the scribe, with a double affirmation. That word is powerful and clear,

and has not only reference to Nicodemus, but to all the children of Adam, who have come to the years of maturity. But alas, it is so obscured by the offensive, leavenous mire of human commands, statutes and glossaries, that scarcely one or two is found in a thousand, who have the true sense and understanding of the heavenly birth, much less have they the active nature, power, properties and fruits of it. Yea, they have brought it so far, through their philosophy, wisdom and self-chosen holiness, that the eternal Wisdom of God, Christ Jesus, eternally blessed, is banished as a poor, senseless fool, out of the house of his honor, which is his church, with his Holy Ghost, Word, baptism, Supper, divine worship, separation and unblameable example; and the man of sin, the son of perdition, is placed in his stead, with his abominable doctrine, idolatrous infant baptism and supper, with his unclean purifications and promises, with his churches, convents, priests, monks, masses, matins,

vespers, holy water, images, pilgrimages, purgatory, vigils, confessions, absolutions, and so forth; all of which in short, are nothing but the doctrines and commands of men, raised up contrary to the Scriptures, an accursed idolatry and abomination, an open denial of the Lord's death and offering, a despising of the New Testament, or of the covenant which was sealed by the innocent blood of the Lamb, a destroying and desolation of the saving ordinances of Christ, *of doctrine, baptism, Supper, life and separation*, abundantly testified in the Scriptures, which ordinance he taught in this world with incontrovertible clearness and power according to the command of his Father, and left it to his children in his Word, and none other can be established eternally that will stand before him.

In short, writers and the learned have corrupted everything so much through their councils, decrees and statutes, with all the tyranny and violence of the great, that there is

scarcely an article entire, of all that Christ and his holy apostles taught. All the aforementioned abominations, together with the ungodly, carnal life of the whole world, I call on as witnesses, nevertheless they would be called the holy Christian church; and he that admonishes them in sincere, pure love, with the Spirit and Word of the Lord, must be an accursed anabaptist and heretic. I tell you again, They want to be the Christian church, and it is evident from all their actions, that they are not Christians; but carnal, proud, avaricious, lascivious, lewd, drunken, idolatrous, blind heathens; and what is worse, some of them are unmerciful, murderous, ferocious, revengeful and blood-thirsty fiends; many of their works are done according to the will of the devil. We may with propriety complain of this matter; for the righteous judgment is come upon them, that they are unconvertible and that little of a salutary kind remains with them.

O! how miserably is the fair vineyard

desolated, and how lamentably are its branches withered, its walls are broken down, the destroying foxes have destroyed the grapes, the clouds are dry and give no rain; there is neither pruner nor knife at hand; and if there is one he must be devoured by the dragon, or slain by the apocalyptic woman, drunk with blood. O merciful, gracious Father, how long will this great misery endure? Our rulers are like voracious lions and bears. Our fathers are our betrayers. Our leaders, our deceivers, and those who feign to be our pastors, are thieves and murderers of our souls. Well may we sigh and lament from the inmost of our hearts; for our house is left unto us desolate. For that which was heretofore the church and kingdom of Christ, is now, alas! the church and kingdom of anti-christ, and for no other reason than because they ungratefully rejected the word of grace, and will not have the ruling Lord Jesus Christ, to rule over them with the righteous scepter of his Holy Word and Spirit;

nevertheless, this poor, blind people hope to obtain the grace and promises of God through their infant baptism, masses, confession and the like superstitious ceremonies and idolatries, which they call the true, divine service, and use it as a remedy for their sins. Ah! no, most beloved, no; for, says Solomon, "The hope of the ungodly is like dust, that is blown away with the wind." I have said it once, and repeat it, and that from the mouth of the Lord, who can neither lie nor deceive, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." And "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." *Matt. 18:3; John 3:3*

My beloved reader, take heed to the word of the Lord, and once learn to know the true God. I warn you faithfully to take heed; he will not save you, nor pardon your sins, nor show you his mercy and grace, except according to his word, namely, If you repent, if you believe, if you are born of him, if you

do what he has commanded, and walk even as he walked. For if he could save unjustified, carnal man, without regeneration, faith and repentance, he did not teach us the truth; but he is the truth, and there is no lie in him. Therefore, I tell you again, that you cannot be reconciled with all your masses, matins, vespers, ceremonies, sacraments, councils, statutes and commands under the whole heavens, together with all the popes and their adherents from the beginning; for I warn you, they are abominations and not reconciliations. Christ says, "In vain do they honor me," because they teach commandments of men. But if you, by any means, wish to be saved, your earthly, carnal, ungodly life, must be reformed; for the Scriptures teach nothing but true repentance and reformation, and present to us admonitions, threatenings, reprovings, miracles, examples, ceremonies and sacraments; and if you do not repent, there is nothing in heaven or on earth that can save you; for

without true repentance, we are comforted in vain. The prophet says, "O my people, they which lead thee cause thee to err, and destroy the way of thy paths," Isa. 3:12. We must be born from above, must be changed and renewed in our hearts, transplanted from the unrighteous and evil nature of Adam, into the true and good nature of Christ, or we can never be saved by any means, whether human or divine. Wherever true repentance and the new creature are not (I speak of adults), man must be eternally lost; this is incontrovertibly clear. Upon this every one may confidently rely, who does not wish to deceive his soul.

That regeneration of which we write, from which comes the penitent, pious life having the promise, comes alone from the word of the Lord, if it be rightly taught, and if rightly understood and received in the heart by faith through the Holy Ghost. The first birth of man, is out of the first, earthly Adam, and therefore its nature is earthly and Adamic, that

is, carnal-minded, unbelieving, disobedient and blind in divine things, deaf and foolish, whose end, if not renewed by the Word, will be damnation and eternal death. Would you, therefore, have your inbred, evil nature reformed, and be free from eternal death and damnation, so that you may obtain, with all true Christians, what is promised them, you must be born again. For the regenerated are in grace, and have the promise, as you have heard. They, therefore, lead a penitent and new life, for they are renewed in Christ, and have received a new heart and spirit. Before, they were earthly, carnally minded, but now, heavenly, spiritually; before, unrighteous, now righteous; before, evil, now good. And live no longer after the old, depraved nature of the first, earthly Adam but after the new, sincere nature of the new and heavenly Adam, Christ Jesus; as Paul says, "Nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Their poor, weak life they renew daily, more and more, and that

after the image of him who created them; their minds are after the mind of Christ, they gladly walk as he walked; crucify and mortify their flesh with its evil lusts; bury their sin with baptism in the Lord's death, and rise with him to a new life; circumcise their hearts with the word of the Lord, and are baptized with the Holy Ghost in the spotless, holy body of Christ, as obedient members and fellow-heirs of his church, according to the true ordinance and word of the Lord. They put on Christ and manifest his Spirit, nature and power in all their fruits; fear God with all the heart, and seek, in all their thoughts, words and works, nothing but the praise of God and the salvation of their beloved brethren. They know not hatred and vengeance, for they love those who hate them; do good to those who despitefully use them, and pray for those who persecute them; hate and resist avarice, pride, unchastity, pomp, drunkenness, fornication, adultery, hatred, envy, backbiting, lying, defrauding,

quarreling, blood-shedding and idolatry, all impure, carnal works, and forsake the world with all its lusts; meditate upon the law of the Lord by day and by night; rejoice at the good, and are grieved at the evil; evil they do not repay with evil, but with good; they seek not *self*, nor their own good, but what is good for their neighbors, both as to body and soul; feed the hungry, and give drink to the thirsty; entertain the needy, release prisoners, visit the sick, comfort the faint-hearted, admonish the erring, and are ready after their master's example, to give their lives for their brethren. Again, their thoughts are pure and chaste, their words are true and seasoned with salt; with them *yea* is *yea*, and *nay* is *nay*, and their works are done in the fear of the Lord; their hearts are heavenly and new; their minds, peaceful and joyful; they seek righteousness with all their powers. In short, they are so assured in their faith through the Spirit and Word of God, that they will valiantly overcome, by virtue of their

faith, all blood-thirsty, cruel tyrants, with all their tortures, punishment, exiling, plunder, stocks, stakes, executioners, tormentors and counsel; and out of a pure zeal, with an innocent, pure, simple *yea* and *nay* are willing to die. The glory of Christ, the sweetness of the word, and the salvation of souls are dearer to them than anything under heaven.

Behold, worthy reader, all those who are born of God with Christ, who thus conform their weak life to the gospel, are thus converted, and follow the example of Christ, hear and believe his holy word, follow his commands, which he, in plain words commanded us in the holy Scriptures, form the holy, Christian church which has the promise; the true children of God, brothers and sisters of Christ; for they are born with him of one Father, and of the new Eve, the pure, chaste bride. They are flesh of Christ's flesh, and bone of his bone, the spiritual house of Israel, the spiritual city, Jerusalem, temple

and Mount Zion, the spiritual ark of the Lord, in which are hidden the true bread of heaven, Christ Jesus and his blessed word, the green, blossoming rod of faith, and the spiritual tables of stone, with the commands of the Lord written thereon; they are the spiritual seed of Abraham, children of the promise, confederates of the covenant of God, and partakers of the heavenly blessings.

These regenerated have a spiritual king over them, who rules them by the unbroken scepter of his mouth, namely, with his Holy Spirit and Word, he clothes them with the garment of righteousness, of pure white silk; he refreshes them with the living water of his Holy Spirit, and feeds them with the bread of life. His name is Christ Jesus. They are the children of peace, who have beaten their swords into plough-shares, and their spears into pruning hooks, and know of no war; and give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. Isa. 2:4; Matt. 22:21

Their sword is the sword of the Spirit, which they hold in a good conscience through the Holy Ghost. Their marriage is that of one man and one woman, according to the ordinance of God. Their kingdom is the kingdom of grace, here in hope, and after this in eternal life. Eph. 6:17; Matt. 19:5; 25:1

Their citizenship is in heaven; and they use the creatures below, such as eating, drinking, clothing and dwelling with thanksgiving, and that to the necessary wants of their own lives, and to the free service of their neighbor, according to the word of the Lord. Isa. 58:7 Their doctrine is the unadulterated word of God, testified through Moses and the prophets, through Christ and the apostles, upon which they build their faith, and save their souls; and everything that is contrary thereto, they consider accursed. They use and administer their baptism on the confession of their faith, according to the command of the Lord, and the doctrines and usages of the

apostles. Mark 16:16

The Lord's Supper they celebrate in remembrance of the favors and death of their Lord, and in reminding one another of true and brotherly love.

The *ban* extends to all the proud scorners, great and small, rich and poor, without any respect to person, who heard and obeyed the word for a season, but have fallen off again, and in the house of the Lord, teach or live offensively, till they again sincerely repent.

They sigh and lament daily over their poor, displeasing, evil flesh, over the manifold errors and faults of their weak lives. They war inwardly and outwardly without ceasing. They seek and call the Most High; fight and struggle against the devil, world and flesh during their lives, press on towards the prize of the high calling that they may obtain it. And they prove by their actions that they believe the word of the Lord; that they know and have Christ in

power; that they are born of God and have him as their Father.

Behold, worthy reader, as I said before; so I say again. These are the Christians who have the promise, and are assured by the Spirit of God, to whom are given and bestowed Christ Jesus, with all his merits, righteousness, intercessions, word, cross, suffering, flesh, blood, death, resurrection, kingdom, and all his possessions, and this all without merit; given out of pure grace from God. But what kind of doctrine, faith, life, regeneration, baptism, supper, ban and divine service, sectarian churches have, of whatever name; and what kind of reward is promised them in the Scriptures, I will let the reasonable, meditate upon, with the aid of the Spirit and Word of the Lord.

Here I would call on all the high and mighty lords, princes and rulers, all under the canopy of heaven, also on all the popes, cardinals, bishops, the wise and learned, who

from the beginning perverted and darkened the Scriptures, to show us one single word in the whole Bible, I say in the *Bible* (for we do not regard human fables and lies), that an unbelieving, refractory, carnal man, without true repentance and regeneration, ever was or ever will be saved, simply because he boasts of faith and the death of Christ, or heard the masses and service of the priests, as the whole world does; if so, they shall have gained the point. But this never has been from the beginning, and never will be to the end of time; if such vile men could be saved without repentance and regeneration, by hearing masses, and confessing, as they, poor children, without the warrant of the Scripture, hope, then we might of a truth say, that the aforementioned means were stronger (though they are idolatrous), than the word of the Lord; for the word knows no mass, but says, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." Luke 13:3 Then would also Moses and the prophets,

Christ and his apostles, have been false witnesses, and have miserably deceived us poor sheep, because they directed us upon such a narrow path.

Ah no! Friends, no! Beware; I tell you, God will not deceive you. For he says through the prophet Malachi (3:6), "I am the LORD, I change not." All that he has testified to us in his holy word through his prophets, through Christ and his apostles, is his eternal, immutable will; on this we may all rely if we wish not to deceive our souls. In short, all is in vain to counsel and advise. True repentance and the birth from above, must take place; we must believe Christ and his word, and we must abide by his Spirit, ordinance and example willingly, or eternal misery must be our portion. This is incontrovertible.

Therefore, I admonish and entreat you, as those whom my soul loves, repent! Repent!! Delay not; "The axe is laid unto the root of the trees; therefore, every tree which

bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." Matt. 3:10 Watch over your poor souls, that have been bought with a precious price, and be no longer comforted with open lies, nor be fed upon chaff; for behold, I tell you, there is nothing under heaven that can, or will stand before God, but the new creature, "and faith which works by love," "and the keeping of the commandments."

My faithful reader, do not only believe me, but believe the word, to which, by the grace of God, I directed you with my small talents; for as true as the Lord lives, all who teach otherwise than we have shown from the word of the Lord, whosoever they be, are prophets who deceive you, who place pillows under your arms, and cushions under your heads; who whitewash the wall with delusions, and speak peace to the wicked, but not out of the mouth of the Lord. For as certain as it is that the penitent and regenerated are the true

Christians, who have obtained God's truth, the true light, pardon of their sins, and the sure promise of eternal life, so certain also it is, that the sensual and impenitent are false Christians, and have serpentine lies, darkness, propensity for sin, and the certain promise of eternal death. That this is the truth, will be found so in eternity before Almighty God; of this his word is to me a true witness; and I am confidently assured of it through his grace.

Now, perhaps, some may answer: Our belief is, that Christ is the Son of God, that his word is truth, and that he purchased us with his death and blood, and that we were regenerated in baptism, and received the Holy Ghost, therefore, we are the true church and congregation of Christ.

We reply: If your faith is as you say, why do you not do the things which he has commanded you in his word? His command is, REFORM. BE YE CONVERTED. KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS. Now it

is evident that you are becoming worse daily; that *unrighteousness* is your father, and *wickedness*, your mother, and the express command of the Lord is foolishness and derision to you. Since you will not do as he commands, or would have you do, but act as you choose, it proves sufficiently that you do not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, although you say so. Nor do you believe that his word is truth; for faith and its fruits are inseparable, this you will all have to confess by the grace of God. O, you poor, blind men! Be silent and blush, let Christ Jesus with his Spirit and word be your teacher and example, your way and your mirror. Do you think it will do only to acknowledge Christ according to the flesh? Or if you but say that you believe on him and are baptized; that you are Christians, and that you are purchased with the blood and death of Christ? Ah no! I have told you often, and tell you again, you must be born of God; in your life you must be so converted and

changed that you become new creatures in Christ, that Christ be in you, and you in Christ, or you can never be Christians, for, "If any man be in Christ he is a new creature."

2 Cor. 5:17

If you believe rightly in Christ, as you boast, then manifest it by your lives that you believe; for "The just shall live by faith," as the Scriptures say. That this is all true has been fully testified and shown by the works of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Caleb, Samuel, David, Matthias, Zaccheus, Magdalene, Paul, and all the pious children of God, who were from the beginning and to this day. But how you conduct yourselves in your faith, and how you are minded, may be plainly seen by your excessive lies, fraud, avarice, hoarding, cursing, swearing, pride and wantonness; for your hearts burn in unrighteousness; you fear neither God nor his word; nevertheless, you boast that you believe on Christ, have his

word, and that you are Christians, and so forth. I repeat it; Reform, or hold your peace and be ashamed.

Further, you imagine that you were regenerated in your baptism and received the Holy Ghost. Faithful reader, remember, that if it even had been so unto you as you say, you will have to acknowledge that your regeneration then took place without hearing the word, without the faith and knowledge of Christ, and without all knowledge and understanding; and besides, that the aforementioned birth and the received Spirit are altogether without operation, wisdom, power and fruit; yea, are vain and dead in you. That you live neither after the Spirit nor in the power of the new birth, is evident from your gross avarice, drunkenness, pride, and idolatrous, carnal lives; of which all those baptized among you are my witnesses. Yea, my friends, if you were born of God in your baptism, and had received the Holy Ghost, as

your comforters persuade and assure you, then it could not be otherwise than that the new, spiritual life and its fruits would also be manifest, as it was the case with the saints from the beginning, and is yet; for it is clear, that the regenerated do not presumptuously live in sin, but through faith, in true repentance, by baptism, are buried into the death of Christ, and also arise with him to a new life, and those who have the Spirit of the Lord, bring forth also the fruits of the Spirit. That you do not bury your sins, but serve them in full power, and also bring not forth the fruits of the Spirit, is daily testified by your vain, carnal and abominable lives. My friends, out of true love I warn, admonish and entreat you, to awaken and observe what the word of the Lord teaches; for the Spirit of the Lord will not dwell in a wicked soul, nor in a body subjected to sin.

In the second place, I say, If you are rightly baptized according to the word of the

Lord, as you imagine, then you have put on Christ, and live no longer after Adam's inbred, evil nature, but after the regenerated, good nature of Christ. But since this is not the case with you, and you are yet altogether carnal and earthly, as is evident from all your fruits, therefore it is clear that you are not regenerated, baptized Christians, but impenitent, carnal pagans, for your works are chiefly done after a heathen will, as we may see and hear. Once more, I say, awaken and hear what the word of the Lord says, "If Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness," Rom. 8:10.

In the third place, I tell you, if you are rightly baptized according to the word of the Lord, then you are members and joint heirs of the body of Christ, and have the evidence of a good conscience before God. Inasmuch as a body is never divided in itself, nor hates its members, or does them harm, but one member serves and assists another; and since it

is evident, and is indeed found to be so with you, that you unmercifully persecute, murder and exterminate the chosen members of Christ, who are of your own flesh and blood, whom he purchased by his death, regenerated by his word, endued with his Spirit, and has chosen as his own peculiar people; and besides a regenerated, new and good conscience, seek no help nor comfort of human institutions, but solely adhere with a pure faith to the grace, righteousness, prayer, merits, death and blood of the Lord; and you depend upon, and comfort yourselves with, the masses, confession, absolution, holy water, bread, wine, oil and vigils of the priests and monks; so the works themselves testify that you are not serviceable members of the before mentioned body, but are much more destroyers and defilers; that you have not a firm, joyful, peaceable and good conscience, but a wavering, damning, restless and evil conscience before God. For we see that all these above-

named superstitions and false worship, which all regenerated, pious and good consciences esteem as mere abominations, are your chief support and comfort, because you neither have Christ nor know him. My friends, beware, you are miserably deceived by your comforters. The spirit of prophesy says, "And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things, saith the first and the last, which was dead and is alive; I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not; but are the synagogue of Satan." Rev. 2:8-9 Well may it be said at the present time to all the great and specious sects; I know the great defamations, and see the wicked lives of those who say they are regenerated, baptized Christians, and are not, but are Satan's synagogue; for I see not how they could do worse.

But if we come to the rulers and potentates, there we find nothing but haughtiness and pride, splendor, dancing, whoring, pleasure riding, sporting, stabbing,

killing, warring, destroying cities and countries, and living according to the lusts of the flesh. If we come to the subordinate officers, and judges, there we find insatiable avarice, treachery and roguery, cunning devices to defraud the helpless and God-fearing (the good and pious I do not mean); they seek gifts and presents; the right of the righteous they pervert, and willingly accept of gifts to shed innocent blood; they persecute the truth; they reject what is right and good; the fear of God is not before their eyes.

If we come to the divines whether preachers, priests or monks, there we find such an idle, lazy, wanton and carnal life, such a corrupted, anti-Christian doctrine and understanding of the Scriptures; such hatred, envy, defaming, betraying, lying and uproar against all the pious, that I would be ashamed to mention it before the virtuous and honest. The common people run, as a frantic heifer, as the prophet Hosea laments. They lie, cheat,

curse and swear by the wounds and sacraments of the Lord, by his judgment, hand, power, suffering, death and blood. I am ashamed that I have to think of these scandalous abominations. They gamble, drink and quarrel. In short, neither their superfluous, wicked lives, nor their great folly can be prevented; yet it must be said, that the mentioned lords, judges, learned and common people, are the truly regenerated church and baptized congregation of Christ. May the merciful Lord graciously preserve all his chosen children from such a regeneration, baptism and church, in all eternity.

I testify to you the truth in Christ Jesus, take heed, if you will; Jesus Christ did not endure from the beginning such openly impenitent, carnal sinners in his holy city, kingdom and church, and he will never endure them, this you may believe.

O Almighty God and Lord, how miserably thy holy and paternal will, and thy

adorably great name are derided, and how little is thy saving, precious word esteemed; yea, what an abominable, idolatrous, carnal, revengeful and blood-thirsty devil is made of thy beloved Son; for they cover all their abominations, sins and disgraces with his blessed, holy name, word, death and blood.

Be ashamed, O you heedless, perverted men, be ashamed, I say, before God and his angels that you are so rebellious and refractory; that you live so rudely, and yet dare say that you are the rightly regenerated congregation and baptized church of Christ. Oft have I told you, and tell you again, that all who are born of God, rightly baptized with the Spirit, fire and water, as the Scriptures teach, are of a heavenly and divine mind; their sins they bury, lead a penitent, pious, virtuous life according to the word of the Lord. They show the nature and power of Christ which dwells in them by word and work; they bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, and subdue the

works of the flesh; they are useful members of the body of Christ, and labor according to the gift received. In short, they are fruitful branches of the true vine, and their fruits abide to eternal life. John 15

But since it is manifest in you, that you show the reverse in all your fruits, and we do see in your whole lives, that it is but world and flesh with you, therefore, it is clear, that your boasting of the new birth, spirit, baptism, congregation and church is not the truth; but vanity, lies and falsehood.

The Holy Scriptures and our common belief, teach us that the holy, Christian church is an assembly of the righteous, and a congregation of saints; and he that can see but partially into the Scriptures, must confess that your church and assembly are a church and assembly of the unrighteous, lascivious, impenitent, sensual and sodomites; yea, of the blood-thirsty wolves, lions, bears, basilisks, serpents, and fiery, flying dragons.

Ah, friends, lift your heads, and open your eyes! O ye bewitched! Look over the whole world, what life they lead who have received the same baptism with you; who practice the same sacraments and worship, who indulge in the same boasting of the death and blood of the Lord, and say that they are the church and people of Christ. For it is clearer than mid-day, that many of you are so insane, so influenced by the spirit of the devil, that you hate, envy, bite and devour one another; so that you wholly destroy principalities, cities, castles and citadels with your accursed fightings and uproar; human blood you shed like water; deprive the poor citizen and peasant (those of your own faith) of body and possessions by burning, robbing, plundering, catching, imposition, torturing, nay even those who have never harmed you, or given you a rash word. In truth, I know not, how the infernal Behemoth could be more devilish and cruel than you or your

members, who imagine that they are the church of Christ. God preserve us! You disgrace families, you persecute the pious and god-fearing; you encourage open brothels, tippling houses, boxing schools, gaming boards, and the like disgraces, idolatrous houses and images, with all false service and the like, without measure and bounds. I will not touch upon your intolerable, blasphemous cursing and swearing, lying, defrauding, drunkenness, whoring, pomp, splendor, &c. What more shall I say, I will forbear; for it strikes me that none can be found under the broad canopy of heaven, who can minutely relate the gross abominations, wicked acts, abuses and scandals of your fellow-believers in infant baptism; a righteous person must be astounded at those great sins. O dear Lord, strengthen us! Yea, whosoever does not rightly understand that you are not born from above, but are baptized contrary to all Scripture, and that all your boasting of the forgiveness of sins, of the

mercy, grace, merits, flesh, blood, cross, death, church, kingdom and eternal promise of God is vain, and without the Scriptures, and must be, we may say, an irrational man.

Ah, readers! How little you think upon the word of the Lord, which is so highly recommended to you; and how little you regard your poor souls, which are bought with such a precious price, and are eternally to live with God in heaven, or to be dying forever with the devil in hell. Think you, my friends, that the Lord is a dreamer, or his word a fable? Ah, no! Not a letter will fall to the ground of all that he spoke. It is high time that you would reflect that God's promise of grace is not given to the unregenerate and impenitent, but to the regenerated and penitent. Let everyone take warning and trust no longer in lies, believing that he is baptized and regenerated, nor trust to long standing usages, nor upon papistic decretals (decrees of the pope), nor imperial mandates, nor upon the wisdom and glossaries

of the learned, nor upon the good opinion of any man, council, institution or wisdom. God says through the prophet, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." The word of God is eternal. Neither princes, nor power, nor the commands of men with all their imperial edicts are to constitute faith, neither can a soul be saved by them. Only the heavenly counsel we must hear and follow, that which Jesus Christ, God's first and only begotten Son himself brought from heaven, and taught from the mouth of his Father, and confirmed by signs and wonders, and finally sealed it with his crimson blood. This counsel stands, and can never be changed or prevailed against by the gates of hell. By this counsel we are, in common, taught that we must hear Christ, believe in him, follow his footsteps, repent, be born from above, become as little children, not in understanding, but in malice, be of the same mind with Christ, walk as he did, deny ourselves, take up his cross and

follow him; and that if we love father, mother, children or life more than him, we are not worthy of him, nor are we his disciples. Again, that adulterers, whoremongers, murderers, drunkards, idolaters and the like sinners shall not inherit the kingdom of God. That we love not the world and the things therein, nor conform to the world; that we, through faith, are to die unto our evil flesh, and conquer the devil; that we are to lead an upright, unblameable, pious life through faith in all things, act according to the will of the Lord. Again, that we are to baptize upon faith and not without it, celebrate the Lord's Holy Supper in a sincerely, penitent communion, I mean so far as man can judge. That we practice exclusion or the ban according to the Scriptures, that we are to fear, serve and love the Lord with all the heart, and walk in his commands, and that we are to assist, comfort and serve our neighbor as much as in us is, and the like doctrine and instruction.

Behold, worthy reader, here you have in part the immutable, eternal counsel of God, which was sealed in the councils of his Majesty, and besides this, he recognizes no other. Blessed are they who receive this with a firm faith, and conform thereto according to their abilities, in all weakness; that is, live according to the Spirit, Word, ordinance, command, prohibition and unblameable example of Christ. On the contrary, cursed are they who despise, reject, curse, hate, defame, mock, persecute, destroy, and cast it from them, and comfort themselves with human power, institutions and fables. For they deny the Lord who bought them, and reject the gospel of peace; believe not that Jesus Christ is their Messiah, Savior, High Priest and Prophet. Ah! How well for them if they had never been born. May the Lord mercifully grant them converted and renewed hearts, that they may repent and be eternally saved, if it be possible.

I will now close the matter and direct the well-meaning reader to the Scriptures; since the whole world, with few exceptions, is built upon human doctrine, lies, invented fables, perverted glossaries, vain idolatry and false service, by which the people of the world comfort themselves and boast of what they neither have nor are; therefore have I briefly, according to my few talents, in sincere, faithful love, shown you in this epistle, who, according to the unadulterated word, are the truly regenerated and baptized Christians that have the promise, or who are not such; so that all who truly hunger and thirst, and who are zealous for God, may be rightly satisfied with the truth unto eternal salvation; and no longer follow deceit to their eternal condemnation. Yea, that all who stand before the eyes of the Lord, with their poor, miserable souls, may be benefited, become whole and be saved. The Lord strengthen you, believe God's infallible word, reform your sinful lives, pray with

confidence and be obedient to the gospel of Christ, that you may receive the eternal promise to your eternal joy and salvation with all the saints, which God the merciful Father has promised to all his beloved children through Christ Jesus. Grace be with all who seek Christ and eternal life with all the heart, Amen. If you will suffer Jesus Christ, with his eternal Spirit and word to be judge, then you will learn that the sure Foundation of truth has been shown.

Menno Simons

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