

A THOROUGH ANSWER

TO THE

SLANDER, DEFAMATION, BACKBITING,

UNSEASONED AND BITTER WORDS OF

Zylis and Lemmekes,

CONCERNING

OUR FOUNDATION AND DOCTRINE, FULL OF INSTRUCTION AND ADMONITION, WHICH DOCTRINE IS (IN OUR OPINION) THE UNADULTERATED FOUNDATION AND DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY APOSTLES, CONCERNING THE

BAN, SEPARATION OR SHUNNING.

BY

MENNO SIMON.

“The man that is accustomed to opprobrious words will never be reformed all the days of his life,” Eccl. 23 : 15.

“The disposition of a liar is dishonorable, and his shame is ever with him,” Eccl. 20 : 26.

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

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If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers; Namely, of the gods of the people which are round about you, nigh unto thee, or far from thee, from the one end of the earth, even unto the other end of the earth, thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare him, neither shalt thou conceal him; but thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people. * * Because he hath sought to thrust thee away from the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. And all Israel shall hear, and fear, and shall do no more any such wickedness as this is among you." "Then his father and his mother that begat him, shall say unto him, Thou shalt not live; for thou speakest lies in the name of the Lord: And his father and his mother that begat him, shall thrust him through when he prophesieth," Deut. 13: 6—11; Zech. 13: 3.

THOROUGH ANSWER,

REPLETE WITH

Instruction and Admonition.

A true, pure and pious mind, unfeigned love of God and neighbor, a true and well seasoned tongue which speaks nothing else but the truth, and a resigned, impartial and pious heart wherein the Holy Spirit dwells, together with the sure knowledge of Jesus Christ and of his holy word, I wish to Zylis and Lemmekes, to all righteousness, now and forever, from my inmost heart, Amen.

I HEAR and understand, dear friends, that you, alas, mistake yourselves against God and against myself, both by writing and speaking; using untrue, slanderous words and abominable, bitter backbiting, which are not becoming a christian; which I had not in the least expected from you; for I thought that you were so taught of the Lord that you would not thus enviously smite your poor brother who cannot now answer for himself; nor that you would, as is the case, defame your faithful friend, who, according to his small talent, has ever sincerely served you and all the pious in Christ, and thus thank him for his faithful service and love. But my good opinion of you, alas, has been a mistake in this case. For my case in regard to you is the same as that of the good Jeremiah, when his enviers counseled about him, and said, "Come, and let us smite him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words," Jer. 18: 18. Yet the innocence of my hands, the true intention of my labors, the unfeigned love of my unction, together with the incontrovertible, sure foundation of the truth shall be my refuge, yea, my invinci-

ble shield and surety against all unreasonable upbraiders and defamers, now and at all times. By the grace of God I am sure of this.

Inasmuch as you prove yourselves quite unreasonable and devoid of love (as I am at such a great distance from you, yea, as if you never had heard a syllable of the word of the Lord), by which you do not only make me an abomination and stench (which I deem very little in you) in the sight of many of those who are not versed in this matter, but also make the holy word such, which, in my weakness, has been preached by me for some time, not altogether without fruit, and thus deter those of little understanding from the right way, and strengthen them in their blindness, and rob them of the true light and understanding of the true ban; therefore I am forced by a sense of duty to send you and your brethren (whom you deprive of the light, by your cunning), my humble, but true reply, as briefly and clearly as possible, in writing, as I can not attend personally, hoping that you may thereby take the matter to heart and henceforth sin no more, but truly repent of your

great mistake, and yet find grace in that day before the Lord and his righteous judgment. Therefore I pray you earnestly to consider that to which I shall point you.

Understand, then, first, that I am blamed by Zylis of being a trifler. The reason is that (as he says) I should have published two small books which contradict each other. To which I thus answer, in my humility: It is well known to a great many that I have been combatted on all sides by many sharp spirits, for more than twenty-three years; and that I have had to withstand many a hard assault. Yet (glory to him who has saved me) I did not go, unsteadily, from one church to the other as both of you have done (do not think hard of my thus writing; for you urge me to it); but I remained firm and peaceable in the faith and doctrine with my beloved brethren until this day. And as I have borne testimony in the name of the Lord in such dark days, I trust, by the grace of God, to remain firm and peaceable, so long as I remain in this tabernacle. To which of us this name of trifler (if so it must be called) is now applicable, I will leave to the judgment of every intelligent reader. But as to the two publications of which you seem to think hard, this is my plain reply: Eighteen or nineteen years ago, when I wrote the first book, I was not well enough enlightened to understand all things thoroughly; and I freely and frankly admit, that until that time I included all sin in three admonitions. This I acknowledge verbally and in writing and do not deny it. But, as all well minded servants of God, who seek the crucified Christ and not their own honor or flesh, are ever ready to investigate the sure foundation of truth still further, thus I, the least of all servants (on account of many abominations which were, from time to time discovered in the church, and also on account of the miserable disputation and discord which crept in without my fault) came to a serious reflection concerning this matter and, at last, plainly saw that we men may not retain those whom God himself, by his Spirit and word excludes, or else the church of Christ must be divided. This is as clear as day.

Therefore it would be advisable for you

to season your words a little better. For you do not thereby slander and despise me, but the Holy Spirit, which, according to the word of promise, has led me, his poor, weak servant and instrument into his truth and discovered unto me the true foundation in this matter.

Yea, dear men, if I, on that account, am to be called by you, a trifler because I was not perfectly enlightened from the beginning, nor claim to be perfectly enlightened at this hour, O Lord! what a trifler you would call the beloved Peter and others, if they were alive to-day, and if you loved him no more than you love me, as he, although taught by the Lord's mouth and enlightened by the Holy Spirit, was yet so unintelligent that he dared not preach the gospel to the heathen until he was admonished and told to do so by a heavenly vision or revelation from God, and thus first took the liberty to teach them.

Oh! oh! Terrible is the word, that slanderers, defamers and liars shall have no part in the kingdom of God. Behold, chosen Zylis and Lemmekes, let it be told you.

Secondly, I understand besides, that Zylis said I published a book from which nothing but hatred, murder and blasphemy could emanate.

To which I reply with Christ's own words, thus. "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword," Matt. 10:34. At another place, "I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled?" Luke 12:49. From which words and also from experience it is plain that the pure doctrine of Christ and of his holy apostles, truly taught and practiced upon, is of such a nature that it engenders, among the obdurate and unbelieving, hatred, envy, falsehood, slander, upbraiding, persecution, rebellion, murder, misery and tribulation. But should we not on this account teach and practice upon the pure doctrine and truth? If you answer in the affirmative, you judge that we should not suppress the truth on account of danger, if that should be the result, but that notwithstanding it should be taught and practiced upon. And what kind of a spirit it is that teaches you this pretense of hatred, murder, blas-

phemy, &c., by which you frighten the poor people from the truth, I will leave you to reflect upon in the fear of God. But if you answer in the negative you make yourselves merely men of blood, as you still continue in teaching, baptizing and the like, while you daily hear that many a pious child is, on that account, robbed, and even murdered. O, I pray you, learn to know the spirit of upbraiding. Say, beloved, is not the word of Christ called the word of the cross? You must answer in the affirmative. For here, in the kingdom and reign of Christ upon earth, the command to the believing, is nothing but to deny yourselves and take up the cross and follow him, Matt. 16: 24. If we love father, mother, husband, wife, children, property or ourselves better than Christ, we are not worthy of him. Yea, he says, if we do not hate all these we cannot be his disciples, Matt. 10: 37. Inasmuch as this is the case with the gospel of Christ, as has been heard; therefore your trifling darts and powerless thunderbolts of hatred, murder and blasphemy, cannot nor should not deter me in the least, so long as you do not convince me by the binding truth and power of the divine, Holy Scriptures, that I, in this matter of the ban or separation, have mistaken the word of the Lord, or in any manner not fulfilled the requirements thereof; but I am the more assured, by your slander, inasmuch as it is done altogether without truth or the Scripture, that the invincible foundation of truth and of the immutable word of the Lord is on our side. But as for the word slander or blasphemy, I would make this my brotherly reply: Learn to know with more fear of God what, according to the Scripture, is blasphemy or sinning against the Holy Spirit. For in my opinion it is this, that when the truth of God is imprinted and conceived into the heart of man, with such a power of the divine, Holy Scripture, by the Spirit and finger of his power, that we, convinced in spirit, must confess that it is the true foundation of truth, and can not be controverted by the Scriptures, yet, by reason of self-conceit or choice we are so audacious and stubborn as to persist in hating, upbraiding and slandering this inspired and truly known truth, or ascribing it to the

devil, by our ambitious, partial, proud and obdurate flesh, as the obdurate Pharisees and Scribes ascribed the glorious miracles and power of Christ to Beelzebub. This the mouth of the Lord (if we persevere, as I understand it) calls blasphemy and sinning against the Holy Spirit. Of which they will not be forgiven in this world nor in the world to come. O, dear, take heed, Luke 12: 10.

Inasmuch as such slander and sin, is the true blasphemy and sin in the Holy Spirit, as was heard, and as God before whom we stand exposed with all our teachings and doings, knows that I have written the book which you slander, with a good, sealed and assured conscience and as all theologians must acknowledge that it is the truth and word of the Lord; and as you cannot disprove it by virtue of the Scriptures, and as you, notwithstanding all this are so obdurate and lost as to call this undisproven writing of mine, a book of fables, and heretical doctrine; therefore I will leave the impartial reader to judge with which of us this slander is to be found. O, that you would see!

Thirdly, I understand that you call our doctrine concerning the ban between husband and wife as heretical. To which I would reply: First, Paul says, "Knowing that he that is such (a heretic) is severted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself," Tit. 3: 11. Inasmuch as such a one is subverted and condemned of himself, as was shown, therefore I know by the grace of God, that I am not worthy of such heretical name; for he that knows and tries all hearts, also knows me. He knows that I never knew, and much less fostered any obduracy, licentiousness, partiality or perverseness in my heart contrary to his word and will. I am sure that the merciful Father (who alone is the true Father of my soul), will not thus condemn to hell his despised, weak servant, nor look at him as such an heretic, although I must hear the despicable slander, not from the world alone, but also from you. O, no, no. His name is, Our faithful God, Merciful Father, Deliverer, Emmanuel, &c. Therefore let all under heaven judge, upbraid and slander; his paternal word, conceived in my open and

willing heart, together with the Holy Spirit of his love which leads all souls, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, to the bread of life and to the true fountain of his living waters, will doubtlessly refresh me in the ardor of such, and of all my tribulations, and extend unto me his hand of consolation. For where is he who thus sought him that did not find grace? and where is he who trusted in him that was not aided and protected? O, that you would once see the abomination of your perverse and unreasonable judgment!

Secondly, I answer: That according to the Scripture, heretics are self-conceited, disquiet, licentious and perverse sectarians, who choose, collect and establish for themselves a peculiar foundation, doctrine and church, contrary to the true foundation of truth in which the true church which avails before God, should be founded; by means of which they disturb the unity of the pious, extinguish love, destroy peace, and cause much disturbance, trouble, sorrow and tribulation among those who would gladly walk in the truth. O, I pray you, learn to know the heretic.

As such are really heretics, as has been heard, so necessity requires to show the division between us, and to explain it; that the intelligent reader and auditor may thereby understand and comprehend with which of us such perverseness and heretical foundation is to be found. Take heed. Judge not by words and semblance, but by God's Word.

So this, our first foundation and doctrine, is that all obedient children of God, without any respect of person, must withdraw from all brethren and sisters who walk disorderly and who are disobedient to the institution, ordinance and doctrine received from the apostles; because it is so commanded of the Holy Spirit in the name of Christ. But your foundation and doctrine is that this does not apply to husband and wife in case one or the other deviates from the truth. You have respect of person, of which the Holy Spirit of wisdom does not command nor imply a single word in all the Holy Writ. Mark our first difference, 2 Thess. 3: 14; Jas. 2: 9; Deut. 3: 6; Zech. 13: 3.

Our second foundation and doctrine is that the true apostolic ban and shunning has not reference alone to the spiritual communion, as Supper, hand and kiss and greeting of peace (as you think), but also to the carnal communion, as eating, dealing, to receive into one's house, &c., and that it is plainly forbidden. But your foundation and doctrine is (for your deeds show it, which in my opinion proves more than words and confession would do) that the shunning applies alone to the spiritual communion, and that it does not apply to natural association. For it is a well known fact that you allow the natural association between husband and wife; and that you eat with the separated, and deal with them, if you have not changed. Mark our second difference.

Our third foundation and doctrine is, that the second table, namely, the commandment concerning our neighbor, must give way to the first, which is, the commandment concerning God. But your foundation and doctrine is (for your action in regard to husband and wife testify it), that not the second table must give way to the first, but the first to the second. As if the Creator must do the will of the creature, and the creature not the will of the Creator. O! O!! Mark our third difference.

Our fourth foundation and doctrine is, that the Holy Spirit ever cares for his, and has therefore commanded us to shun the sectarian and offensive sinners, lest they leaven with the leaven of their unrighteousness, or by their intercourse or conversation (as is generally the case), the pious and draw them into their wicked works; and also, that the apostates may thereby be made ashamed before the Lord and his church, repent, and be converted. But your foundation and doctrine combats and disputes this so cruelly that you quite bitterly call us divorcees and heretics; because we, in this regard, through the zealous fear of God, follow the command of the holy apostles, and point every one, whose lot it becomes, to the surest way, according to Scripture. You pretend to the poor people that it is an abomination that, on account of the ban, a husband should shun his wife, or a wife her husband. The same as it is also an abomination to

the world that we should baptize the believing and not hear the false preachers; and thus reprove the Holy Spirit of the love of Christ; accuse and abuse his holy apostles of a false doctrine, as if the leaven of corruption (against which they have faithfully warned us) could not leaven husband or wife; also, as if we were at liberty, according to the rule of the holy word, not to seek the reformation of our consorts, 2 Thess. 3: 14; Tit. 3: 10; 1 Cor. 5: 5; Gal. 5: 9; 1 Cor. 5: 3; 2 Tim. 2: 18, 21.

Our fifth foundation and doctrine is that the ban without the shunning is quite useless and dead, yea, as a mill without a millstone, and as a knife without a blade; for it is very clear that the apostolic ban, properly, has its power and effect in the outward shunning. For else the danger of corrupting others would not be in the least avoided, which, properly, is the first and main reason of the ban, as has been heard. Your actions openly show that you have and teach a ban without the shunning, and that the same is therefore without effect, since you first except husband and wife from the shunning, and second, eat, deal, &c., with those who are banned, while the Holy Scriptures plainly and pointedly forbid it, saying, With such ye shall not eat; with such do not keep company; but shun them. Have no dealings with them; do not greet them, nor take them into your houses. Mark our fifth division, 1 Cor. 5: 10; Rom. 16: 16; 2 Tim. 3: 5; Tit. 3: 10.

But if you should say, *That if the pious can abide in his faith, living with the impious, that in such case there is no necessity of shunning*, I would then answer: First, that by such acceptance of the matter you, in fact annul all the plain commandments of the Scriptures concerning the outward, bodily shunning; as not to eat, deal or take them into your houses. Yea, if some liberty should be taken, it would be more reasonable to give the whole church liberty to eat and deal with apostates than to allow it between husband and wife. For there would be less danger accompanied with it to the church than to husband and wife who are of necessity in continual intercourse; something which the church could

easily avoid. This is too clear to be denied. O, men, take heed.

My second reply is, that none under heaven can abide in his faith, living with his degenerate consort. For, first, he would transgress all the explicit commandments of the Holy Spirit concerning the ban and shunning. Secondly, he would not seek the repentance of his consort in such a manner as the Scripture teaches. And, thirdly, he keeps company with one who should, according to the command of the word, be shunned by all pious persons. I will leave it to the consideration of all of you, if this can be called abiding in the faith. Therefore, I pray you again, take heed.

Behold, beloved, if you compare this division with the doctrine of the Scripture, and in the fear of God impartially weigh it in the balance of the holy word, you will clearly see that I and my beloved brethren have the immutable, incontrovertible word to sustain us; and that you only have a vain presumption and a self-conceived opinion; that we have a restoring ban, while you have one that is fruitless, vain and dead; that we have obedience, you, disobedience; that we cordially seek to save all afflicted souls from the inherent disease of corruption, according to the doctrine and command of the holy apostles, while you, contrary to all admonition, doctrine and the explicit commandment of the holy apostles leave them to corruption, without all aid, succor, consolation, assistance and earnest trial; not looking at what is pleasing to the spirit, but only at what is pleasing to the flesh. Therefore it shows that you are, alas, those who are covered with the abominable shame of heresy of which you undeservedly blame me. If you are intelligent, mark what is the meaning.

Fourthly, I understand that you call us divorcees, telling your followers that of such shunning of husband and wife there can not be found a single example in all the Scriptures. To which I answer, first, that Moses taught the Israelites that they should not excuse their own wives, sons, daughters and friends who were as precious to them as their own hearts, if they should want to lead them to strange gods; but that they should, without mercy, slay or stone them,

Dent. 13: 6—10. Say, beloved, who was the cause of this? Moses or God? Not Moses; but God who had thus commanded him. Thus it is with us also. We teach that the apostates and sectarians should be shunned, without respect of person. Yet not we, but God, who has thus commanded us to do, in his word, as has been sufficiently shown. O, mark this.

Again I reply by asking this question: If one of your number had a dishonest, wicked, thievish, sodomitic, murderous, incendiary wife or one that should try to take his life, and were aware of it, would he yet continue to live with her? If you answer in the affirmative, you must acknowledge and own that he is an abominable, fearful, murderous rogue, to be one flesh with her; something which would not well become a servant of Christ. But if you answer in the negative, you judge yourself that you, in this matter, without previous adultery or fornication, are no less divorcees than we are. I repeat, mark this also.

Again, I ask, If one of your number had such a consort that he would have to renounce his faith or could not abide therein, would he, or should he continue to live with such consort? Jer. 17: 5. If you answer in the affirmative you thereby plainly testify that such perverse and ungodly flesh avails you more than Christ Jesus himself, together with his kingdom, truth, word, promise, blood, and death, besides your faith, unction, love, and the salvation of your souls. If you answer in the negative, I again say, that you, in this matter, without previous adultery or fornication, are no less divorcees than we are. Mark this.

Thirdly, I answer, If this our doctrine must be called a divorce by you, then it is evident that holy Paul was no less a divorcee than we are, for he says "But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried (observe he openly admits separation), or be reconciled to her husband," 1 Cor. 7: 11. Paul also allows such separation when it is for their betterment if they remain unmarried, as is also our doctrine, and so you yourselves (if the above is your answer), are no less divorcees than we are, as shown in the above two articles; therefore I would have you to consider in the fear of God

what kind of a spirit it is that prompts you to make use of such slanderous, cunning words as divorcees, book of fables, heresy, &c. Venom is deadly, and gall is bitter, but much more poisonous and bitter is the tongue which is charged and laden with partiality and hatred. O, mind this, Jas. 3: 5—10.

But as to the beforementioned example this is our answer, first: That all those who make such pretensions manifest thereby that they do not believe the Scriptures of the apostles concerning the ban and shunning, nor understand the reasons, utility and effects of the ban, and alas, have but little regard for the explicit commandments concerning the outward, bodily shunning.

Again we say, concerning the opinion that a doctrine without example cannot stand in the church of Christ, as seems to be your ground; that in such case we are all badly mistaken, both you and we; because we allow our women to approach the Lord's Supper, of which there is not a syllable to be found in the Scriptures. But if you should say, *That our women are believing; therefore they should be admitted to the Supper, along with the believing men*, I would answer in like manner: As the pious consort is believing, he should shun his apostate wife, according to the common rule of Scripture, together with all other believing ones without exception. Whosoever is intelligent will judge and consider the inference.

In the fifth place, I understand that Lemmekes has boasted that he is going to rebut more than half of the books. To which I briefly reply: To promise mountains of gold and not to have sandhills to give, is called boasting by the world; therefore, it would be well not to boast of more than we have Scripture and talent for. But whosoever will rebut it must first establish the following ten articles, by virtue of the Word.

First, that the first table of the commandments in Christ's Kingdom and reign must give way to the second. Mark.

Secondly, that the Scripture teaches two bans or shunnings. Mark.

Thirdly, that there can be a scriptural ban without the shunning. Mark.

Fourthly, that the deadly disease of

corruption cannot leaven or make unclean the husband and wife when they do not shun each other. Mark.

Fifthly, that it is not required at the hands of the pious spouse earnestly to seek the reformation and repentance of the impious spouse, according to the counsel, doctrine and commandments of the Holy Scripture. Mark.

Sixthly, that the pious spouse is not bound to agree to the separation of his impious consort. Mark.

Seventhly, that the carnal ban and love must be preferred to the spiritual ban and love. Mark.

Eighthly, that the marriage with Christ, in the Spirit, must give way to the marriage consummated in the human flesh. Mark.

Ninthly, that the Holy Spirit has taught exceptions or respect of persons concerning the ban or shunning, in the Scripture. Mark.

Tenthly, that the spouse is not subject to the explicit commandments concerning the outward or bodily shunning. Mark.

Behold, dear Lemmekes, whenever you or any of your followers dissolve or untie this knot by virtue of the Scriptures, then we will further consider the matter.

But as we know that no man, no matter who he be, can ever do so by virtue of the truth, of which, before the Lord, we are certain; therefore we let men slander and boast as much as they please. Firm and immutable the doctrine remains, namely, that all pious husbands and wives as also the church are bound to shun their impious spouses, according to the common rule, doctrine and command of the Holy Scriptures, as has been frequently shown, by virtue of the holy Word. Whosoever seeks and loves the truth, may ponder upon that which we say and consider the meaning of the Scriptures.

In the sixth place I understand that Lemmekes should have said, that if we were of one mind in regard to the article concerning husband and wife, that there would yet be three or four articles about which we could not agree. To which I would say this, that I would like to have him put in writing these articles and points of difference, and send them to me. If you have truth on

your side, and we have not, then, by the grace of God, I for myself will say, yea with you. But still I would warn you not to call that which is right and pure, wrong and impure; nor that which is wrong and impure, right and pure; not to dissolve that which the Scripture binds, nor to bind that which it makes free, as some, alas, are in the habit of doing; so that not our self-chosen righteousness nor human propositions and holiness, but the word of God alone, be our guide and way. In love, take heed.

In the seventh place, I understand that Lemmekes also said, that I first came to the Franekers and their followers and agreed with them; but was afterward instructed by the brethren, and remained with them. To which I reply to you and all who believe your untrue story, with truth, thus: I fraternally asked the Franekers when I was in conversation with them, If they had any further doings with carnal transgressors after the third admonition? To this they answered, no. Then I said (after passing a few words concerning secret sins), If that is your doctrine we will not remain divided. Then they thanked the Lord, as if we were quite of one mind in regard to the matter. Observing this, I said, Not so, brethren, but I will also talk to the others, and see what grace the Lord will give. That this is true I can prove by our beloved brother, Nette Lippes, and is also known to the omniscient Lord whose hand and judgment I cannot escape if I lie and do not speak the truth.

Afterwards I came to them and conversed with them and got my full satisfaction (praise the Lord for his grace) concerning secret sinning, at which my heart was rejoiced more than I am able to write, not, now, doubting in the least but that the matter would come to a good result, until the time that the Franekers came and showed that they did not abide by their understanding concerning carnal works, as they had confessed to me. This caused in me sorrow, as bitter as death. In my affliction I knew not what to do; for there is nothing upon earth I love more than the Lord's church. But as it is, I see that the leavening spirit of the false parties has leavened

many. Yea, had not the gracious breath of the Omnipotent saved me I would probably have had my mind wrecked. In short, the Franekers would not unite before they had first consulted Henry Naeldeman. In the course of time, Henry came to us, and in love, we informed him that we were not those who thus judge the offensive transgressors; but that, according to the word, we could not do the will of God by retaining those whom his Spirit and Word exclude. He was so startled that he openly said before us all, that he had never so taken the matter to heart, in his life, hoping to place the Franekers on a better footing. I then left the country. Not long afterward he again sent for me. He had studied the matter over; and all we had built before, with the Lord's word, was again broken, in the poor man. Yea, it is known to me and to the Lord how unstable and childish he proved himself once or twice, in a short time, concerning the matter of husband and wife. His own handwriting shall be my testimony of this assertion.

Behold, dear men, here you have the outline of our action in this matter of which you so quite partially dare to upbraid me, which I assert with a good conscience, before the eyes of the Lord. If you had acted the part of wisdom in this matter and had not inclined your ears to the backbiting of the unpeaceable of the sectarian parties, you would never have offended against me by such gross falsehood and slander. Justly did Paul say "That a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump," 1 Cor. 5: 6.

In the eighth place I understand that Lemmekes publishes that I should have said to him, the people build upon, and look to me so much that I am afraid that the Lord will yet cause me to stumble, so that they shall no more look to me or any other man. To which I reply first: If I should now or at any time say to Lemmekes or any one else—the people build upon and look to me; then my own mouth would convince me that I would be like unto a fool who is quick to praise himself. I trust that not only the word of the Lord but also common sense will teach me better. And as I have experienced more than once in my time that the spirit of Diotrephes is not yet dead,

3 Jn. 9, which generally clothes itself in a sheep skin, sighing and complaining—saying: Oh, oh! The people build upon and look too much to Menno, whereby the hearts are turned from love; therefore I have not said once, but perhaps ten times: If the unversed should thus build upon and look to me, then my desire is that the Lord would cause me to stumble, but not take his grace altogether from me, that they might learn to know not to build their foundation, hope and consolation upon me, but solely upon the living corner stone, Christ Jesus. Whosoever hath the bride, says John, is the bridegroom, and that is Christ Jesus, who, according to the will of his Father (to his honor), has called us in his eternal love, and married us by faith in his death and blood; and not Menno or Lemmekes. Oh, that they would not garble my words, and not tell any thing but the truth which stands before God.

Secondly I answer, If you thus turn to shame the word of my piety, whereby I only seek the praise and honor of my Redeemer, which I had not thus expected, then I desire that in love, you point out my error according to the truth; for although I am a poor sinner who, at times, is mastered by his flesh, I yet thank God for his grace that he has to this day saved his poor, weak servant, without any considerable offense, both in doctrine and in life. But if your sight is so weak and dim that you call it stumbling, namely, that I teach according to the Holy Scriptures that we should shun the offensive transgressors until they repent; or that the ban should be used without respect of person; or that I am ever prepared to accept a better instruction of God or admonition and doctrine of his Holy Spirit, as I have done in regard to the doctrine of carnal abominations—then I may well console myself that the holy apostles are, in this matter, no less stumblers than I am. For before God, I do not know but that I teach the essence of their word unadulterated and walk in the footsteps of their spirit, so far as I have received grace and strength from my God. O, how quite carnal, unintelligent, blind and perverse is the judgment of a person who, before his God, is led away by partiality and

envy. If you fear God then heed what I tell you, Jas. 3: 2, 17; 1 Cor. 2: 4.

In the ninth place, I understand that you slander and upbraid our brethren in Friesland, not a little. To which I briefly reply: It is not necessary that I should be the brethren's advocate, since the merciful Lord has not denied them his grace, Spirit and gifts. Yet for myself I would say that the worldly privileges are, or imply that we should give both sides a hearing. We also read of Alexander the Great, that when one party or one side laid in a complaint to him without the presence of the other side or party, that he would shut up one ear to give the other side a hearing therewith. Since there was found such great decency among the gentiles; and as it is the common usage, in all matters and policies, not to judge until after a hearing has been granted; therefore you have acted very unscripturally and unreasonably not only to give the one party (and that the party which are separated from the church on account of their contention) a hearing, but besides, accept them as your beloved brethren, while the other party you reject, to the great shame of you and your counselors; and because you would not give them a verbal explanation and hearing, although they so frequently and brotherly desired it. At which unreasonableness, unwillingness and childish ignorance we can not sufficiently satisfy our astonishment. We are of the opinion that it was never heard of people who seemingly feared God. Yet you proceed on the strength of the sayings of the partizans with intolerable lying and misgivings, without any certainty about the matter, and by this violence and wrong doing you take from us that which, I fear, you can never restore to us. But if you had given both parties a reasonable and christian hearing you might have (if you had the gift) passed a just sentence between them, and thus have sought unity and peace between them, according to the intent of the holy word. But now you have manifested yourselves to all mankind, while you see that with your unscriptural ban, now used by you and your followers these many years, you cannot stand before the sharpness of the Holy Spirit of Christ and of his

strong word; that you seek to assert and maintain as much as you can; not the desirable unity and peace, nor the unfaltering, abiding truth which is of God, but your own ignorant opinion and carnal intentions by wrong and violence, dissention, partiality, slander and defamation. You should, however, know that not such wrong and violence as you commit, is to be the judgment and decision in this matter but that the Holy Spirit and word of Christ Jesus are to decide it. In love, take heed.

In the tenth place, I understand that Lemmekes said, "That he would rather be banned by our elders than to agree with them." To which I answer: That one of two things is made true by his words; that he either does not know what the ban is in fact; or else that the elders are such abominable people that they are not worthy of the church. For all the world I would not pass such a sentence. If these elders were such evil people, even, as his words imply, why be so unreasonable (since it is his office) as not to show his brotherly love by pointing out to them, in accordance with the Scriptures their errors and abominations of which he shows such abhorrence, since it becomes him before God and his church to seek their salvation, in love. But I presume that you feared the sharpness of truth and that you, therefore, were afraid to face them. O, that you would hear the voice of the Lord and not harden your hearts while it is yet to-day.

I must also, lastly, remind you that you came to us in A. D. 1556, just before May, and that we had a conference of two days, in the fear of our God. Yea, such a conference that Lemmekes, the morning of his departure openly confessed before me, that he quite agreed with us although not quite satisfied in the matter of husband and wife, but as he had not confessed this before the brethren, he had come hither that he and they would come to us, and as he had now opened his heart before all, his word would thereafter avail but little. And he wished to further treat with you, on the way, Exod. 17: 2; Gal. 6: 2; Jn. 3: 29. Behold, such were his pretenses. Besides he said, If the Upperlanders will not agree, and Zylis and Henry will remain with them,

I will (he said) go over to the Netherlanders.

Again he said, There are some strangers at Weert who would gladly come under the Word of the Lord; and asked: To whom shall I take these? to Zylis or to the Netherlanders? Besides this he desired of me that when we would have the consent or dissent of Zylis, to send one or two faithful brethren to his assistance, that the ban and shunning might be thus introduced into his church. Dear friends, that he thus agreed with us he did not only confess before me, but also before our beloved brethren Herman of T. and John S. And what is become of all these words and promises? Were they not all vain wind and falsehood? You must answer in the affirmative. And yet you do not want it said at Cologne and thereabout that you had thus agreed with us. The most lamentable of all is that that which he then confessed to be good and right is now called by him heresy and deceit. Whether such an inconsistent person can not be justly called an apostate I will here-with leave to the judgment of all reasonable and intelligent readers. Zylis and Henry wanted to consider the matter and propose it to the Upperlanders; they sent a written message, but whether or not you showed it to the elders of your church, I do not know. But Lemmekes has written, Yes. And the brethren write, No; and it is said that Zylis said, No. Their answers are contradictory.

In short, at last we, after long delay and waiting, received an answer from you and the Upperlanders: That we should not push the ban to its utmost, for it would have to be broken, and that there were as many Scriptures concerning marriage as for the ban and shunning. Behold this was the instruction of scriptural argument, by which he puts aside all apostolic Scriptures concerning this matter, and rejects them as useless.

If I do not write the truth, I am willing to bear my punishment. In my opinion it is come so far with you that, before God, I do not know who could ever agree with you. For first you agreed with us; afterward dissented without our knowledge and joined the Upperlanders. Observe, Lem-

mekes agreed with us, but the same summer yet turned his back upon us and again agreed with them. Observe again: Those that were separated on account of their dissension and shamefulness you again accepted as your brethren.

Observe, thirdly: Our elders and church you despised, answered their prayer quite unfriendly and sneeringly, and said that you did not come on their account.

Fourthly, observe: The spirit of the disquiet partizans you believed behind our backs.

Fifthly, observe: You belie, upbraid, backbite, slander, and accuse me and my beloved brethren without any truth; while I for myself never said an unfriendly word about you, of which God is my witness, but have ever shown regard for your well being until this hour of your unbearable action.

Sixthly, mark: The plain word of the holy apostles as regards the ban and shunning, you reject. Seventhly, mark: You uphold many lightminded, carnal babblers. Eighthly, mark: You encourage many disquiet, unpeaceable dissenters and quarrelers.

Ninthly, mark: Many, yea, thousands of faithful hearts who sincerely seek God and his sure truth, you afflict. Tenthly, mark: Many pious children who would gladly obey the word of the Lord in this regard, and thus save their souls, you hinder.

Eleventhly, observe: You beget many defamers, liars, profaners and upbraiders. In short, you have brewed such beer that, if the Lord does not save you by his mercy, I fear you will yet stumble over the heaped pot. For beware, if you again renounce the Upperlanders and also those whom you, alas, have now given the hand of brotherhood they will not depict you in very pleasing colors.

And if you, even, remain with them, all intelligent persons must confess that you build your faith, in this matter, with a sectarian spirit, upon vain self-conceit, opinion, flesh and man, and not upon the firm rock and foundation of the divine word. If you change your doctrine which you have so long wrongly practiced and taught in your church, then you will have to hear that you are miserable teachers, that you have

deceived many souls and that you do not know the light of truth.

But if you do not, you make it manifest that you do not seek and uphold the souls or the salvation of the church, nor the word of God, but your own honor and flesh, only.

If, too, you acknowledge that you have, through partizanism, wrongfully defamed me, a cry from the pious will issue against you, that you have defamed the reputation of your brethren, without cause, not as faithful servants of Christ, but rather as envious defamers.

If you do not acknowledge it, nor do such penance as can avail before God, then the just sentence of his immutable word will be upon you, that is, the defamers, backbiters, slanderers and liars have no portion in the kingdom of God and Christ. O, awful is the sentence. Woe unto those on whom it is inflicted! With fear, trembling and shaking reflect, I pray you, 2 Pet. 2: 18; Jude 1: 10; Rom. 1: 30.

Behold, dear, chosen men, how perilously you are sailing! Like a ship that is cast about between two rocks. If she avoid the one she will sail upon the other. Therefore, take heed. Take heed, that you may prevent the eternal shipwreck of your poor souls, and yet arrive in the haven of eternal peace with the Most High, Amen. Amen.

This, now, is the proper content, conclusion, intent and meaning of my writing to you, and yours, First, that you may behold the abomination of your actions in this clear mirror, turn from evil, come before the Lord with a contrite heart and sincerely pray for his grace. Secondly, that also, the simple, and those of little understanding who are, in this respect, imprisoned by you, may taste and see therefrom that you have fed and satiated them not with the bread of their heavenly Father, but with mere swill and chaff, and human self-conceit.

Thirdly, that you may know that I and the pious who are with me, dare not, by the fear of our God, be your brethren, so long as there are not found with you such doctrine, obedience, confession, reconciliation and repentance as to pacify the church of the Lord and to be pleasing unto him.

This is written in sorrow. If you fear God, then take heed, and reflect. The God of all grace and the Holy Spirit of peace and of the love of Christ grant you grace that you may read with impartial hearts, and that it may be to your service, Amen. Amen. Amen.

By Menno Simon, who loves you souls according to the truth.

January 23rd, 1559.

