

Article Four:
Concerning Divorce Between Believers and Unbelievers

As far as the article on marriage between believers is concerned we have clearly understood, as you wrote, that people on almost every side are raising a cry and evil slander against us; we also know that those people accuse us not only in that respect but make the worst allegations against us in many other matters, possibly even in secret. But we rejoice that they do not do it on the basis of truth but out of a perverted mind. Nor did it begin with us, but as early as the time of Christ and the apostles the gospel had to endure many blows inflicted by this pack. As the history records, they were first called swine, robbers of God, killers of children, murderers, filthy dogs, fornicators of the darkness: infamous impurity carried on with mothers and sisters; sacrifice of human blood and their children; enemies of the human race because they separated themselves from it; desperate villains (because they let themselves be killed for their faith), who were the source of all misfortune and more; how should it be otherwise now? The world sticks to its old practices and carnal man does not reform but grows worse, and especially in these last times when they are all persuaded by the anti-Christian crowd and are falsely comforted with the vain hope that they have the law before them or in their hands. Whoever fails to agree is a heretic, desperate and--in brief--the worst person on earth. People become bold and brash to blame the worst evils on the godly; no matter how good his intentions or his deeds, it is still never right in their eyes; he is most vilely accused. The wolf at the head of the pack keeps accusing the lamb standing downstream of dirtying the water; he cannot divert himself enough in blaming it (although he knows well enough what a rascal he is) until he has

John 8

Acts 19,
23, 25

devoured it. There is hardly a place or state of security in their lands where the God-fearing man and his children can live and be safe from these ravenous beasts. However wide and large the earth were, they would still consider it too small voluntarily to grant the God-fearing (in the nature of their father, the envious devil, a murderer from the beginning) a quiet spot or place; even in former times among the naked heathen conditions were to a certain extent less cruel on all sides. For the message of the gospel (in it much about human conditions) horrified them, and they refused to condemn the uncomprehended acts and dealings of the believer, but rather liked to see an honorable, disciplined life. Besides, God himself opened the hearts of many to recognize God's committed themselves to him for their salvation, as had long been prophesied concerning them. Then there was room enough. The government demanded nothing more of them than what was inherently due to their office. Everyone could live in his own city, community and country and was not expelled. All of this gave no small opportunity and reason (FOreseen or ordained by God for the salvation of the heathen) why the apostles could get around so far with the gospel and convert many thousands to it; then they soon gathered them together in some place in a neighborhood, so that a small country could not contain them, and at times it was probably convenient to support so many. Besides it was under a single ruler, the Roman monarch; almost all in Judea, especially at Jerusalem, the Pharisaic crowd was full of zeal and threats against the apostles and disciples of Christ; they could not tolerate them, and stirred people up and tried very hard, now with Herod and again with the governors until they succeeded in getting them tyrannized, so that several of the apostles

and servants fell into their power and were imprisoned and slain, and the others crushed. But still they were not killing so generally and ruthlessly as we have come to at the present time. Hence a great difference in change and occasion comes about between the present time and that time also in conducting the work of Christ. This must of necessity be thus. He who does not consider this and notice and grasp this difference but immediately takes a position based on the unmediated Scripture and thus protects himself therewith, he cannot understand or even read the Scripture, but goes too high and too deep. The more he questions the more arises for questioning, as the angel said to Esdras: Until he submits to the obedience of the spirit of Christ and he is enlightened by this lamp or he grows weary, confused and is caught in his old nature, or he takes a meaning out of it according to his human understanding in which he persists and fights, he is finally among the number of all the rest, of whom there are now innumerable variations. For what does not come from true faith inspired by God's Spirit and presented to mankind, is all *vanity, outside of and without God. As the Lord himself says: many will say to him on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name and do many mighty works in your name?" To all of them he will confess that he never knew them and commanded them all to depart from him. Through Christ only one people, chosen now and earlier, one bride and church to whom he has revealed his *mind and let them know the mystery of his will, yes, even the concealed secret of the kingdom of grace and gave his *Holy Spirit to lead them into all truth and according to his own will, so that they may be able to direct, judge, understand and conduct all things in a spiritual, godly, and holy manner, and [recognize] what is like the faith and his Word. Those he knows, and they know him, as he says

IV Esdras 4 d

Isa. 29
Matt. 15
Rom. 14
Titus 1
Matt. 7c, d
Luke 6

Caut 4,5
Eph. 5
I Pet. 13
Matt. 13
Mark 14
Luke 1
John 16
Acts 2
I Cor. 2

John 10 in John. Christ himself laid the basis for this work; he says: Do not
Matt. 10 think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring
Luke 12 peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and
 a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-
 in-law, and a man's foes will be those of his own household: three against
 two and two against three. He who loves father or mother more than me is
 not worthy of me, and he who does not take up his cross and follow me
 is not worthy of me.

Luke 14 Luke writes similarly: If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Christ said and announced this to the twelve apostles when he sent them out the first time with the preaching of the gospel, so that in case anything strange and hostile should happen or be imposed upon them (aroused by the word of the gospel) contrary to the ancient usage of the Law) they would feel less horror, surprise or annoyance about it; yes, he indicates to them thereby that it would be very different in meetings of believers, and they should conduct themselves as under the written Law, which discouraged such unusual assemblages with threats. Finally

Luke 14 he says this, as *seen in Luke, to each one who would have assembled around him and tells them to consider the matter well first and carefully count the cost (that is why he presented the example of the building of the tower and the king's reckoning), to see how much grace he has within himself or confidence and hope to commit himself thus to the Lord in true Gelassenheit and submit to a dying away. No one should deceive himself (by estimating the cost of the building too low) or act too hastily and then become a subject for mockery by everyone,

Now, dear friends, if it happens that the word of grace, the two-edged sword of the Holy Spirit (which commands that every man without distinction turn from sin and the world and the world's confusion and that none should look to another) strikes one before the other, be it

Rom. 8

man or wife, and stirs up the fear of God on account of sins committed, and there is with it an earnest yearning, longing, desire for God's grace. The Lord himself wants to meet such and gives his servants inspiration and witness to lead and incorporate them into the family of saints. And if the unbelieving spouse complains, scolds, rages, strikes, kicks against him or otherwise treats the other contrary to common marital duty, and grants the believer neither room nor opportunity for his own and his family's upbuilding--what do you think the Lord should decide in this matter, where tyranny (as it is now in nearly all countries) is so great that the police and hangman's servants, as soon as they know that someone has separated himself from their vain meetings and committed himself to God in baptism. He gropes for that, and does not spare or regard his spouse or his orphaned children, or any other straying in marital matters; they are saddened, even divided and orphaned. It does not follow that the believer be as if entangled, expect anything and use nothing for himself, not even consider the God-given freedom (when they *persecute you in one town, flee to the next) and accept it for himself, nor was it ever the intention of the Lord and the apostles. The natural law in mankind also contains and witnesses to this, for whenever someone in the world has witnessed a dangerous unexpected deed (that he fears is fatal), he cannot do anything else but not look at it and above all save his own life. And the released spouse (considering and weighing the fact that life is the highest and best gift to men) does nothing against it, out of marital love, whereby he would ruin life as well as security or spirit of the other, even though there may be want in the household and sadness, and they would have to bear some loss. The [unconverted spouse] sees well that the step is not taken out of

Matt. 10

thoughtlessness, and it should be tolerated all the more since it is not taken with that guilt. We know, of course, out of the Lord's grace that God instituted marriage for the increase of the human race and that even marriage in Christ is not rescinded for reasons of human foolishness; and it should always be honorable and upright and not contrary or a hindrance to godly work. For God originally created man not only for the sake of a physical marriage but for the sake of his honor, that man be obedient to him, earnestly seek his truth and will, fear him, keep him in view, love and serve him and in all of life belong to God; marriage is special picture and direction to the godly of the union and continuing obligation that they owe and have vowed to God's Spirit and the Lord, as is clearly explained in our Rechenschaft.

Gen. 12

Matt. 5, 19
Mark 10
Luke 15

Therefore Christ was moved to cut off all frivolous, unimportant and bad reasons arising from or originating in human loathing or displeasure (as was common, acceptable practice among the Jews) and rescind it among his people. Thereby the original institution was re-established in its first status and no one could break it off for his human wishes or will (except for adultery). But nevertheless, when his Word causes *such disharmony and disunity in the unbeliever that he becomes hostile to the believing spouse (because he has committed himself to God) and treats him badly, refuses to have his any longer, but

Matt. 10
Luke 12

destroys and shatters it, and refuses his access to the Word of the Lord and to his fellow believers, slanders and reviles him, and even refuses to let the children they have together be instructed in the fear and honor of God and piety, and finally stops at nothing--in that case it is more needful for the believer to keep his eyes on what is godly to keep his heart *in peace and not make too many concessions, cling too much or agree or overlook too much, be it for fear or love of the spouse,

I Cor. 7

so that he does not sully his conscience or sin against God but value the grace he has received above all else and *finally be more obedient to God than to man also in this respect; the Spirit of Christ surely was with his own when such occasions arose and explained what they were to do. One sees that also in Paul, for he says throughout that the obligation of marriage should not be assumed and observed too carelessly or thoughtlessly, but also that where there are religious reasons there should not be too much love and nothing is compulsory, as if a man without means had to remain entangled whether it is against or with a good conscience and there would be no means to grieve over, precisely in this way, he tells the married. *He means that where both are believers (as the thought in the following verses clearly shows) that it is "the Lord, and not I" that commands the wife not to be separated from her husband as was the common Jewish practice--and perhaps she might still be willing to remain attached; but it should not be done for unimportant reasons. But in the other case (where not both are believers, even if it is also called a marriage) "I say," not the Lord (as divine counsel, and not a command as above): if a brother has an unbelieving wife, and she is pleased to live with him (note: pleased), he should not be divorced from her; and also, if a wife has an unbelieving husband and he is pleased (note: again pleased) to live with her, he should not be divorced from her. Note that here Paul must have been taught by the Holy Spirit (of which he boasts) of a distinction: that there is a *difference between a case where one is a believer and the other an unbeliever and a case where both are believers; in the latter there is some lenience and freedom of choice. Otherwise he would have bound these as well as marriages where both are believers with the Lord's command and combined them in a single passage. One sees clearly here that he gives this

Acts 4

I Cor. 7

I Cor. 1, 6

I Cor. 7d

advice more out of human pity, but still in godly intent and hope, as he indicates later than that he received or knew of such a definite command from the Lord; therefore makes the distinction if one is pleased to live with the other. But what does "pleased" mean here? Physically, it means that since the natural heathen were somewhat more relaxed than the present so-called Christians, where the unbelieving spouse (as often mentioned above) is willing to let the believing spouse continue unhindered and unhampered in his service of God and work of love that he/she may withdraw from the disorderly crowd as it is now in the world (as goes with the teaching of godliness), adhere to his fellow believers and learn still better from them the divine will and the difference of salvation as well as offer a helping hand loyally in their need, give them help and counsel in the manner of divine love, and, in addition, teach and point their children faithfully and earnestly *to God and raise them in his fear, remove all evil (to which the flesh is inclined from it youth) from them kindly and by punishment, never voluntarily watch anything bad or mischievous become a habit.

Eph. 6

Gen. 8
Prov. 23

Then the unbeliever would not be unclean or cut off from the believer, but be somewhat more fit before God to be used in his church.

Eccti. 4:1

"Otherwise your children would be unclean," that is, they would be repulsive to God and would not be able to please him (as the wise man says, the children of the ungodly are abhorrent children, and those who live around their houses. And at a different place [he says], Do not desire to have many children who are useless, and do not rejoice in them even if you had many if they are not God-fearing). But "by the zeal of the believer they are sanctified," that is, beloved of God and a pleasure to him. Notice here: In them was stirring the law, order and command that no Israelite should take or have an unbelieving wife,

Deut. 7

Deut. 1
Ezek. 34
Kings 11

so that they would not thereby be drawn away from God and be enticed back to the abominations of the heathen by which they were horrified and which they feared. For the Lord said through Moses that *if they took the daughters of strangers for their sons or gave their daughters to the sons of strangers they would surely incline their hearts to strange gods and make them backslide from God; they knew many instances of this from their forefathers and also the terrible punishments inflicted upon them. Note that when Solomon, the wisest of all kings, disregarded this commandment which he well knew, was led by his foreign wives into the greatest foolishness and divine punishment. *For they saw that the Lord valued obedience and honor to himself far above the wishes and show of mankind; hence he did not regret that Israel had to put away and banish the foreign wives that they had taken in marriage and with whom they had children together with the children. For it is never fitting, beneficial and helpful to a people of God to live with foreign and contrary-minded spouses. They were concerned about this now; their anxiety was somewhat deeper than it is now among you and your kind. For the God-fearing it was now only a question of being kept and preserved in the grace they had received.

III Esdras 1,
10, 11

Here Paul wants to inform them of something: because it applied more to that time than to the present, and show them the long-suffering in Christ, that in the meantime the unbeliever might be moved thereby by the *devout life of the believer and be a cause for realization that he also seek his salvation in Christ by living together. But where this pleasure cannot be, and he/she would have to fear a violation of conscience he presents to them the better, higher and more perfect way and proclaims the freedom of Christ for a sister or brother is in such a case as if unmarried and not bound. Where does he give the verse and cause of adultery, that besides it nothing parts a marriage?

I Pet. 3

I Cor. 7

For he says God called his people (that is, in the true assurance and purity of heart that brings eternal life) not only to remain in physical marriage, because it is, after all, dangerous, when people live together long beyond their goal, whether or not they are drawn to the faith thereby. This is what we now consider the meaning, reason and advice of Paul; it is also similar to the faith and is not to be so harshly and vengefully understood as you interpret and exposit and apply it. To this all of God's saints will testify at the right time. Then if an instance or more of such a case occurs among us in the lands where because of tyranny and other ungodly things, no opportunity is given to a young person committed to the faith to keep himself [faithful] we are with Paul compelled and obligated by God to give everyone the best and safest counsel if we want to be faithful witnesses and not carelessly or thoughtlessly cast to the winds his dearly redeemed ones, or deliberately allow the wolf to have access to the sheep--let him who wishes cry out, complain, condemn and slander us about it; who can avoid it? What kind of a creation does Christ have in his whole church that is pleasing to the world or that the world praises? Then how can this be judged in the worldly sense? We do not belong to the world to adapt ourselves according to its likes but to God to show his holy work. Still, we do not deny (as here in this country or wherever God shows us an occasion) that outside and around our church we let a believer live with an unbeliever, frequently for many years, as long as we recognize that it is not harming his soul. But where we notice that it is more harmful than helpful and we see and learn of sufficient reason we must act against the truth but for it and give the believer (to whom we are obligated more out of divine love than human love) the best advice. If it follows that he remains won, and even if he does not, we are free before God and bear no guilt of any kind of neglect,

I Cor. 6, 7
I Pet. 1

II Cor. 13

Ezek. 3
John 21

because God has for this reason set us in our weakness* as shepherds and watchmen over his children and sheep. If then one or more (on whom we have expended all godly zeal the divine spark has been completely extinguished) become violently angry, rude and rough as any bold heathen as rage and rant and create unrest, and we are aware of distress on his account, we cannot do anything or tolerate it; we have to commit the case to God whose possession we as well as the work are;

Phil. 2:3-4

I Thess. 2

beyond this we seek nothing in it for ourselves, *nor do we act with guile or malice. And God has stood by us even in this until today and given witness. If they bear their guilt, they are acting contrary to their knowledge and heart, frequently like people who deliberately act wickedly; God will therefore judge them and not impute any guilt upon us. On the other hand, other groups are so dissolved in their carnal soft-mindedness that they no longer have any real advice, distinction, earnestness or judgment in this matter, but have always fallen prey to the world, yielding now this, now that, and judge and direct things as seems expedient at the moment. But that is always contrary to God. We must again point out something against you. Ponder it without heat or grumbling with proper judgment, for our intentions are godly and we have no desire to uncover you. For several years we have heard and learned much about your actions and course in regard to this article; but the converts that come from you to us and stood in the same and other services beside and among you know even better how you dealt with such people. From them we have learned that you have completely departed from the mind and judgment of Christ. Now look: when it happens among you (and it happens not seldom) that married people of differing faiths, where a brother or a sister has an unbelieving

spouse you allow him/her to live with that spouse undisturbed; indeed, you force the verse in Matthew 5 and Matthew 19, that nothing but adultery and unchastity should break the marriage, no matter what attitude of the unbelieving one takes toward the believer. You don't ask very much whether the unbeliever does so willingly, of which Paul speaks and to which he attaches everything else. At the same place [you say] that even though the husband does not permit her to go to you or to your preaching, even you are not allowed to go into that house, even if he vilely and proudly scolds, insults and slanders her and you, or even if she cannot do any good deeds for her fellow believers; and even if she may not raise her children according to her pleasure and must watch her children get mixed among the heathen, put feathers on their hats, run to dance halls or idol houses and grow up completely like the world, become *obstinate and no longer care about the believers. Even when she comes and seeks counsel, complaining that she can no longer live with the spouse with a clear conscience you still say you cannot do anything to help her bear the cross before God that has been laid upon her; they should not let it trouble her, and go back home, even if her husband strikes her and puts her out the door she should come in again by another door, and more of such things. And she herself, when she is dismissed from you without counsel and disconsolate, will finally come to the point of despair about you and melt into the world. Still you assume that you have faithfully fulfilled your office and dealt nobly if she only stays with her husband. Perhaps it is because no disturbance has arisen among you and yours, Oh you of little understanding and completely unenlightened, must this be the mind of the Lord and of Paul?

I Cor. 7

Ecctj. 30

Consider at Ober Wisternitz in this country the tawer's wife who had an ungodly evil hus and who treated her vilely and beat her nine times in one day--when she came to you as one of your members asking counsel, she was sent home again, was stuck there; you had no other judgment nor did you fear anything unpleasant. How did the noble-woman at Wegenbach fare, who was lost on that account? How about the girl , Strauss's wife at Wimpfen? As long as she was one of your sisters you were not permitted to see her, enter the house and she was forbidden to hear your preaching until she finally died. Should you not have a judgment? Oh, the negligent shepherds who guard so poorly! It is almost like that with those who want to be brothers with you and have unbelieving wives; they are to be the head of the home who should bring up their children to the honor of God and their own honor; they frequently travel, one here and another there for a week or ten days or longer in practicing their trade (because you allow many kinds of dealings that a church of God cannot do), rarely come home and then are gone again. Then the carnal, undisciplined wife is supposed to bring up the children to the good and the godly (of which she herself does not yet know) in the place of the believer. What happens there is clearly seen in the course of time: out of natural love she allows them whatever they wish; they run about on the streets with the others in order to play somewhere, and then they go into the temple, or to a dance, and wherever there is something bold going on or is about to begin in the manner of youth they are there. They put feathers on their hats, carry weapons--all this before the father's eyes. If he wants to have peace in the house, he dare hardly utter a sound. He has the name of head of the household, but actually the unbelieving wife and the children rule it. Besides that, the wives often have their infants carried into the idol-house

and soiled with infant baptism. And the father is supposed to be a brother, but winks at it or uses whatever kind of excuse he can. That is final. All is unpunished just as it was [before his conversion], and like others of his brothers he finally comforts himself, "Well, I am not alone in this; there are others of my brothers who are in the same situation and must endure it as I do. I am bound to my wife and cannot or must not become single." And so the consequence is that people

Deut. 29

*sleep and cannot wake up until poverty breaks in and these *who have drunk are lost with the thirsty. Here the salt has become tasteless

Rev. 3

and there is no godly earnestness concerning wrong-doing or any ardent zeal. Nevertheless people think they are rich and have prospered (all is done well, they think, and have just come into the freedom of Christ), one needs nothing, not knowing that he has become so poor, wretched and miserably blind and naked, so that the Lord had to charge them: "Would that you were cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm" I am angry with you "and will spew you out of my mouth. In this supposed freedom with which you console yourselves you attain such heights of understanding (we mean that in reverse) that you no longer feel any horror about it even if the children do not follow in your steps, if only they grow physically. The brother or sister then makes an effort only to see that they are well provided for in the world, even if it means an outside marriage and willingly assist in it. It seems good to them if they have been friendly the honest men among the Moabites, from whom, in the fear of God, they should better have stayed 1000 miles away. Besides, one becomes so very wise *and clever that he wants to see first what liberties there are in marrying. Before the marriage one perhaps makes do for a good while with prostitutes or their own sisters (but think it should not be defamed as adultery),

and live make use of the mixing like married people or persuade each other to the extent that they take each other in marriage; but they do not soon make it public; there is none among the brethren who has the courage when he notices it that he would take the proper action and punish it in the godly way. When it is about to be gossiped about or one has become pregnant one must (for the sake of appearances rather than with proper earnestness) speak to them. Then one rebukes them with words or avoids them for a time, but the fornicators stay together with the adulterer; one does not separate them (because, someone says, who would meanwhile look after the cattle for me?). There is little avoidance. Just as before, they are both soon readmitted and permitted to live as they did before the punishment without a formal ceremony. If they were living in fornication before, they are doing so now too. We would have several instances to relate. We have one woman with us who has become a sister, who lived with someone at Harrgart for some seven years who also cheated her. She had never promised him marriage nor did you ever marry them. But you still considered them your sister and brother and thus let them live together. At first you did punish him, but never set them back, and baptized them and let them live together. She made that accusation first to us and revealed it herself. There was a similar instance in the Netherlands with Nelusen Jan, a charcoal burner, now living along the Rhine, who made Katarina von Hullert pregnant without marriage. And although you excluded him, you did not make Katarina, the partner in adultery, leave him, nor did you marry them. They are still living in their former state and you consider them your brother and sister. A similar case is that of the gentleman at court in the castle at Landskron and the girl he took for himself after his

wife's departure. Susanna, the sister of the girl criticized him at that time for treating her sister in that way. He is said to have replied: "Well, if you had been there with me I would have done the same to you," or words to that effect. Is that not a bold carnal wickedness? Where is the shame or conscience here, and where do you find any Scripture at all to defend it, but still you accepted them as members. We would have many more cases to tell about, some that came to us from you in similar circumstances whom you had treated thus. Now just think for yourselves what sort of reputation you have. But that is what happens when human wisdom wants to be the master, then God removes his hand and man falls from one error into another, and from a small one into a greater, and continues to deviate from the right path until he grows weary enough to confess that the vain reputation that they make and create for themselves does no good. We are not pointing this out to imply that nothing punishable ever happens among us committed by the thoughtless. No! We point it out because you apply no true punishment or severity to them, whereas we, as soon as we are aware of it, deal with such as with adulterers and put them *out and separate them in accord with the Word of the Lord, unless they are willing to repent; that is their God-given judgment. But you may want to allege as an excuse that when two people make an agreement it is a marriage; because they want to be together we cannot and do not want to part them. That is the rule among nearly all the carnal and most of the people in the world, but only for the purpose of concealing their carnal lust, desires, and shame under that pretext, for the beginning of such a union is accompanied by far more stubbornness than the fear of God or considering that one should marry in the Lord. Otherwise they would take some time to begin the matter properly with counsel and not in the form of adultery. Otherwise there would

Matt. 16, 18

Tob. 6
I Cor. 7

be no difference between the people of God and the course of the world.

Matt. 5 *How would the light then shine into the darkness? *How would the
 Eph. 6 a, b city on the hill of the Lord be seen? You cannot charge the forms of
 Matt. 7 the world in its adultery, for the accuser must always be without guilt.
 Rom. 2 We would like to say to you with Paul: When you condemn others for
 something you are condemning yourselves because you are doing the same,
 for God's judgment is according to the truth. Oh, dear friends, if
 you are to rightly perceive, in this one main point, what marriage is,
 how binding, for what purpose and in what fear of God it should take
 place for the believer and you really considered, comprehended and
 understood it, all your verses, and arguments to the
 contrary would fall and you would see the light. Under the article
 on community you learned that we do not suppose that believers married
 to half-believers have lived separately with their families, especially
 in Greece, Macedonia, Achaia and Asia, or in towns in those countries
 and understood the reasons for it. In this article therefore we also
 began by confessing our reasons. To what are you able to testify
 with us on this subject? Almost nothing but that you revealed your
 general leniency of spirit and pity for the flesh contrary to God's
 pity for the soul. And all your debate is simply in order to preserve
 a hiding place for the flesh for its own liberty (which is the severest
 suppression of the soul and the inner life). In fact, you give such
 very raw and carnal evidence (about which you boast of greater godly
 enlightenment than the whole world and all so-called Christians)
 that we are extremely amazed. Nor can we judge from it that on this
 point your judgment is in any way much higher than other carnal peoples,
 despite the fact that you want to avoid infant baptism, idols and
 some of the worst abominations. Otherwise we can notice little dying

away and renewal among you. As they fight with the dead letter, so do you, so that we are shocked at your position. We cannot now discuss further all the cited and indicated verses nor give lengthy answers on this article. It would simply be a futile answer or task.

Among other things you mention two married couples: in one case we are supposed to have advised the sister to return to her excommunicated husband for the sole reason that she be available to him in marital duty; the other we are said to have returned to her husband yourselves, and when she came back we, contrary to our word, refused to regard her as a sister. You do not name them, and we cannot remember with certainty and can therefore not write or answer with certainty just now; but as far as we know, we hope that in such affairs none was dealt with in that manner; they had other reasons sometimes even if they gave you only that account. But as far the backsliders are concerned or those standing in penitence we make a difference according to the circumstances of the transgression. We however consider that one who truly is sorry for his misdeed *before God and really strives and chastises himself before God, he will himself know how to shut himself in where carnal lust can tempt him little. You make your fleshly manner and great darkness very evident again; it is probably only for appearance' sake, and your procedure in such things is superficial, showing little seriousness in punishing. For that reason you also have and report so much more trouble with such licentious vices. To be sure, we have found few unmarried people who have been coming to us from you since some time ago who are not spotted with some licentious impurity. We cannot say that among us nothing like that has ever been found among the careless (because the tares will always grow beside the good wheat), but it is punished seriously according

to the Lord's judgment; that is not seen or heard of among you. You also give little attention to such vices in your meetings, and so these persons confess that they have never heard from you that it is supposed to be wrong; hence such things are not exposed or removed from among you. As to our having narrow beds, you must know that we would prefer to have wider ones, but since the enemy hardly allows it, we accept what we have with deep thanks to God. But in practice we make a different distinction than you think in assigning beds to the married and to the single, and to the unmarried brothers and sisters, like all who come to us from you, in order that all occasion and temptation may be eliminated as far as it is possible for us human beings; the rest we commit to God and know that the devout, forgiven hearts do not have their minds set on such carnal and improper things. We believe that if our people were so completely subject to nature as we note in your letter (perhaps adopted from some of yours) and you revealed yourselves--and we know some things ourselves--that there could be better safeguarding, for we know well

As to the government, you are greatly surprised that it can think so well of us in spite of this article. Dear friends, don't take it ill of us, that frequently one of your people should have a more correct judgment in this matter than you yourselves have. You thereby reveal that your spirit is more inclined to set them to harassing us than to a true desire for temporal calm. As to the other statements you make: that we take the girls captive (which is the meaning you intend)--that the sin of eating among the populace entices careless souls to us and makes us participants in the sins of outsiders--we are not at all afraid. The Lord knows us well. Just see to it that

they do not hit you, against which you are now defending yourselves.

Whenever you learn of someone who sincerely desires to inquire about what is right and does not want to let himself be when

God lends him a hand, that you undermine his heart and confidence in the people of God by falsely saying many evil things [about them] and offering much freedom, claiming that one can also without a communal church do what is right and be saved, and other carnal preachments.

Yes, we have experienced it several times, and a number that have been with must bear witness that you did not get married but in the middle of the night got up and, as they say, went astray and spared *no pains to turn them away from us, and did not concern yourselves very much if they did not come to you but remained stuck in the world, if only

they did not come to us. For that, God will in due time (unless you repent) God will seek you out and punish you. The more the wish one has to do this and be boldly daring, the greater will God's desire become.

Most important, you can now act as if you were helping the Lord gather and would like to be one with us in matters of faith, so that even if you cannot arrive at our foundation there would still be good, neighborly love between us and our groups. This should, after all (in our estimation), be highly objectionable to you because you suppose that even in our activities we are working against God, as you wrote. Why, if that were the case you should rather be 1000

miles away from us than have unity with us. We have indeed not wished you any evil up to the present, but have sought enlightenment from God for you for your salvation, and we have never willingly and boldly (as you have often accused us and proclaimed in public) talked against you except as the Lord himself has given us reason to discriminate in his Word and the work. But to say or confess that you stand and live right, we cannot do that, unless we wanted to speak contrary

II Pet. 2
Jude 1

Matt. 23

Eph. 4
 to the truth; be that far from us! We have learned Christ differently; namely, that *in him is an upright being, after the former walk to lay down the old man who will be destroyed by the erroneous desires; but be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness; there one is *pure, virtuous, peaceable and obedient to the truth. And as David says, "Your people will offer themselves freely on the day you lead your host upon the holy mountains. This we also want to keep with God's help, and never direct the Lord's doing into pleasing men. You have already heard that the apostles had to teach and tell Christian ordinances and commandments now and again in the churches, whether they lived together as in Jerusalem or scattered, as outside Jerusalem, in order that everything everywhere was done with order and devotion, and those who lived together in community as well as those outside had to use and observe these rules; namely, that wives should be subject to their husbands, whereas the husband should fulfil his duty to preside as the head and give the wife the honor due her as the weaker vessel, and be an influence to lead her to God, that she may also be built up in the grace of the Lord and be saved with them. Both parties should have regard for *human weakness, and not unkindly withdraw one from the other. Children should be brought up in the discipline and admonition of the Lord, and the children should in turn hold their parents in honor. These things must still be done today. We know, of course, that people do not have the same gifts, because the divine Word binds, motivates and leads the believer to these things that give the soul peace and keep it unspotted, we consider it to be most necessary of all, and in these days such statements cannot protect from it. It was not written by the apostles in order that true community be dissolved

James 3

Ps. 110

I Thess. 2

Eph. 5
 I Pet. 3

I Cor. 7

Eph. 6

and there will never again be one or that people must live in separate houses and not get involved in any other Gelassenheit, for you do praise voluntary community. Then if it is to be properly led you should know that it must develop its own order and means for doing this and must be observed as before; otherwise a peculiar work would arise and have no permanence. Then, even if in such trouble of conscience as described above, a believer must leave his unbelieving spouse for a time because the unbeliever has neither desire nor love for the truth, and after frequent requests there is no compliance, this is by no means complete separation or adultery even in human law and practice but is derived from the words of Christ. But that the unbeliever (as you write, which we very rarely experience, much more likely to hinder and resist) loves the believing spouse and is happy to live with him/her unhindered in his faith, then at such a place the believing spouse could live similarly, and then his desire would be improved. We know that the husband always likes his wife with him, and the wife the husband (if they have the right attitude in their marital duties) and at the end in death leaves the spouse reluctantly if only it can do no harm or injury to his faith and conscience. Where that cannot be the case the believer must of course force *himself to keep more firmly to God, use his aid and with all earnestness resist weakness because much severe difficulty may befall him if the spouse refuses to give any consideration to his soul and honor or to the welfare of the believer and acts stubbornly. For him the believing spouse can do nothing, but must commit the matter to God and let the intractable partner bear his punishment. God will not reckon against the believer what he has caused the separation contrary to his Word, because it was not done in carelessness or human cleverness, or he will grant ways and

Matt. 11
Luke 16

means that will lead to a solution of the problem. Then, as far as marriage among us is concerned, that because of unforeseen circumstances we are said to read two out of one note and then (whether or not they give their consent) marry them immediately is not the case, for we do not read or write anyone who has not agreed beforehand and wanted to accept each other in the fear of the Lord, for we have always consulted each one separately and no one urges them. But that we are said to proceed so carnally as to praise and commend everything anyone chooses for himself out of fleshly appearances (which is seen in the whole world and also among you here)--that we cannot do. It would also generally not benefit her and we would be just like the world.

I Cor. 7

What would then become of marriage *in the Lord, with petition and earnest prayer that God himself would reveal in his people and lead and order what can be useful to each for salvation, comforting, edifying

Eccli. 26

and has been foreordained by him, because a *devout wife is a good gift, and is given only to those who fear God which makes both the

Gen. 24

Tob. 7

high and the lowly happy, as in the case of *Isaac with Rebecca, and young Tobias with Sarah. They did not look to the flesh but to God,

as is also discussed in our Rechenschaft. Then what God has joined together according to his will--that is a marriage, and God will bless them that they may be an honor to him and also direct their children in that way, wherever they may be staying. Other verses that you cite:

Deut. 24, about divorce, such as Matt. 22, about the woman who married seven brothers, and its meaning, in Song of Solomon 6, that there were 60 queens and 80 concubines and maidens without number; also about

Jacob with Leah and Rachel, that he loved one better than the other,

seem very strange to us in connection with this matter, for you yourselves know that the Law on this point was abolished and no more than one wife is allowed at one time. It only shows you up, that you like to point

to such passages to allow gratification of carnal pleasure the more unblamably. As you have indicated as several reasons, you have nearly reached the point or arrived at the state where you look very little at such divine regulations pertaining to marriage if only the flesh is gratified and its lascivious passion, fulfilled and covered. But the secret impurity is well known to God, etc.

So much on divorce, etc.

"Do not find fault before examining the evidence." Ecclesiasticus 11.