

Love is like
The Confession
of an
Anabaptist Prisoner
Fire



PETER RIEDEMANN

Peter Riedemann

LOVE IS LIKE FIRE

THE CONFESSION OF AN

ANABAPTIST PRISONER

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Love is like fire –

When it is first kindled in a man,
small troubles and temptations smother
and hinder it; but when it really burns,
having kindled the man's eagerness for God,
the more temptations and tribulations meet it,
the more it flares, until it overcomes and consumes
all injustice and wickedness.

PETER RIEDEMANN

Peter Riedemann (1506-1556) was born in Hirschberg, Silesia, and was a cobbler by trade. The earliest we hear about him is that he was imprisoned from 1529 to 1532 at Gmunden, Upper Austria, on account of his faith. This strongly suggests that he had joined the Anabaptist movement there between 1527 and 1529.¹ Because we know that the movement owed its existence in particular to the missionary activity of the well-known Anabaptist apostle Hans Hut, we may assume that Riedemann was either converted or baptized (possibly in Steier) by Hut or by one of his co-workers. The fact that Riedemann was able - at the age of twenty-three or twenty-four - to write such a comprehensive work during his imprisonment shows that he must have been one of the strongest and most active leaders among the Anabaptists of his period.²

Of course, at that time there was no living experience of an ordered communal life such as Riedemann was to find later among the Hutterites. It follows that this first or "Gmunden" Confession is less concerned with practical questions than the second "Hutterian" Confession of 1540-42, written in Hesse. The great tradition of the Anabaptist churches was still missing; having suffered heavy persecution in Upper Austria, they had had neither time nor peace for real inner construction. So it is not surprising that this first detailed Confession, in addition to including a song in praise

of brotherly love, devotes a disproportionately large space to biblical history (as illustrating what faith really means).

The Gmunden Confession contains two important supplements: "How we should build the House of God, and what the House of God is" and "The Seven Pillars of this House," both meditations of a deeply spiritual character. This peculiarity of spiritualistic allegorical interpretation of the Bible was soon given up, it is true, to make room for a more radical biblicism. We can see Riedemann's great intimacy with the Bible from the great number of Bible references in our text. Nevertheless, the quasi-mystical or spiritualistic element so characteristic of early Anabaptism must not be overlooked, especially in the sections about love, for it gave its representatives an amazing certainty in interpreting the Bible. We do not know if Riedemann had a Bible with him in his imprisonment of 1529-1532; it is very likely that he knew large passages of scripture by heart and quoted them from memory.

In 1532 Riedemann escaped from prison and seems to have gone straight to Moravia, where he joined the young Hutterian church there. Though founded as early as 1529 on a quasi-communistic basis, it was only organized on a solid basis, strictly observing community of goods, in 1533, by Jakob Hutter from Tirol. For Riedemann there now began a rich time of missionary activity and pastoral care during which he traveled several times to Franconia and Hesse. He was imprisoned for about four years in Nürnberg (till 1537), and later in Hesse (Marburg and Wolkersdorf) for almost two years.

In the fifty years of his life Riedemann was held nearly nine years in prison, partly under severe conditions, though fortune was kind to him and he could escape again and again. During his imprisonment in Hesse, he wrote (mainly for the landgrave Philip of Hesse) his second, much larger statement of belief, an account in the original sense of the word, which became the standard confession of faith for the Hutterian Brethren. This Account and Confession of Faith was first printed in 1545 (only one copy is known) and reprinted in 1565 (about seven copies are extant).³

From 1542, Riedemann, with the assistance of Leonhard Lanzenstiel, served as Elder or Bishop of the Hutterian Church. Courageously sharing in its hard early lot, he held the brotherhood together and led it into a more hopeful era.

Riedemann died on December 1, 1556, at Protzko Bruderhof in Slovakia. The Hutterian Chronicle says of him:

He was a man inspired and highly gifted by God....He wrote many wonderful epistles from prison and from the community to brothers and sisters who were also prisoners or living elsewhere....Both in prison and in the church community, he wrote many beautiful Christian songs, spiritual and biblical, for he was rich in all the secrets of God.⁴ The gift of God's Word flowed from him like a running river and brimmed over. All who heard him were filled with joy.

Robert Friedmann

THE LOVE OF GOD

God in his almighty power and divine nature hovered in the wind before there was a place to stand, and before the foundation of the world was laid; he, the infinite Being, was alone in his glory. It seemed to him not enough to be alone, however, as there was nothing to praise and glorify his name, for he wanted praise. So in his wisdom, which endures for ever and never changes, he created heaven and earth and filled them with his glory - that is, with all creation, the work of his hands in which we recognize his invisible being and eternal power, if we note and observe it. On looking at it, he declared that everything was very good, made according to his will and without blemish; but among them all there was no creature able to give him the praise he wanted. So he said, "Let us make human beings in our image, that is, beings who are perfectly pure and completely without blemish."

Then he made a man and a woman and gave them dominion over all the work of his hands, except the tree of life and of the knowledge of good and evil. Regarding this tree, he said, "When you eat of it you shall die." But the human beings whom God had made for his praise soon turned away and forgot their Creator's command and all the good things he had given them. They exchanged obedience for disobedience and ate of the forbidden fruit. This caused them to fall, and their descendants also, for the wrath of God came

over them, and as a result the earth, too, came under a curse, and as a punishment bore thistles and thorns where they had hoped for good. God had expected goodness and obedience from them, but they had been disobedient and caused thistles and thorns to grow. Therefore eternal death and damnation came over them and all their descendants, and it became impossible for any of them to attain what the one man, Adam, had lost - that is, God's favor and grace; for the wrath of God had come upon them and they lay in the power of death under sin, as under a heavy load that none of them could lift. Only the one eternally powerful God, against whom they had sinned, could do so through his dearly beloved Son.

But God in the very great wrath which had befallen us could not restrain and hide his love. This was impossible, for he himself is love. So he had to show himself and make himself known, and extend love to the human race, and after the curse give comfort once more through his promise. In order that man might have comfort and hope, he said to the serpent, "I will put enmity between your seed and the woman's seed, and her seed will crush your head." This seed is Christ our Savior, who crushed the serpent's head, that is, robbed the Devil of his power and dominion.

What great love that is! God comforts us, his greatest enemies, with such a glorious and wonderful promise to free us from death (which we had willfully deserved) and give us everlasting life freely, without our earning or deserving it.

So loving is his compassion! Like a spring that overflows, his mercy flows over all who desire it, calling them to this grace and saying, "Everyone who is thirsty, come to the water, and those of you who have no money, come buy wine and milk without price!" Who has ever shown anyone such love as the Ruler of all has shown, even to those who despised him? He still cares daily for them, and gives them food and drink, clothing and all they need, also strength of body. Truly, what can a man have that he did not receive from him? And what could he achieve that was not done by God beforehand and given him? Yet who is thanked less for a gift than the One from whom everything comes, the One who cares for us as a mother does for the child at her breast, and wants nothing evil to befall us, but wants to save us from it all, if only we listen to his voice? For as a bird cares for its young, he watches over us to help us, saying, "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will hear you and help you." He is a faithful God who soon forgets all our transgressions and favors us with his noblest gifts.

God's love is seen in that he did not spare his dearly beloved only Son, but sent him into the world and gave him up to death as atonement for our sin. What great love that is! He makes his only Son whom he loves alive again in us who were dead, and leads us to his kingdom. What more should he have done than he has already done, or what more should he have shown us than he has already shown? God wants to give us everything with him. But not only that; he

has already given himself to us to be our Father and accepted us as his children by freely forgiving our sins. We have not repaid him for this, nor does he want any recompense except that we believe in his name and in Jesus Christ his Son, whom he sent to be the Savior of the world.

THE LOVE OF CHRIST

Christ Jesus, the eternal Word of God Most High, was with the Father before the creation of the world and made all things together with his Father - as it is written, "Before the world was, I was, and rejoiced in his presence continually, and when he prepared all things I helped him, for through him all things are made, and nothing was made without him." Everything that has been made, however, has being and remains in him and through him will once more be perfected. He came from above to his property, but they did not receive him; but to those who received him he gave the power to become children of God. What great love that is! Christ Jesus, the eternal Father's Son, left the glory beside the Father which he had had before the world was made and came into the world in the form of a servant, endured poverty, temptation, and suffering to set us free from the yoke of misery and servitude. The lord of all lords and king of all kings became poor for our sake that we might become rich in him. We see the love of Christ in that he gave his life for us and suffered death to free us, who were guilty of death; for it is written, "No one has greater love than to give his life for his friend, and you are my friends, if you do all that I command you. I lay down my life in order to receive it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down myself." Christ had such love for us that he gave his life and suffered the most humiliating death, namely death on the

cross. Thus he became a curse for our sakes. For it is written, "Cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree."

How could he have a greater love than this: he suffered so much poverty and misery, and shed his blood in death and so broke down the middle wall of partition and wiped out all that was written against us. He made a sure path to the Father for us and earned for us the Father's favor. See how he spared no effort but did all that was necessary for our blessedness simply so that we might find joy with God and that he might cast off the heavy load that had lain upon us. We could rid ourselves of this in no other way than through him, since Satan had bound us so tightly with his ropes and stood like an armed man, keeping us in his power until the appointed time of grace came to us from God, when he sent the strong hero, Jesus Christ our Lord, against whom no one can prevail. He took away Satan's power, burst the chain and the prison that held us, and forced Satan to obey him. He redeemed us, his people, in order that we might cleave to him alone and serve him with all our hearts.

Now, whoever recognizes the love of God the Father and of his dearly beloved Son, and takes to heart the great grace that has come to us through him, will truly set his heart to serve him, obey his commandments, and delight in them by day and night; he will treasure and love the testimony of his God, and have no fear of what may happen to him as a result. He will let nothing hinder him in this or turn him aside: as it is written, "What can separate us from the

love of God - tribulation or death, hunger or thirst, heat or frost, fire, water, or sword? As it is written, we are killed all day long and are counted as sheep for slaughter, but in all this we more than overcome for the sake of him who loved us." Such a man, however, will watch carefully over his witness to the Lord, and will hold unhindered to God's will against his own will, which he gives to die with Christ. He strangles and kills it, so that his whole will is changed and renewed, and he becomes a new creature in Christ. He puts on Christ and truly surrenders himself to God. Just as previously he surrendered to sin, obeying it and serving it, and going from one sin to the next, now, after having recognized God, he gives himself and his members to God as weapons of righteousness that they may be holy. Now he no longer lives, but Christ lives in him and brings to perfection everything in him that is pleasing to God, so that he may praise God with an honest heart. For the true praise of God is to keep his testimony and love his name wholeheartedly.

LET US LOVE GOD

Let us love God; for he has loved us first and sent his Son into the world, through whom he has made us holy and sanctified us to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices well-pleasing to him through Jesus Christ. This is the love of God: that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. But whoever says he loves God and does not keep his commandments is a liar. In such a man there is no truth, for whoever loves God remains in God and God in him. We recognize that we remain in God and he in us if we keep his commandments.

The chief of all God's commandments is, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one. You must cleave to him, serve him and love him with all your heart, all your mind, all your soul, and all your strength." So to love God is the fulfillment of all his commands, and to love him with all my powers is to honor him with all my works and to give him praise. This means that in all I do and want to do, I look first to see whether I seek to increase God's praise in it. If I find that he will be praised by a deed, I joyfully carry it out for God's sake, regardless of the consequences for me. Where that is not so - where I do not find God's praise in it - it is useless work. I should leave it undone in order that God's name not be profaned in my work (regardless of who becomes my enemy because of it), and so that what I do may be done or left undone in God.

his brother, however, penetrates through from death to life, for he loves his brethren. So let us love everyone - not with words and with our tongues, but in deed and truth. For if someone who has the goods of this world sees his brother in want and does not share with him, how can God's love abide in him? It is rather Cain's love that is in him. He was evil and slew his brother, because his works were evil and his brother's upright.

Christ, our Master, gave himself completely to us with all he had and kept nothing back. He himself said, "All that I have received from my Father I have given to you." He has become our own with all that he has, and we have become his, so that he is in us, and so that we live and move in him. In the same way we should give ourselves to our brethren and keep nothing from them, but gladly give them love, life, and all that is ours in order to become one indivisible body whose head is Christ. Whoever remains in such love remains in Christ and Christ in him, and he will bring forth much fruit for eternal life. But whoever does not abide in me, says the Lord, will be cast out to wither and be burned. That is the end and the recompense for the hypocritical and ungentle love of which the world is full.

Brotherly love should come wholeheartedly from pure hearts and not be tainted but remain pure. God the Lord knows what is in man; he searches the heart and mind. Thus neither outward show nor hypocrisy means anything to him, no matter how fine they seem, for God is not de-

ceived. He wants a sincere, renewed heart. As it is written, "A broken and contrite heart you will not despise." God wants to be praised in spirit, heart, and conscience. As he is a spirit, he does not look for outward ceremony which is not founded in the heart. That is an abomination to him however fine and good it seems. What comes from the heart in faith, however, and is carried out in deed is a pleasing and fragrant offering to his glory.

Love your neighbor as yourself. This is the second commandment and is like the first. On these two depend all the law and the prophets. Indeed, the law: you shall not kill, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not commit fornication, you shall not defame, you shall not covet, and all other commandments, however many there may be, are fulfilled in the saying, "Love your neighbor as yourself." But love of one's neighbor, as Christ himself teaches, consists in this: what you would like men to do to you, do to them first - then you will fulfill God's law. Now, no one desires evil to befall him; he desires good from all, therefore, in obedience, we should first show men love, loyalty, and goodness, then they will not speak against the praise of God. In this way we gladly make ourselves of service to all men for Christ's sake, that his name may be praised through us, also by unbelievers, for when they see how we serve they will have no ground for blasphemy. Such love flows from brotherly love, as Peter shows us when he says, "Supplement your faith with virtue,

and virtue with modesty, modesty with godliness, godliness with brotherly love, and brotherly love with the love of all. If these things are in you, you will not be lazy or unfruitful in the knowledge of God and of Christ." It follows that every human being who is born of God is inclined to show his neighbor love, loyalty, and all that is good spontaneously and without end.

If you ask, "Who is my neighbor?" listen to Christ's teaching in the Gospel:

A man went from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves who beat him and left him wounded and half-dead. Then a priest went the same way, and on seeing him passed by; then a Levite did the same thing. But a Samaritan also went that way, and when he saw him he was moved to compassion. He went to him and poured wine and oil in his wounds, took him to his inn and cared for him. The next morning, before continuing his journey, he took a coin from his purse, gave it to the innkeeper and said, "Look after him, and on my return I will repay you for whatever more you have spent." Which of these is neighbor to the wounded man? The man who showed him compassion.

From this we recognize that we are all one another's neighbor - whoever is in need of help or whoever gives the other help. No one is excluded.

But whoever wants to strive for perfection is obliged, in order to reach this goal, to love all who hate and despise him as well. For Christ taught, "to the men of old it was said,

'You shall love your friend and hate your enemies,' but I say to you love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven, who makes his sun rise over the evil and the good and sends rain on the just and the unjust." For that is God's way: through patience he calls sinners to repentance. So the children who have received his Spirit should walk in its footprints and be disciples of God. Paul teaches, "Be followers of God as beloved children." Through patience and through returning good for evil, they should point their enemy to uprightness, for it is written, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink, for in so doing you will heap fiery coals on his head." Perhaps this kindness may affect him so that he considers deeply and turns over a new leaf. He will think, "I treat this man badly, and he repays me with kindness and does all he can to serve me and is my friend. Oh, what am I doing? I want to change and do as he does - leave the evil and pursue the good, for what does it help me to live in wickedness and oppose the will of God?" When this takes place - when you move a human being to have a good conscience - you have helped a soul from death to life, which is sure to be rewarded by God. Where this does not take place - where God sees you repay evil with good - he will say in his heart (even though he does not let it be seen), "This man accepts everything patiently that I maliciously do to him, and is so ready to do good to me - he is truly better than I

am." In this way your well-doing becomes a witness to him. Such love is a band of perfection. But if he does not better himself and repent after such a witness, he increases God's wrath upon him in the day of judgment. When love takes hold of a man, he is pleasing to God and approved by man. Where there is need, he walks and abides in God, and God in him, and his life and all his work is accomplished in God; for God's clarity enlightens and surrounds him so that he walks in the light of God's grace and is no more surrounded by darkness. Bright radiance and great light has enlightened his heart, and he is defended by the Holy Spirit and led with sure conscience to the peace of the saints. Whoever does not have this is blind; groping for the wall, he does not know where he will fall or that the pit of hell is close to him.

WHAT LOVE IS

As so much has been said about love so far, we must show what it is like in order that it is better understood, that one may not think he has love when it is only an illusion. Love cannot hide itself because its nature is light. It must shine and show itself in active work, serving all men and doing good. For love does everyone good. It is ready to serve; it is kind, gentle, mild, patient, humble, pure, temperate, modest, sympathetic, brotherly, warm-hearted, good, compassionate, gracious, lowly, forbearing, loyal, and peaceable. Love is not repulsive; it is not proud, puffed up, boastful, envious, or drunken; it is not self-willed, disobedient, deceitful, quarrelsome, or thieving. Love does not gossip; it is not jealous, irate, or spiteful, it despises no one, but bears all things and suffers all things; it is not revengeful; it does not repay evil with evil; it does not rejoice in what is wrong, but rejoices in truth. Only love does God's work.

Love is like fire, which goes out before it really ignites if one puts too much wood on it, as those who work with it know. But once it really flares, the more wood one puts on it, the better it burns, so that even houses and whole forests are burned. But when there is no more wood, however, it dies and grows cold. It is the same with love. When it is first kindled in a man, small troubles and temptations smother and hinder it; but when it really burns, having kindled the man's eagerness for God, the more temptations and trib-

They did not go of themselves, but through being sent they received strength for their task and were not unfruitful. In the same way Paul writes:

How can they hear without preachers; how can they preach before they are sent? Yet, have they not heard? Their voice has gone out into all the world, its sound to the end of the earth; thus faith comes from hearing, hearing through preaching, but preaching through the Word of God.

PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD

The voice of those whom God draws, teaches, and sends is heard by the hearts of believing people. They do not speak their own words but God's, so men gladly listen to them and follow his word not only with their ears, but with their hearts. Jesus says, "My sheep hear my voice; they do not listen to the voice of a stranger. I go before them, and they follow me, for I know who are mine, and they know me." From this we can recognize that up till now many - indeed all - have run without being sent by God, and have not been shepherds of the sheep, but hirelings who sought their own gain more than that of the sheep. As no betterment results from their preaching, they have not proclaimed God's word but their own fabrication (even though their deceit was covered up with godly words). That is why the sheep did not hear them. For when God's word is proclaimed in its purity, it will not return empty but will accomplish all that is commanded it, says the Lord. As Christ wanted to send to his sheep shepherds who would faithfully pasture them, he said to them, "Go out into all the world, preach and proclaim the Gospel" - that is, the good news about him and what good things he has done for us. He has made us blessed through his death. Much has been said already about this elsewhere.

WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT BAPTISM

"Whoever believes, that is, receives your words, will have your peace come over him, for you proclaim it and I bring it about in him, and he is baptized - that is, he submits to your word and becomes a partaker of my death through killing and mortifying the flesh." This takes place in baptism, as Paul says: "All of us who have been baptized were baptized into Christ's death." And again, "All of us who have been baptized have put on Christ." Yes, they have changed and become new creatures in Christ, so that they live from now on no more for themselves but for God through Jesus Christ.

Whoever does this will be blessed, but whoever does not believe, that is, does not accept your words and the witness to me that you proclaim, makes himself unworthy of it. Then your peace will not remain in him but comes over you again. Leave that place and shake the dust from your feet as a witness against it. Truly I say to you, it shall be more tolerable on the day of judgment for Sodom and Gomorrah than for such a man, for he is condemned.

This is Christ's purpose in his advice, which is sufficiently founded in scripture, where each devout heart can rightly recognize what he must do in accordance with Christ's command. But that this knowledge may be better assured, I will quote one passage (and, for the sake of brevity, omit many others): Peter says, "It is as it was in the days of Noah during the building of the ark, in which a few, namely eight

people, were kept safe in the water through God's word. The counterpart of this ark today is baptism, which saves you, not as the removal of dirt from the body, but as the bond of a good conscience with God." That is, I recognize I have a gracious God who has forgiven my sins and accepted me into the community of his saints as his child and has given me himself as Father; so I may bind myself to him, to walk henceforth in accordance with his will, never again to transgress it as formerly, and ask that my heart become firm in the hope of his grace and trust God's promise assuredly. That is the bond of baptism, which no infant can make, as it knows neither good nor evil. Thus infant baptism is no baptism at all, but idle talk. For baptism is not what takes place outwardly; it takes place in the renewal of a man's heart and conscience, though after that he also receives the outward sign through which he is written in the book of life and is incorporated into the body of Christ and his holy church, the community of saints.

Since Peter says the ark is symbolic of baptism, we ought to examine the symbol to see what it teaches us. God commanded Noah to build the ark for the flood. He said, "Make yourself an ark in which you and your household can be saved, because I am going to destroy the world." God told him how to make it: its form, height, length, and breadth, and he gave him the time to do so, namely one hundred and thirty years. Noah obeyed God and did not alter his command, holding in firm faith to what God had told him;

he was thus preserved in it together with his whole household, as God had promised him. But if he had not listened to God's voice, if he had made the ark a different way, according to his own design and not God's, it would have been of no use to him, and he would have perished with the rest. In the same way, Christ has also commanded and given us true baptism and shown us how it should be done. Whoever listens to his voice and receives baptism in accordance with his command and with firm faith in his promise will be preserved and saved, but whoever does not listen to Christ's voice, neglects baptism, or receives it in a different way from what Christ has commanded, will perish with the unbelieving. For God's will is that we immediately obey his command and do not alter it. He said to Moses, "See that you follow the plan I showed you on the mountain," but those who from the beginning of the world were disobedient and altered God's command - even if they did so with good intentions - brought punishment upon themselves, as we see in Saul and in the prophet whom God sent to Bethel from Judah. So let no one rely on being able to say he baptizes infants with good intentions, for God wants his will to stand, not ours.

THE ERROR OF INFANT BAPTISM

Christ says, "Every plant which my heavenly father has not planted will be rooted out." It is clear enough that infant baptism is not from God, but appointed by the Antichrist and child of destruction, the Pope. This is clearly seen in the statements of the Pope, though everyone fights for it today, thinking they have their safeguard in God's word; but if one really looks at it, one sees it is as far from that as heaven and earth are from each other. Everyone has a Bible passage of his own which he holds on to and brings out here and there, rejoicing that he has won the battle. But if one looks at it thoroughly it strikes him from his perch. He says the apostle baptized the whole household, in which there were also children, and that they were baptized. But we are told clearly which household members were baptized and which were not. When Paul was imprisoned in Philippi, he was praying in the night, and suddenly an earthquake occurred opening the doors of the prison, and loosening all the prisoners' fetters. When the jailer awoke from sleep and saw the prison doors open, he thought the prisoners had escaped, and taking his sword, he thought to kill himself. But Paul called out, "Do yourself no harm - we are all here." The jailer called for a light and rushed in trembling and said, "Men, what must I do?" Paul said to him, "Believe in the Lord Jesus!" Then he took them into his house, washed their wounds, and set food before them. Then Paul spoke the word of God to him

THE FALL OF MAN

On the seventh day God rested from all his work. Then God made Adam and Eve rulers over all he had created. He placed them in the midst of the garden and said, "All things are subject to you, and you may eat of all the fruits of the garden, except from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for as soon as you eat it you will die." When God made them to rule over all creatures, he explained to them, that as they were lords over the creatures, God was Lord over them. That was why he had laid down a law for them. Soon after, however, aversion arose in the creatures, so that the serpent, the deceitful devil, said to Eve, "Did God really say 'As soon as you eat the fruit you will die?' It is not so; as soon as you eat you will be as wise as gods and like them." When Eve heard this, she looked at the fruits and desired them, for they looked delicious. Besides, she wanted to be somebody, so she listened to the serpent and ate the fruit and then gave some to Adam as well. But as soon as they had eaten, their eyes were opened and they saw that they were naked - that is, they recognized that they had left God's will, and were stripped of his grace, which had covered them. Beginning to feel ashamed, they reached above them, tore leaves from the fig trees, and made aprons of them to cover their shame. Then they hid themselves under the bushes. In the evening, when it was cool, God's voice called to them, "Where are you, Adam?" But he was silent until God had called three

times. Then he answered, "Lord, I have hidden myself, because I am ashamed of my nakedness." God said, "Who told you that? You have clearly eaten from the tree of which I forbade you to eat." Adam answered, "Lord, the woman whom you gave me offered me the fruit, and I ate." Then God said to Eve, "Why have you done this?" She answered, "Lord, the serpent seduced me."

Then God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, you shall be cursed above all creatures. You shall crawl on your belly your life long, and eat earth, and I will put enmity between your seed and the seed of the woman, and her offspring will bruise your head, but you will bite his heel." And to Eve he said, "As you have listened to the serpent, you shall bear your children in great pain." To Adam God said, "Because you paid more attention to your wife than to me, the earth shall be cursed on your account. It shall bear thistles and thorns for you, and only by the sweat of your brow will you eat bread." And God sighed: "Man now knows good and evil; he would eat of the tree of life and become like me." So he thrust them out of the garden and set an angel with a fiery sword to guard the gate.

Then Adam in his disobedience decided to obey God no longer. But through this he was to recognize that creation also became disobedient to him: just as he had disobeyed God's command, the creatures now disobeyed him, and they could only be made to obey once more by using great force. Man, too, can only live in obedience to God by his

carnal will and dying to his self, which is achieved with great tribulation and suffering.⁵

A PARABLE

Many trees are in a wood. All alike are God's creation and good for building a house, but nothing will come of it unless they first endure the master builder's work: they must be cut down, squared, planed, and prepared according to the master's pleasure, and then joined together as a house. Thus many people are alike good creations of God, made for his praise, and all made to serve as God's house in which he wants to live. But the house of God will not be made of everyone, but only of those who accept God's working and discipline: they must be hewn down from all vanity and wickedness, cut with Christ's circumcision, purified in their hearts, and truly surrendered to God the Father to follow Christ. These will be united in the bond of love as a house of God in which he lives. As is written, "You are the temple of the living God." And again, "I will live and walk in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." We are taught by this and other parables that when we have transgressed, we should submit once more in obedience to God and suffer and bear the discipline by which he makes us fit and pleasing for him to live in.

The purpose of all that has been said so far is to make God's power and might more easily recognizable. Paul also taught that God's invisible nature and eternal power can be recognized in his works since the creation of the world.⁶

In all this we see the power of God: how he redeems all his own at the right time; how wonderfully he leads his saints and teaches them what faith has worked in them and what God's power is; and how we should truly rely upon and trust the Lord. So search scripture, and recognize clearly how you can please God. May the eternal God help you to do this with his inexpressible grace and power.

I BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST

I believe in Jesus Christ, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell, rose from the dead on the third day, appeared to his disciples and ascended into heaven. He sits at the right hand of God, the Father, from whence we await him, the coming judge of the living and the dead.

When the immortal God, our faithful Father, wanted to fulfill his promise and send the promised Seed who was to crush the serpent's head - that is, take away the Devil's power, destroy his kingdom, and efface his dominion - he sent his eternal Word, who became man in Mary. The angel Gabriel brought the message from God and greeted her saying, "Hail Mary, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled and pondered the meaning of this greeting. As she stood afraid, the angel comforted her and said, "Do not be afraid, Mary. Listen, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son who will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High." Then Mary asked, "How can that be? I have no husband." The angel answered, "The power of the Most High will come from above into you, so he who will be born of you is holy." When Mary heard that it was from God, she said, "So be it! See, I am a handmaiden of the Lord." When she submitted herself to the word of the Lord, she conceived through the working of the Holy Spirit

he had fed the people in the desert and crossed the water, early next morning the people also crossed over, and when they found him they said to him, 'Master, when did you come here?' Christ answered, 'You do not seek me because you saw the signs, but because you ate your fill of the bread; seek for the bread that does not perish but endures eternally in heaven.'" He continued, "Your fathers ate heavenly bread in the wilderness, and they died." We read, "He gave them bread from heaven, and each one ate the bread of the angels." Christ said, "Moses did not give you bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven, so that whoever eats it will not die but have eternal life; the bread I give is my flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world." Now listen carefully: Did flesh and blood come from heaven? You will clearly see that his flesh and blood did not come down from heaven, but he only became flesh in Mary. So Christ is not speaking here of his physical flesh and blood, but of the faith of the living Word of God, who came down from heaven and gives life to the world. Whoever believes this Word and surrenders himself to God as Mary did has already eaten the flesh of Christ. As it is written, "If a man believes in me, my Father and I will come and make our home with him." So believing the truth means eating Christ. Later you see clearly that he is not speaking of eating his physical flesh and blood, nor does he want us to eat him. The disciples also did not understand. They were appalled at his words, and said, "This is a hard saying; who

can listen to it?" meaning "Who wants to eat his flesh?" He answered them, "Do you take offense at this? What then if you will see the Son of man ascend to heaven where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is of no use" - that is, it is no use to eat. But flogged for us, killed, and raised from the dead, it is of very great use to us, and without it we could not be saved. That is why he says, "The words I speak are spirit and life." If they are spirit and life, they are not flesh and blood.

THE ERROR OF THE MASS

Even though Christ says, "Take and eat, this is my body," he does not mean we should make a god of it, right away as the belly-preachers do, who misuse these words to please themselves and avoid suffering. They are truly devoted to a god: their stomach. If it were true, as they say, that Christ was eaten in the bread, why then do they need to be worried about damnation? For it is written, "He who eats of me will have eternal life," and God does not regret his gift. Since he says, "Father, I will that where I am, there my servants will also be," so each one who truly receives and eats Christ is certain of his glory. Because they are not certain about God's promise, however, but waver about it, they witness by their deeds that they have neither received nor eaten Christ - that Christ is not there at all. So the saying, "This is my body" must not be understood in such a physical sense. You will hear later how to understand it when I speak of the Lord's Supper. But in order to keep back nothing from you, and to tell you what I really think of your communion bread, I say it is bread upon which the Lord's curse comes, and all who eat it make themselves unclean and cannot come into the Lord's house. Your blessing banishes it from God's sight, as it is written: "Since they transgress my covenant and do not walk in my law, I will curse all their blessings." In short, all the praise rightfully due to the living Christ is taken from him and given to the dead element, bread, which can nei-

ther see, hear, nor speak, and is of no use to itself, let alone to any other. But we have a living Christ through whom everything has been made, has being, and is sustained, and from whom each one receives help. He has been appointed by God a judge of the living and the dead. He testifies himself that he does not want his body (with which he ascended into heaven) to remain in bread or in any other place on earth, for he says, "You will always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me." And again, "I am leaving the world and going to the Father." However, he is always near us with his almighty divine strength, for he says, "I am with you always, to the end of the world."

WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT THE LORD'S SUPPER

I cannot praise and glorify the Lord's Supper enough as described figuratively in the Old Testament and as kept in the New. When God had plagued Pharaoh, and then, wanting to plague him still more, decided to strike down the first-born in the whole of Egypt, he commanded Moses that the people should kill a lamb, take its blood, and smear it on the lintel of their doors, so that when the angel of death came he would not enter and do harm. The lamb was to a yearling without spot or blemish, and the people were to cook it without water - roast it. Where there were not enough people in a house to eat it all, they were to invite their neighbors, provided they were circumcised, so that nothing would be left overnight. In addition, not one bone was to be broken; what remained, however, was to be burned with fire. When they were about to eat, they were to stand, their clothes tucked up ready for action, white staves in their hands and shoes on their feet, like men prepared for a journey, that is, ready to leave the slavery of Egypt.

This lamb is a symbol of Christ. For just as the children of Israel were saved by the blood of the lamb smeared on the lintel, and the plagues that struck the whole of Egypt did not harm them, in the same way we are saved when our hearts are smeared, washed, and purified with the blood of Christ, when we accept him and make ourselves partakers of his suffering and death. The eternal plague prepared for

all the world cannot harm us. As with the lamb, no bone of Christ's was broken when the bones of those who were crucified with him were broken. The lamb was to be without blemish - that is no sin was found in Christ and no deceit in his mouth. He was killed as an innocent and spotless lamb. Now, if we want to be partakers of this lamb (the divine Word) and eat the bread of the Lord, we must eat it standing; that is, we must stand firm in faith and trust in the Lord, expecting his coming with clothes tucked up in readiness, girded with truth and wearing the armor of righteousness. We must have in our hands a white staff - a clear conscience toward God - as those who are purified and reconciled in him, and certain of being his children - and experience on our feet the mailed shoes of the gospel of peace. Readied like men wanting to embark on a journey, we must prepare ourselves in Christ to endure cross and death, if necessary, in passing through this vale of tears to the true fatherland.

When the people of Israel wanted to eat the lamb, they were not allowed to take leavened bread with it, but only unleavened bread. This means we must rid ourselves of all leaven - all sin and wickedness - and take a sweet bread, that is, become new creatures in Christ, well pleasing to him, as Paul teaches: "Since we also have a pascal lamb, Christ Jesus, let us keep Easter, not with the old leaven of wickedness, but with the sweet dough of sincerity and truth." Later when it was kept and children asked their parents, "What is this; what does this mean?" their parents answered, "It is the

