

A Brotherly Agreement

Brüderliche Vereinigung etlicher Kinder Gottes / sieben Artikel betreffend

Adopted at a Meeting in Schleithem, in Switzerland, 24 February 1527

May joy, peace, mercy from our Father, through the atonement of the blood of Christ Jesus, together with the gift of the Spirit—who is sent by the Father to all believers to give strength and consolation in all tribulation until the end—be with all who love God and all children of light, who are scattered wherever they might have been placed by God our Father, wherever they might be gathered in unity of spirit in one God and Father of us all. Grace and peace of heart be with you all. Amen.

Beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord, first and foremost we are always concerned for your consolation and the steadfast purpose of heart (knowing that you have passed through times of confusion), so that you might not become separated from us but turn to the truly implanted members of Christ, who have been armed through patience and the knowledge of self, to be united with us again in the power of a godly Christian spirit and zeal for God.

We see with what great cunning the devil has tried to distract us so he might destroy and cast down the work God began in us through his mercy and grace. But the true Shepherd of our souls, Christ, who has begun this in us, will direct and teach the same unto the end, to His glory and our salvation, Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters, we who have been assembled in the Lord at Schleithem on the Randen make known, in points and articles, unto all that love God, that we have been united to stand fast in the Lord as obedient children of God, sons and daughters, who have been and shall be separated from the world in all that we do (the praise and glory be to God alone), completely at peace. In these things we have come to the unity of the Father and of our Lord Christ in his Holy Spirit. For the Lord is a Lord of peace and not of quarrelling, as Paul indicates.

So that you may understand why we came to this agreement we must tell you the following: Some false brothers did much damage among us, leading a number of us away from the faith by teaching that in Christ one may do whatever one feels like. But such have fallen short of the truth and (to their own condemnation) have been given over to impurity and the lust of the flesh. They thought that once in the faith they could do and permit everything and that nothing can harm nor condemn them, since they are "believers."

Note well, you members of God in Christ Jesus, that faith in the heavenly Father through Jesus Christ is not like this. It produces and brings forth no such things as these false brothers and sisters practice and teach. Guard yourselves and be warned of such people, for they do not serve our Father, but their father, the devil.

But for you it is not so—you who have crucified your flesh with all its lusts and desires. You know who we mean. Separate yourselves from them, for they are

perverted. Pray to the Lord that they may come to repentance, and for us that we may persevere along the path we have entered upon, unto the glory of God and of Christ His Son. Amen.

The Seven Articles

The articles we have dealt with, and in which we have been united, are these: baptism, the ban, the breaking of bread, separation from abomination, shepherds in the congregation, the sword, and the oath.

I. Notice concerning baptism.

Baptism shall be given to all those who have been taught repentance and the amendment of life and who believe truly that their sins are taken away through Christ, and to all those who desire to walk in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and be buried with Him in death, so that they might rise with Him; to all those who with such an understanding themselves desire and request it from us. With this we exclude all infant baptism, the greatest and first abomination of the pope. For this you have the reasons and the testimony of the writings and the practice of the apostles. We wish simply yet resolutely and with assurance to hold to the same.

II. We have been united as follows concerning the ban.

The ban shall be employed with all those who have given themselves over to the Lord, to walk after Him in His commandments; those who have been baptized into the one body of Christ, and let themselves be called brothers or sisters, and still somehow slip and fall into error and sin, being inadvertently overtaken. The same shall be warned twice privately and the third time be publicly admonished before the entire congregation according to the command of Christ (Matthew 18). But this shall be done according to the ordering of the Spirit of God before the breaking of bread, so that we may all in one spirit and in one love break and eat from one bread and drink from one cup.

III. Concerning the breaking of bread.

We have become one and agree that all those who desire to break the one bread in remembrance of the broken body of Christ and all those who wish to drink of one drink in remembrance of the shed blood of Christ, must beforehand be united in the one body of Christ, that is the congregation of God, whose head is Christ, and that by baptism. For as Paul indicates, we cannot be partakers at the same time of the table of the Lord and the table of devils. Nor can we at the same time partake and drink of the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils. That is: all those who have fellowship with the dead works of darkness have no part in the light. Thus all those who follow the devil and the world, have no part with those who have been called out of the world unto God. All those who lie in evil have no part in the good.

So it shall and must be, that whoever does not share the calling of the one God to one faith, to one baptism, to one spirit, to one body together with all the children of God,

may not be made one loaf together with them, as must be true if one wishes truly to break bread according to the command of Christ.

IV. We have come to unity concerning separation.

We shall separate ourselves from the evil and the wickedness that the devil has planted in the world, and have no fellowship with those that take part in it, not running with them in the confusion of their abominations. All those who have not entered into the obedience of faith, not uniting themselves with God so that they can do His will, are a great abomination before God. Nothing but abominable things, therefore, can grow or spring forth from their lives. Everything in the world and all creation is either good or evil, of faith or of unbelief, darkness or light, the world or those that come out of the world, God's temple or idols. Everything belongs either to Christ or to Belial, and one cannot be a part of the other.

To us, then, the commandment of the Lord is obvious. He orders us to separate ourselves from the evil one, so he can be our God and we his sons and daughters.

Further, He admonishes us to go out from Babylon and from the earthly Egypt, so we may not be partakers in the torment and suffering that the Lord will bring upon them.

From all this we should learn that everything that does not belong to God in Christ is an abomination we should avoid. By this are meant all popish and state church rituals and idolatry, worldly gatherings, going into worldly church buildings and taverns, signing pledges and becoming members of public organizations, things the world regards highly yet which are against the command of God, patterned after the wickedness that is in the world. From all this we shall separate ourselves and have no part with such, for these things are nothing but abominations, which cause us to be hated before our Christ Jesus, who has freed us from serving the flesh and fitted us for the service of God and the Spirit whom He has given us.

With this we also rid ourselves of all diabolical weapons of violence such as swords, armour, and the like, and the use of them to protect ourselves and our friends, or resist our enemies. We reject violence because Christ said "you shall not resist evil."

V. We have reached unity concerning shepherds in the church of God.

The shepherd in the church shall be a person according to the rule of Paul, fully and completely, who has a good report of those who are outside the faith. The office of such a person shall be to read the Scriptures, to exhort and teach, to warn, admonish, or ban in the congregation, and to lead an exemplary life among the sisters and brothers in prayer, and in the breaking of bread, taking care of the body of Christ in all things so it may be built up and developed, so that the name of God might be praised and honoured through us, and the mouth of the mocker be stopped.

The Shepherd shall be supported materially, in whatever he needs, by the congregation that chose him, so that he who serves the gospel can also live from it, as the Lord has ordered. But should a shepherd do something worthy of reprimand, no action shall be

taken against him without the voice of two or three witnesses. If they sin they shall be publicly reprimanded, so that others might fear.

If the shepherd should be driven away or led to the Lord by the cross, at the same hour another shall be ordained to his place, so that the little flock of God may not be destroyed, but be preserved by warning and be comforted.

VI. We have reached unity concerning the sword.

The sword is an ordering of God outside the perfection of Christ. It punishes and kills the wicked and guards and protects the good. In the law the sword is established over the wicked for punishment and for death, and the secular rulers are established to wield the same.

But within the perfection of Christ only the ban is used for the admonition and exclusion of the one who has sinned, without the death of the flesh—simply the warning and the command to sin no more.

Many who do not understand Christ's will for us ask whether a Christian may or should use the sword against the wicked for the protection and defence of the good, or for the sake of love.

The answer is unanimously revealed: Christ commands us to learn from Him, for He is meek and lowly of heart so we may find rest for our souls. Christ did not say the woman who was taken in adultery should be stoned according to the law of His Father (and yet He says, "What the Father commanded me, that I do") but with mercy and forgiveness and the warning to sin no more, he said: "Go, sin no more." We should do exactly that, with the rule of the ban.

People also ask whether a Christian should pass sentence in disputes and strife about worldly matters, like the unbelievers. This is the answer: Christ did not wish to decide or pass judgment between two brothers concerning their inheritance. He refused to do it and we should also refuse.

A third question people ask is whether Christians should become magistrates or take civil office if they are elected to one. This is the answer: When they tried to make Christ a king he fled, even though he had access to all power and authority in heaven and on earth. We should do as he did and follow him, not walking in darkness. For Christ says: "Whoever would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." Christ forbids the violence of the sword when He says: "The princes of this world lord it over them, etc., but among you it shall not be so." Further Paul says, "Whom God has foreknown, the same he has also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son." Peter also says: "Christ has suffered (not ruled) and has left us an example, that you should follow after in his steps."

Finally, one can see in the following points that it does not befit a Christian to be a magistrate: the rule of the government is according to the flesh, that of the Christians according to the Spirit. Their houses and dwelling remain in this world, that of the Christians is in heaven. Their citizenship is in this world, that of the Christians is in heaven. The weapons of their battle and warfare are carnal and only against the flesh,

but the weapons of Christians are spiritual, against the fortifications of the devil. The worldly are armed with steel and iron, but Christians are armed with the armour of God, with truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and with the Word of God.

As Christ our Head is minded, so we (the members of his body) must also be minded, so that there is no division in the body, through which it would be destroyed. Since Christ is as was written about him, his members must be the same way, so his body may remain whole and unified for its own advancement and upbuilding. For any kingdom divided against itself will be destroyed.

VII. We have reached unity concerning the oath.

The oath is a confirmation among those who are quarrelling or making promises. In the law it is commanded that it should be done only in the name of God, truthfully and not falsely. Christ, who teaches the perfection of the law, forbids his followers to swear, whether true or false, whether by heaven nor by earth, whether by Jerusalem or by their own heads, because we cannot so much as make one hair white or black. We see in this that all swearing is forbidden. We cannot perform what is promised in the swearing, for we are not able to change the smallest part of ourselves.

Now there are some who do not believe the simple commandment of God and who say, "But God swore by himself to Abraham, because he was God (as he promised him that he would do good to him and would be his God if he kept his commandments). Why then should I not swear if I promise something to someone?"

Hear what the Scripture says: "God, because he wished to prove to the heirs of his promise that his will does not change, inserted an oath so that by two immutable things we might have a stronger consolation (for it is impossible that God should lie)." Notice the meaning of the passage: God has the power to do what he forbids you, for everything is possible to him. God swore an oath to Abraham, Scripture says, in order to prove that his counsel is unchangeable. That means, no one can withstand and twist his will—he can do whatever he promises but we cannot. So, as Christ said, we should not swear.

Others say God cannot forbid swearing in the New Testament if he commanded it in the Old, but that it is forbidden only to swear by heaven, earth, Jerusalem, and our head.

Hear what the Scriptures say about this: "He who swears by heaven, swears by God's throne and by Him who sits thereon. If swearing by heaven is forbidden, which is only God's throne, how much more is it forbidden to swear by God Himself! You blind fools, what is greater, the throne or the one that sits on it?"

Others say if it is wrong to use God for truth, then the apostles Peter and Paul also swore. But Peter and Paul only testified to what God had promised Abraham, something we have long received. When one testifies, one speaks concerning the present, whether it be good or evil, like Simeon spoke of Christ to Mary and testified: "Behold: this one is ordained for the falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign which will be spoken against."

Christ taught us to do the same when he said, “Your speech shall be yes, yes and no, no, for what is more than that comes of evil.” He says, your speech or your word shall be yes and no, so that no one might understand that he had permitted swearing. Christ is simply yes or no, and all that seek him with an honest heart will understand what he says to us. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord, these are the articles some brothers had confused and misunderstood, leading many with weak consciences into error and bringing reproach on the name of God. For this reason we felt it necessary to come to an agreement on these issues, in the Lord—something that has now come to pass. To God be praise and glory!

Now that you have clearly understood the will of God as revealed through us at this time, you must live it out. You must persevere in it and not turn aside, for you know what happens to the servant that knows what he should do but refuses to do it.

Everything you have done unknowingly and now confess to have done in error shall be forgiven, through the prayers offered among us in our meeting for the gracious forgiveness of God through the blood of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Watch out for all that do not walk in the simplicity of God’s truth as described in this letter, so that all of us might be governed by the same rule, and so we might prevent false brothers and sisters from coming in among us.

Put away from you what is evil and the Lord will be your God, and you will be His sons and daughters.

Dear brothers, keep in mind what Paul admonished Titus. He says: “The saving grace of God has appeared to all, and disciplines us, so we should deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, to live righteous and godly lives in this world while wait on the appearing of the glory of the great God and of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, to redeem us from all unrighteousness and to purify unto himself a people of his own, that would be zealous of good works.” Think on this, and exercise yourselves therein, and the Lord of peace will be with you.

May the name of God be forever blessed and greatly praised, Amen. May the Lord give you His peace, Amen.

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