

THE SENDING OF PREACHERS OR TEACHERS

That is, who are the true teachers who are sent by God and rightly chosen and called by the Christian congregation: Whereby these are recognised and what fruits they bear. Similarly, how one may know the false teachers and how one may shun them and not hear them. A small instruction out of Holy Scripture with an explanation of some contradictions and blasphemies introduced by the disgruntled blasphemers, and spoken in a mocking manner, against the true ministers of the gospel.

By D. P.

“He whom God has sent speaks God’s words,” John 3:34.

I, Dirk Philips, out of grace a fellow member of the faith and of the Christian congregations, wish all God-fearing lovers of the truth genuine spiritual wisdom and a pure understanding of the divine Word from our heavenly Father, and of Christ Jesus his only begotten Son, our Lord and Saviour, through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Text

Beloved in the Lord, all you who fear God and love the truth; since some at this time create much controversy and discord concerning the sending [of ministers], and in addition all ministers, be they whoever they are, boast of the gospel and allow themselves to think that they are sent of God, and that also without any doubt, now is the time of which Christ and the apostles have prophesied, namely that many false prophets and false Christians should come and lead many astray, Matt. 24:11; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:1; 2 Pet. 2:1; Jude 4; therefore I was compelled, out of brotherly love, to prepare a brief instruction about the sending of true ministers in order that you may know how to distinguish true prophets, teachers, and Christians from false ones. For this is the nature, character, and skill of Satan, that he transforms himself into an angel of light, 2 Cor. 11:14. Therewith he hides his guile and hypocrisy, disguises and conceals his ministers, and sets them before the world in a beautiful appearance of piety.

For what has a more beautiful appearance than Satan in all hypocritical and unspiritual work as saints who seek righteousness through their own works and efforts, and present themselves so splendidly with words and appearance, with many ceremonies and churchly pomp? Who is more presumptuous and audacious with words of high praise than the false, deceptive, and lying prophets; those who run but are not sent from the Lord, those who prophesy but not through the Spirit of the Lord? Who pride themselves more of the gospel and Christendom, of true theology and knowledge of Holy Scripture than [do] the highly praised wise [ones] of the world, the perverse scribes who allow themselves to think, since they have studied in advanced schools (and, therefore, according to the common proverb, the more learned the more perverted they have become), so they alone are teachers and masters of Scripture and yet themselves have neither received nor taught the divine words of the first school primer? For they have not yet been in the school of Christ and they have not had the true master teacher, namely, the Holy Spirit, yes, have neither seen nor known [him]. But they speak about the Scripture which they do not understand, and even when they already do understand something, they yet do not wish to act in accord with it, John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7.

These are the genuine false Christians and false prophets of whom the Lord warns us and of their fine image, saying, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits,” Matt. 7:15[-16]. At another [place] Christ says, “Not every one who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” [Matt. 7:21]. And after this follows: “On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, all you who do evil,’”[Matt. 7:22-23].

Out of these words of Christ it is clear that those are the false Christians and false prophets who boast much about Christ, prattle beautifully about the gospel, and portray themselves in a splendid manner and, in addition, live according to the flesh and have the nature of a wolf in order to destroy the sheep of Christ in every way they can.

Christ has truly warned us about these, although there are few who heed this warning. The people are generally so minded as Ahab the king of Israel was minded, namely, they love lies and hate the truth and cannot endure it that a Micaiah should come and tell them the truth, 1 Kings 22:[8]. Therefore, they cannot understand the truth. “For the foolish, (says Jesus Ben Sirach), shall not find wisdom, and the godless shall not get to see her. She is far from the proud and hypocrites shall not know her,” Ecclus. 15:[7-8]. Therefore Paul also says, “If our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only in those who are being lost, in whom the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, so that the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the exact image of God, does not shine on them,” Cor. 4:3 [-4].

It is on account of this that false prophets have always had such great respect and attention, but the good prophets, regarded as those who lead astray, are shamed and persecuted. And that is the way it still goes. For Satan can so deceive the world that it accepts appearance for reality, darkness for light, and lies for the truth; yes, completely rejects Christ because his being is an offence to the world as the Lord says through Isaiah: “Behold, my servant shall deal wisely. [He] shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high. And many shall be agitated on his account because his appearance is so marred, beyond human resemblance, and his form beyond that of human beings,” Isa. [52:13-14]. And Simon spoke to Mary concerning Christ: “He is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that shall be spoken against,” Luke 2:34. And Peter said that Christ Jesus is the cornerstone of God laid in Zion, which is precious to the believers, but to the unbelievers he is the stone which the workmen have rejected and has become the head of the corner, “a stone that will make people stumble, a rock of irritation for they stumble because they do not believe the Word on which they were founded,” 1 Pet. 2: [8].

Therefore spiritual judgement, keen insight, and clear eyes are necessary [for] all believers, particularly in these our times, whereby they may see Christ rightly, rightly recognise his ministers and distinguish them from the ministers of Satan. These reasons move me, through the Lord’s grace, to show all God-fearing persons out of the biblical Scriptures, which teachers are sent of God and whereby and through what [they are recognised]. [I do this] in order that all pious Christians may be strengthened a little in their faith, comforted and refreshed in their hearts, and that all blasphemous mouths who speak blasphemously against the true messengers of God, against the faithful ministers of Christ in order to hide their [own] hypocritical nature, may be stopped. The eternal and omniscient God grant us grace thereto. Amen, 1 Tim. 1: 17.

In the first place there are two kinds of calling or sending (whereby God calls anyone to an office) included in Scripture. The first is from God alone. Thus, Moses was called by God alone, Exod. 3:10; Num. 12:6 [-8]. Thus also Aaron was chosen by God alone, Heb. 5:[4] Thus also the prophets were called by God alone and spoke, being driven by the Holy Spirit, 2 Pet. 1:21. Thus also the apostles were called by Christ Jesus alone, chosen, and sent out to preach the gospel to all creatures [Mark 16:15; Rom. 8:19-22; Gen. 9:8-17].

These were sent out by God without mediation from any persons in order to prophesy and to teach, and [were] driven through his Spirit. But because of the [fact] that Satan also sends out his ministers and at times drives [them] powerfully, yet under the appearance that they are sent by God and driven by his Spirit, 2 Cor. 11: [13-14], therefore the Lord has left us a sure test whereby one may recognise both good and false prophets and [it] is this:

In the first place, if the prophet prophesies something and it does not take place, then he is false. For thus says the Lord: “Whenever a prophet presumes to speak in my name [that] which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die. But you say in your heart, ‘How can I know the word which the Lord has not spoken?’ When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass, that is a word which the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously, therefore you need not fear him,” Deut. 18:[20-2].

These are the clear words of the Lord wherewith all prophesies must be measured and judged. Therefore the prophet Jeremiah spoke thus to Hananiah (who prophesied falsely about the release of Judah from Babylon): “The prophets who preceded you and me from ancient times, who prophesied in many lands and kingdoms against war, famine, and pestilence or prophesied peace, will be tested whether God truly sent them whenever that comes to pass which the prophet said,” Jer. 28:8[-9].

In the second place, even though a prophet gives a sign or miracle, and it takes place as the prophet said, and the prophet in addition teaches that one should serve other gods, then the prophet is false. For thus says the Lord, If a prophet arises among you, or a dreamer, and gives you a sign or a miracle, and the sign or miracle which he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, ‘Let us go after other gods,’ which you have not known, ‘and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or to that dreamer; for the Lord your God is testing you, to know whether you love him with all your heart and all your soul,” Deut. 13:1[-3].

In these words it is to be observed that although a prophet gives a sign or a miracle and it comes as the prophet said, this is not enough to establish his sending that it is from God, if his teaching is not unblamable, fruitful, and wholesome. To this Paul also says, ‘Should it be that an angel from heaven proclaim another gospel than we have received, let him be accursed,’ Gal. 1:8[-9].

The other calling is from God and from his congregations. Thus Paul and Barnabas were first called by the Lord and thereafter by the congregations through the co-witness of the Holy Spirit, and were confirmed in the divine call as the work of the apostles indicates, namely, that the Holy Spirit said to the congregations, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Said for the work to which I have called them. Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and let them go,” Acts 13:2[-3]. Thus Paul and Barnabas also ordained bishops or elders in all congregations (through united voice) with fasting and prayers, Acts 14:23. Again, Paul writes to Timothy, “Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you through prophecy when the elders laid their hands upon you,” 1 Tim. 4:14. Similarly he commands Titus [to do] the same in the cities of

Crete, to appoint elders over all as he [Paul] had ordained him, Titus 1:5. Thus also the congregation at Jerusalem set seven deacons before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them, Acts 6:6.

From these [examples] it is clear that the apostles and elders with the congregations, through the power of Jesus Christ and the testimony of the Holy Spirit, called, chose, and ordained teachers and ministers. Therefore no one may assume such an office by himself, except he is called of God (like the prophets and apostles) or by the congregations of God with the laying on of hands (as Timothy and Titus and others in addition, were ordained by the apostles and elders, with the voluntary consent of the congregations) and thus others also were called and chosen. For thus says the apostle, "And how shall they preach unless they are sent," Rom. 10:15. And another passage, "No one takes this honour upon himself, except he is called by God, just as Aaron was," Heb. 5:[4]. Therefore, also the Lord so severely punished Dathan, Korah, and Abiram, and their followers because they wished to take up the priesthood without God's election, Num. 16. [See especially 16:28-35.] Thus the Lord rejects all prophets who run of themselves and are not sent by him, who speak in his name but are nevertheless not driven by his Spirit, Jer. 23:21.

Therefore, everyone may well see to it that he does not run by himself before he is called by the Lord or by his congregation according to these previously described methods. But now no one will be sent by the Lord nor correctly chosen by the congregation, except through the Holy Spirit who must touch his heart, make him fiery with love, in order thus to voluntarily feed, lead, and send out the congregation of God, John 21:15; 1 Pet. 5:2, as it is written of Paul and Barnabas, "they went out sent by the Holy Spirit," Acts 13:4, and Paul said to the elders of the churches, "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you guardians, to feed the congregation of the Lord which he obtained with his blood," Acts 20:28.

But because the true teachers must be driven, sent out, and set over the congregation of God by the Holy Spirit, it is clear how these must be prepared. For it is certain and undeniable that the Holy Spirit sends out no drunkards, nor adulterers, nor misers, nor servants of idols, nor hypocrites, who dissemble for the sake of the belly, and make merchandise with God's Word. For it is written: "The holy spirit who teaches rightly flees deceit, and avoids the reckless," Wisd. of Sol. 1:5. Therefore, Christ also says that the world cannot receive the Holy Spirit for she does not see nor know him, John 14:17. But those who do not have the Spirit of Christ do not belong to him, Rom. 8:9 But how can those who do not belong to Christ have an office in his congregations and serve correctly, 1 Cor. 12:8? The apostle says that no one may call "Christ Jesus Lord except by the Holy Spirit," [1 Cor. 12:3], much less then can he preach Christ Jesus correctly except through the Holy Spirit.

Out of this it follows forcefully that the ministers of Christ, the teachers and bishops in his congregations, must have the Holy Spirit through whom they first and before all things must be well instructed in God's Word. The common people will err and walk in darkness if the teachers themselves are unwise. The reason? Christ calls teachers a light of the world and salt of the earth, Matt. 5:[13-]14. How shall the world see correctly whenever those to whom it belongs to be a light of the world are themselves darkness? Again, how shall the world correctly understand and know the Holy Scriptures and the Power of God, when those who should be the salt of the earth have lost the power of the divine Word and themselves do not know what it behooves a good Christian to know? Again, how should the world not err when those who properly and with truth should be the city (built upon a high mountain) and show all erring ones the right way are themselves those who lead astray? Therefore, I say again, that the teachers themselves must before all things be well instructed and taught in God's Word. As it is written: "For the lips of a

priest should guard knowledge, that one may seek the law from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts,” Mal. 2:7 And Paul says that “a bishop must hold firm to the sure Word, so that he may be able to give instruction in saving doctrine and to admonish those who contradict it,” Titus 1:9.

In addition, the teachers of God’s Word must teach correctly and without falsification, as the evangelist says, “He whom God has sent utters the words of God,” John 3:34. And Paul says, “I will not dare to speak of anything except what Christ has worked through me,” Rom. 15:18. And again, “we are not like some who falsify God’s Word but we speak in Christ out of sincerity and out of God, and before God, 2 Cor. 2:[17]; 4:2. Likewise, “we are messengers in Christ’s place, God admonishes through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God,” 2 Cor. 5:20. Again “our admonition does not spring from error or uncleanness, nor is it made with guile; but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, to preach it, so we speak, not as though we would please people, but to please God who tests our hearts,” 1 Thess. 2:3[-4]. The apostle Peter says, “If there is anyone who speaks, he shall speak as God’s Word,” 1 Pet. 4:11. Therefore, the Lord also said through Jeremiah, “Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let him to whom my Word is revealed proclaim it faithfully. For what does chaff have in common with wheat? says the Lord. Is not my Word like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces,” Jer. 23:28[-29]?

Out of these and similar words of Holy Scripture, the true teachers may certainly be easily recognised, particularly as far as true doctrine is concerned, namely, if they teach God’s Word correctly, if they seek therewith the glory of God and the salvation of persons, if they are spiritually minded, if they have renounced all earthly and temporal things, if they know no one according to the flesh, 2 Cor. 5:16, if they love God above all and do his work without deception and hypocrisy. For such leaders the Lord desires to have as Moses also said, “Who says to his father and mother, ‘I do not see you’; and to his brother, ‘I do not know him,’ and to his neighbour, ‘I do not recognise him,’ he has kept your Word and preserved your covenant. He shall teach Jacob your ordinances, and your law to Israel,” Deut. 33:9[-10].

Therefore Christ also chose and sent out such apostles to preach who had first forsaken all things, Matt. 10:[5], and had followed after him, and remained with him in his temptations, Matt. 4:19; 19:27; Luke 5:11; 18:28; 22:28. These the Father gave him out of the world and to these he first revealed the Father’s name, as he himself said, I have revealed your name to the people whom you have given me out of the world; they were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your Word,” John 17:6. These Christ also chose himself and separated from the world, just as he said, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should remain,” John 15:16. These Christ also commended to his Father and prayed for them saying, I am praying for them; I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours; all mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them.... Holy Father, keep them in your name which you have given me, that they may be one even as we are one,” John 17:9[-11]. I have given them your Word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world,” [John 17:14]. These [disciples] taught by God, chosen and separated from the world, Christ sent out and said to them, “Even as the Father has sent me, so I send you,” John 20:21. But how Christ was sent from the Father, and how he forsook all things and gave up all his glory and became a faithful messenger of his Father [who] did not do his own will nor speak his own Word nor seek his own honour, but spoke and did as the Father commanded him, the Scriptures, both the Old and New Testament, testify so abundantly that we do not think it necessary to repeat such here,

Isa. 53:1[ff.]; Jer. 23:5[-6]; Ezek. 34:15[-16]; John 1:1; 3:[13]; 5:19; 6:32; 7:16; 8:28; 10:14[-15]; 12:49.

Just as Christ now sent from the Father was entirely faithful in his office, so also all his servants must be faithful according to the example of their Lord and Master, Heb. 3:5 [-6], disregard all earthly things, deny the world, pursue heavenly things, and not seek their own glory but the glory of Christ who sent them. Of such an interpretation Christ said, "He who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but he who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no unrighteousness," John 7:18. Therefore, those are without doubt sent of God who teach God's Word correctly and with their whole heart seek the praise and glory of God, as Paul did. For we," he says, "never used either words of flattery, as you know, or a cloak for greed, as God is witness; nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nurse taking care of her children. Thus our heart was filled with joy for you to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because we had come to love you," 1 Thess. 2:5[-8].

In these words one may clearly see how the apostle Paul was minded, and what he actually sought, namely, the glory of God and the salvation of souls. But thus the hypocrites and false prophets do not do, but they seek their own honour, they incline toward money and goods, they preach for a wage, they serve their belly and are enemies of the cross of Christ, Rom. 16:[18]; Phil. 3:18. Therefore, they also can [neither] do nor teach anything good as it is written, a godless [person] cannot teach correctly for it does not come from God. For to the correct teaching belongs wisdom, then God grants his grace thereto, Eccles. 15:14[?].

Since then a godless person cannot teach correctly, and he who is actually godless is he who transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ as John says, 2 John 1:9, it follows therefrom without contradiction, that no one can teach God's Word correctly unless he himself remains in Christ and his doctrine. But no one can understand Christ's doctrine, much less abide in it, except through the Holy Spirit. And no one has the Holy Spirit except one who is no longer carnally but spiritually minded, as Paul says, "But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God really dwells in you. Any one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although your bodies are dead because of sin, your spirits are alive because of righteousness," Rom. 8:9[-10]. Therefore, he who has not died to sin and does not live in righteousness does not have the Spirit of God. But he who does not have the Spirit of the Lord does not understand the Word of the Lord and does not experience what is spiritual. How should he then be able to teach God's Word correctly or correctly distribute the gifts of the Spirit, 1 Cor. 2:14? Therefore everyone may well see to it that he does not accept the office of teacher before he himself has been taught by God and enlightened with the Holy Spirit through whom he may speak God's Word correctly.

Further, so Scripture testifies, a true teacher must bear or bring forth fruit. For wherever God's Word is implanted in the human heart and spoken in the power of the Spirit, there it must, according to its nature, be active and fruitful. To that end the true teachers are chosen and ordained of Christ that they may go forth and bear fruit and that their fruit may abide, John 15:16. But the fruit which all true teachers through God's Word and spirit must bring forth is [of] two kinds.

The first is that whenever God's Word is spoken through the Holy Spirit it bears fruit and is not barren just as the evangelical parable of the sower and his seed testifies, in which parable Christ gave us to understand that his Word is not without fruit, Matt. 13:3[-9]; Luke 8:[5-7]; [Mark 4:3-

9]. For while most of the seed fell upon bad earth and brought [forth] no fruit (which then is not the fault of the good seed but of the bad earth), nevertheless another part fell upon good earth and brought forth much fruit. Therewith the Lord teaches us two things. The first, that there are at all times few Christians upon the earth although many have the name Christian and boast themselves of the gospel as then he also said to Matthew in the seventh chapter, "The gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to condemnation, and many walk on it. But the gate that leads to eternal life is small and the way is narrow, and there are few who find it," Matt. 7:13[-14].

The second [is that] Christ gives us to understand, that even though the largest part remains evil, his Word is nevertheless not without fruit. There is yet perchance a good acre into which the seed of the divine Word is cast, sprouts, and brings [forth] fruit. This [is] what God has also said through Isaiah. "Just as the rain and snow fall from heaven, and do not return but water the earth, making it fruitful and [bring forth] growth, giving seed to the sower and bread to eat, so shall the Word that goes out of my mouth not return to me empty, but accomplish that which pleases me, and shall prosper in that for which I send it," Isa. 55: 10[-11].

But because the Word of God is now the seed that is planted by God in the hearts of human beings and desires and must have good soil, therefore it is necessary that the field of the heart be properly cultivated through the grace of the Lord, [that] all weeds be plucked up or uprooted, so then the field will be made receptive of the divine seed and bring forth fruit, as James says, "Put away all uncleanness and all wickedness and receive with meekness the Word which has been planted in you, which is able to save your souls," James 1:21.

To that end, namely, in order to cultivate and prepare the field of the heart, the law of God serves [well]. Therefore, true preachers must also first and before all things proclaim and preach repentance to the people (even as Christ and the apostles did) and teach them out of the law God's wrath and severe judgement upon sin, Matt. 3:8; Acts 24:25; but out of the gospel rightly to know God the Father in his eternal love and fathomless mercy, Christ Jesus in his grace and merits, through the co-operation of the Holy Spirit in order that the hearts, smitten and broken through the law, may again be comforted and strengthened through the gospel. For this is the nature, character, and power of the divine Word, that where it is spoken orderly and through the motivating of the Spirit flinty hearts are smitten, Jer. [23:29], the cold made fervent, and the sorrowful are comforted thereby.

This is also the true teacher's office and work, according to the command of Christ, first to preach the law, thereafter the gospel. But false teachers preach to the people, also to the unrepentant, nothing but grace, proclaiming peace to them, and as Ezekiel says, "They lay cushions under the arms of the people and pillows under their heads and shoulders," Ezek. With this they strengthen the hands of evil persons in order that no one may be converted from their wickedness and unrighteousness as can be seen and found daily. But because they do not convert anyone, therefore they are also not sent from God and also do not have God's Word. For thus says the Lord, I did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I have not spoken with them, yet they prophesied. But if they had remained in my council, and had heard my words, then they would have turned my people from their evil ways, and from the evil of their doings, Jer. 23:21

These words testify to us clearly that those who have God's Word correctly teach and speak it; these are they who convert the people from their reckless living and evil ways. Again, those who do not do this also do not have God's Word. They may well have the letter of Scripture, but the living, powerful, and fervent Word of God that pierces and cuts through hearts and souls as a two-edged sword, Heb. 4:12, that they do not have. They may speak many words, but because the

Lord has not cleansed their lips with fire, (as the lips of the prophet Isaiah), Isa. 6:7, and has not given his Word into their mouths, (just as into the mouth of Jeremiah) that they [may] pluck up and break down, destroy, build up, and plant, Jer. 1:9; therefore they are not sent from the Lord and they also accomplish nothing, as is seen and felt much in the present day [from those] who want to be evangelical preachers but have not yet discontinued the human idolatrous ceremonies and institutions and again accepted true worship and ordinances. But so much some may well do, that they with Jehu hate the harlotry and sorcery of Jezebel and have a zeal against the priests and prophets of Baal. Nevertheless, they themselves walk in the sins of Jeroboam and allow the golden calves (which were erected in the place of divine worship by the godless king) to stand and remain a judgement upon themselves but a stumbling block and destruction to others, 2 Kings 9:22; 10:[28-29]. Thus one blind person leads another until they both finally fall into the canal, Matt. 15:14.

The second fruit of a true teacher is that he himself leads an unblamable life which is conformed to the gospel. "For the kingdom of God does not consist in words but in power," 1 Cor. 4:20. The wisdom which the teacher [needs] to open his mouth in the congregation, Eccles. 15:10, does not enter an evil soul, nor a body enslaved to sin, Wisd. of Sol. 1:4. Therefore James also says, "Whoever is wise and understanding among you, let him show [this] with his good life and works in the meekness of wisdom," James 3:13. Thus Paul also did as he himself said, I pommel my body and subdue it, in order that while I preach to others, I myself will not be rejected," 1 Cor. 9:27. And nothing is accomplished and leads to no end that anyone praise and chatter at length about himself, but let him who wishes to boast (says the apostle) "boast of the Lord," 1 Cor. 1: [31]; 2 Cor. [10:17]; Jer. 9:23-24. For he is not praised who praises himself but whom the Lord praises. But the Lord praises the righteous who praise and honour him as he himself said, "Those who honour me I will honour, but those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed." 1 Sam. 2:30.

But what the true honour of God is, Christ testified with these words: "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and that you become my disciples." John 15:8. But which are the fruits of the Spirit Paul told the Galatians, namely, love, joy, meekness, goodness, faith, moderation, Gal. 5:22[-23]. Again, who are the true disciples of Christ he himself said, namely, those who continue in his Word, these will know the truth and the truth shall make them free, John 8:32. But no one abides in Christ and his teaching except those who walk as he walked, 1 John 2:[6]. But whoever does not walk thus, does not remain in Christ, yes, that one has neither seen nor known Christ as John clearly testified in his epistle, 1 John 3:6.

Therefore, true Christians and primarily the teachers must themselves as disciples of Christ lead a Christlike life and faithfully follow Christ. But if they do not do this, then Christ has not sent them. For he said that we would recognise false prophets by their fruits even though they come in sheep's clothing, Matt. 7:15[-16]. He taught us this through parables saying, "Can one gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? So, every good tree bears good fruit but the bad tree bears evil fruit. A good tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore, you will know them by their fruits" [Matt. 7:16-20].

In these words Christ compares every good Christian, but in particular an honest teacher (for he speaks primarily of the teachers) with a good tree and a false teacher with a bad tree. Just as now a good tree brings good fruit and therewith shows its good nature and serves humanity in its necessity and feeds the body, so also a good teacher bears good fruit; therewith he shows his Christian nature and that he has been sent of God. But the others, that is, the goodhearted listeners and lovers of the truth, he thus serves to their salvation, just as Paul said to Timothy,

“Take heed to yourself and to your teaching; remain in it, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers,” 1 Tim. 4:16.

Again, just as a bad tree can bring no good fruit, and just as one can pick no grapes from thorns and no figs from thistles, so also a false prophet cannot teach nor do right. The false prophet can indeed boast himself of the gospel, but that he should accurately teach or speak the teaching of the gospel and bear the fruits of the Spirit, that he does not do; his leaves are and remain leaves, that is, a useless noise beautiful in appearance all that he teaches, and hypocrisy all that he does.

If then now through the particular grace of God, the gospel (which has sharp eyes and looks not upon the sheep’s clothing but upon the inward nature, and does not inquire about the leaves but about the fruits of the tree) has come to the [light] of day and been revealed to us, and has given to us [the ability] to know the tree by its fruits out of God’s Word; therefore [let] everyone pay attention to that and guard himself before the false prophets that he be not deceived by them.

Likewise, how a teacher should be qualified Paul describes very beautifully for us to both Timothy and Titus. There one has a true description, yes, an express example of an evangelical teacher. And Peter says, “So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the suffering that is in Christ, and also as a partaker in the glory that is to be revealed. Feed the flock of Christ that is in your charge, care for them, not by constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain but with a compassionate spirit, not as those who domineer over the inheritance but being examples to the flock. So shall you (when the chief Shepherd reveals himself) receive the imperishable crown of glory,” 1 Pet. 5:1[-4].

Here Peter gives all elders, leaders, and teachers a good lesson, that is, how they should be qualified, and says among other words, that they shall feed the flock of God out of a willing mind and not for the sake of shameful gain. For he knew well that the Lord Christ had asked him three times, saying, “Peter, do you love me? Then feed my sheep,” John 21:15[-18]. Thus also all true ministers of the Word of Christ must teach God’s Word unfalsified out of true love Without desiring shameful gain. For this is called feeding in the Scripture.

But how many now at this present time accept the office of teacher who do not reflect upon this teaching of Peter, but it takes place even according to the words of the prophet, namely, “its priests teach for reward, its prophets prophesy for money; in addition they want to be seen as though they rely upon the Lord and say, ‘The Lord is among us, no evil can come upon us.’ Therefore because of you Zion shall be plowed as a field; and Jerusalem shall become a heap of stones, and the mountain of the temple a wooded height,” Mic. 3:11[-12]. The same prophet also says in another place [that] the false prophets “declare war against him who puts nothing into their mouths,” Mic. 3:5.

God complains similarly through Ezekiel over the false prophets who proclaimed death to souls who should not die and affirmed life to souls who should not live; that is, they condemn the innocent and pious and justify the godless, and they do this for a handful of barley and a piece of bread, Ezek. 13:[18-]19. And this still happens daily and proceeds in full power. Yes, Balaam, the son Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness, he still has many followers and companions, Num. 22:5. And even though the Lord had opened the mouth of the ass to punish such Balaamites, they are yet so stubborn and blinded that they cannot discontinue [their] greediness, Num. [22:21-35]; 23; 24; 2 Pet. 2:15. And then above that they still wish to be regarded as though they were true servants of Christ, and take the liberty which Christ has given

to the true ministers of the gospel, (namely, that they may live off of the gospel and have seemingly necessities), as a cloak for greed, 1 Cor. 9:14.

But this is a shameful thing that one under the guise of the gospel (which after all teaches scorn of all temporal things) seeks money and goods, Matt. 10:37[-38]. This is also an abomination before God, that someone who undertakes to teach God's Word does not himself live according to it. To all such the Lord says, "What right have you to proclaim my statutes, or take my covenant in your mouth? For you hate discipline and cast my words behind you. If you see a thief you run with him, and you keep company with adulterers," Ps. 50:16[-18]. And Paul says, "You presume to be a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the unwise, a teacher of the simple, you have the form to know something, and what is right in the law. Now you teach others but do not teach yourself? You preach against stealing but you steal? You say that one must not commit adultery, but you do commit adultery? You abhor idols but you rob God of his own? You boast about the law but you dishonour God by transgressing the law? 'The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,' " Rom. 2:19[-24].

Oh, that many (who accept their teaching position and yet are so selfish, haughty, unrighteous, idolatrous, and lead such godless lives) would earnestly observe and consider well what great complaint is in all Scripture over the false prophets and shepherds with the implication that the corruption of the people has most of its origin from them. For it behooves the shepherds to feed the sheep, just as Christ commanded Peter and Peter commanded the elders, John 21:[17]; 1 Pet. 5:[2]. But how is this to take place when the shepherds trample the precious pasture of the divine Word with their feet and then give the sheep to eat the same which they have trampled with their feet, Ezek. 34:18[-19]? It behooves the shepherds also to dip the water of divine teaching out of the fountain of salvation and give the sheep to drink; but how lamentable is it when the shepherds become Philistines and stop up the spring of living water by throwing in earth. Yes, when they are wolves who do not save the flock [but] feed themselves and scatter and strangle the sheep, Acts 20:29[-30]?

Again, whenever they are such, as the prophet Hosea says, "The bands of priests are just like robbers who murder on the streets and lie in wait for the people on the way to Shechem. For they complete all villainy," Hos. 6:[9]. And as Isaiah says, "Your watchmen are all blind and have no knowledge; they are all mute dogs who cannot punish, they are lazy, sleepy, lying down, and snoring, loving to slumber. They are unashamed dogs who have a mighty appetite, they never have enough. Similarly the shepherds also have no understanding; they each look to their own way, each to his own gain in his own place. 'Come,' they say, 'let us get wine, let us drink ourselves full and do tomorrow just like today, yes, and much more.'" Isa. 56:10[-12].

Oh, God, why have the false prophets, priests, and shepherds always been so many in the world and the pious ones so few? Against so many hundred prophets and priests of Baal, it is scarcely possible to find one Elijah, 1 Kings 18:22. Among so many lying prophets of Ahab, it is scarcely possible to get one Micaiah, 1 Kings 22:5[-23]. Thus also sometimes the sins of the people deserve that God allows an hypocrite and idolator to rule in the place of a shepherd. For since the people are so minded that they hold good teaching in contempt, as Paul says, and have such weak ears that they desire more to hear what is pleasing than fruitful teaching, therefore they choose such teachers for themselves, after whom their ears itch, 2 Tim. 4:3. And it then happens just as the Lord said through the prophet, "It is horrible and dangerous in the land: the prophets teach lies and the priests rule in their office, and my people like to have it that way, but what will you do when the end comes?" Jer. 5:[30-31].

Therefore Christ also said to his disciples, “Woe to you, when all speak well of you, for thus they did to the false prophets who have been before you,” Luke 6:26. Contrary to this you are blessed “when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they did to the good prophets, etc.” [Matt. 5:11-12].

Therefore it is certain that the true teachers must be tested with the cross. And this comes because they desire, speak, and do other than the world; therefore the world hates them as is written in the book of Wisdom: “Let us lie in wait for the righteous one, because he is of no good to us, and is contrary to our works, and blames us that we sin against the law, and calls our being out to sin. He claims that he knows God and boasts of being a child of God, punishing us for what we have in our heart He is grievous for us to look at, for his life is unlike others, and his being is a very different being. He holds us to be unfit, and avoids our doings as defiled, and claims that the justified shall be rewarded at the last, and boasts that God is his father,” Wisd. of Sol. [2:12-16].

Thus Christ was treated and opposed as he himself says, “The world hates me because I testify of it that its works are evil,” [John 7:7]. This he also promised all his disciples and said, “I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be as careful as serpents and as innocent as doves,” Matt. 10: 16. Continuing, he said, “You will be hated by all people for my name’s sake,” [Matt. 10:22], but, “if the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, and I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also. But all this they will do to you for my name’s sake, because they do not know him who sent me,” John 15:18[-21].

In summary, how all good prophets and true teachers have been persecuted from the beginning, and shall be persecuted to the end of the world, yes, as even the most high prophet and master, Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God had to suffer and thus enter into his glory, Luke 24:[26], the Scripture, both the Old and New Testaments, testifies so openly and abundantly that it is unnecessary to discuss and write more about it.

Therefore then they are not ministers of Christ who are so great and highly regarded by the world, who are seated on high and who persecute others purposely. For that is far from Jesus Christ and from his gentle divine spirit, Matt. 13:28. It is also far from all Christians who have the mind and spirit of Christ. It is not Christlike but tyrannical to persecute, to expel, to strangle the people because of faith and religion. Those who do this are certainly a remnant of the pharisaical race to whom Stephen said, “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the righteous one, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it,” Acts 7:51[-53].

Oh, how many pride themselves now at the present time that they have received the gospel out of the grace of God and yet do so little, yes, nothing according to it! They want to be great masters in the Scripture [and] be called evangelical preachers, but Christ Jesus and him crucified they know not, 1 Cor. 12. For Christ himself was poor and also chose poor disciples who had to deny themselves for the sake of the Lord, who forsook all things for the sake of the gospel, Matt. 8:[20]; Luke 9:58; Matt. 4:18[-19]; 19:27; 1 Cor. 8:9, who were a spectacle to the world and the

refuse of the world, and the offscouring thrown out by all people, 1 Cor. 4:9[-13]. But these are rich and powerful, therefore also, according to the word of the prophet, their pride or haughtiness must be a costly thing and their cruelty must be called well done, Ps. 73:6.

Christ said to his disciples, “You are not to let yourself be called rabbi, for one is your Master, Christ. The greatest among you shall be your servant. He who exalts himself shall be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted,” Matt. 23:[8-11]. But these allow themselves because of the gospel and their ministerial office to be called masters, licentiates, doctors, yes, worthy fathers and lords in Christ. How splendidly does that accord with these previously mentioned words of Christ? Yet these are of no avail to them, they pay no attention to them but puff up their person, as the prophet says, “They do only what they think; [they] speak evil of the devout, blaspheme the truth, and what they say must be spoken from heaven; what they propose and institute must prevail upon earth,” Ps. 73:7[-9]; for they think and also say, “Our tongue shall take the upper hand. We have the authority to speak. Who is he who can master us,” Ps. 12:[4]?

But what shall follow and happen to them after such presumption and pride, let them be aware of. The Scriptures testify clearly that Jezebel, while she indeed ruled for a period of time, feasted her prophets lavishly, and kept them in great splendour, yet finally had to be brought to shame together with all her followers, Rev. 2:20. And although the harlot of Babylon has made the heathen drunk with the wine of harlotry, [Rev. 18:3], and has become proud and says in her heart, “I sit, and am a queen. I shall be no widow, mourning I shall never see,” so nevertheless, her plagues shall come in a single day,” Rev. 18:7[-8].

Thus we have now briefly indicated which teachers are sent of God, that is, those who are thus qualified, just as the Scripture testifies, speak God’s Word rightly, and are conformed to the image of Christ and his saints. And what they yet lack, they seek with [their] whole zeal at the fountain of all grace, Jesus Christ. Whoever is such an one is without doubt sent of God.

Again, those who are otherwise minded, speak and do other than what is seen in this previously described and presented mirror of the prophets of Christ and his apostles, these are also not sent from God. They can also teach nothing good nor speak God’s Word correctly, for that must be spoken through the Holy Spirit, as Christ said to his disciples, “For it is not you who speak, but it is the spirit of your Father speaking through you,” Matt. 10:20. And Peter said, “No prophecy ever came out of the will of humans, but the holy people of God, moved by the Holy Spirit, have spoken,” 2 Pet. 1:21. Therefore all that the spiritless people say, that has no power and bears no fruit. Yes, and if it were possible that they could speak with the tongues of angels, yet it is nothing more than a sounding brass or a tinkling bell, 1 Cor. 13:1.

We also urge and admonish every individual, be he teacher or listener, that he heed it well. The teacher may well see whose servant he is, of which spirit he is motivated, whether Christ is and works in him, whether he portrays the living Word of God in open testimony of the Holy Scripture to the people, images it, bears fruit with it, and himself walks according to it. The listener may well take heed to himself that he not believe every spirit, but that he at all times recognise the teacher by his teaching and fruits, 1 John 4:1. And the teaching must test and measure right according to the plumb line of the divine Word.

Similarly, observe, test, and prove fruit not alone according to their external and splendid appearance, but according to the Spirit and true reality. And whichever teacher he recognises and finds false, him he himself watches and hears him not, but turns from him, just as God commanded through Jeremiah and Christ through the gospel, namely, that one should not hear

the words of the false prophets, that one should beware of them, Jer. 23:16; Matt. 7:15, that his sheep hear his voice, and follow him and the stranger they do not follow after but flee from him for the reason that the voice of the stranger is unknown to them. Yes, all those who did not enter into the sheepfold through Christ Jesus, as through the true door, but have climbed in through another way, these are thieves and murderers who come nowhere except to steal and to kill and to destroy, John 10:4[-5]; [8-10]. Therefore the sheep of Christ fear for themselves before such thieves, murderers, and destroyers.

But that some suggest that Scripture does not forbid the external hearing of the false prophets, but the internal hearing only, this is craftiness and philosophy, yes, an open falsification of the divine truth. For this is certain and undoubtedly true, that two kinds of hearing are included in Scripture, one the internal hearing which is faith, that which comes through the external hearing of the divine Word through the co-operation and enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, as may clearly be seen in the following words of Paul: "How shall they call upon him in whom they do not believe? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have never heard? How are they to hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach when they are not sent? As it is written, 'How lovely are the feet of those who proclaim peace and preach good news!' But they are not all obedient to the gospel, for Isaiah says, 'Lord, who believes our preaching?' So faith comes from hearing, but the hearing is through the Word of God. But I say to you, have they not heard? Indeed their voice has now gone out to all the lands, and their words to all the world," Rom. 10:14[-18]; Isa. 52:7; 53:[1]; Ps. 19:4.

Here the apostle speaks expressly about the external hearing through which the preaching of the gospel by the apostles' voices and their words were heard by all creatures under heaven, Mark 16:15; Col. 1:6, through which many have also come to faith, yet all out of grace through the internal working of God and his Holy Spirit, as God now through the external hearing of his Word creates faith in his elect, as through a mediator. Thus Satan also creates unbelief in his children through the external hearing of his false doctrine. Therefore Holy Scripture also admonishes us to hear God's Word and that is to be understood that we shall hear God's Word with external ears and believe thereon with the heart, John 5:24; 8:51; 10:27. This then is called to hear God's Word aright.

In like measure the Scripture forbids us to hear false teachers, Jer. 23:16; Ps. 1:1; John 10:[5]; and this is the meaning, that we should not run to the false teachers in the house of idols where they stand upon the stool of pestilence and falsify God's Word, nor hear their words nor believe them, 2 Cor. 6:[14-15]. This the Scripture calls not hearing false teachers, to shun the strange ones and to flee from them, John 10:5. On this opinion the apostle John also says that false teachers are of the world; "and what they say is of the world, and the world listens to them. But true teachers are from God. Whoever knows God listens to them, but whoever is not of God does not listen to them. By this one knows the spirit of truth and the spirit of error," 1 John 4:5[-6]. This is what we have now said in brief of the sending of teachers.

But there are many who contradict [us] here. In the first place, some say that no one may teach and restore the fallen worship again, except they be called of the Lord through a living voice from heaven. Just as Elijah (they say) did not punish the priests of Baal nor restore the fallen worship in Israel before he had received a command from the Lord and was sent to Ahab, 1 Kings 18. Again, just as Joshua did not again begin circumcision (which was not practised for a period in the wilderness), before the time that the Lord commanded him, Josh. 5:2.

Answer

God does not now, at the present time, speak with us through an external voice from heaven, nor through visions and dreams as happened in the Old Testament, but he speaks with us through his Son, Jesus Christ, Heb. 1:1[-2], and Christ speaks with us through his Word. And the Word of Christ is Spirit and life, John 6:63. Whenever Christ now grants and impresses his living Word in someone's heart, and thereby calls, that person is without any doubt called of the Lord through his Word. But whereby one shall know that anyone is thus called of God through the living Word and through the Spirit of Christ, we have said above, namely, that he speaks God's Word truly, bears fruit, and seeks the honour of Christ and the salvation of souls with wholehearted zeal, Isa. 55:10[-11]; John 3:34.

Further, so we have maintained above, that the apostles and elders, with the congregations of God, called and ordained deacons and teachers through the power of Christ, Acts 6:1[-6]; 13:1[-21]. What now the Christians of their time did correctly, that is not forbidden or discontinued for the Christians of this time, but the Christians must conduct themselves according to the practice and procedure of the first churches. The reason: "For no other foundation can any one lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ," 1 Cor. 3:11. Therefore, just as the fallen temple of the Lord in Jerusalem was built again on the first foundation and all worship therein was resumed and practised according to the law, so also now must the fallen house of God, namely the Christian congregation, be built up again on the first foundation of the apostles and prophets, (of which Christ Jesus is the cornerstone) 1 Tim. 3:[1-12]; Heb. 3:5[-6]; Eph. 2:19 [-20]; and all things therein must be conducted and carried out according to the ordinance of Christ and his apostles.

Since then the apostles and elders with the congregation of God chose leaders and ministers through Christ and placed and established them in their office, therefore the Christians of this time must also, according to the example of the apostolic congregations, choose and ordain teachers. And necessity also demands this, for it is certain and incontrovertible, that a Christian congregation may not be built, established, and gathered without correct doctrine, faith, and baptism.

In addition, without the Lord's Supper, admonition, discipline, excommunication, or separation, it cannot stand. For where God's Word is not taught correctly and the gospel of Christ is not preached, how then shall people believe? As the apostle says, "And how are they to believe in him of whom they have not heard," Rom. 10:[14]? But where faith out of the hearing of the Word of God through the co-operation of the Holy Spirit is not rightly grasped in the heart, how can baptism be practised orderly and received, since baptism upon faith was commanded and instituted by the Lord himself and practised by the apostles, Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:[16]; Acts 2:41; 8:[38-39]; 10:47[-48]? But where the baptism of Christ is not practised properly, how shall one then be baptised into Christ Jesus, into his death and [added] to the fellowship of his body through the Holy Spirit, Rom. 6:3; Col. 2:12; 1 Cor. 12:13? How then shall the dying away of the flesh, the burial of sins, and the resurrection into a new life be rightly considered and carried out [Rom. 6:6-11]?

Where the Lord's Supper is not rightly observed, how can his Word and command (that one by and with the breaking of bread should proclaim his death and preserve his memory) be adequately done there, Matt. 26:25; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 10: 16; 11: 22? How can the fellowship of Christ, yes, his body and blood, be indeed taken to heart there, brotherly love and

unity be truly signified and established? Again, where admonition does not proceed in full power, there the love to both God and neighbour usually grows cold. And where discipline is not correctly practised, there the one entangles himself in sin with the other. Therefore the Lord says, "You shall not hate your neighbour in your heart, but punish him, that you may not be guilty because of him," Lev. 19:17. Again, where excommunication and the ban are not correctly observed with the gospel, there the one corrupts the other, as Paul says, "Do you not know that a little leaven ferments the whole lump of dough," 1 Cor. 5:[6]?

And if the congregation of God without all these previously mentioned items (and whatsoever more the Lord has ordained for the upbuilding and sustaining of his congregation), can neither stand nor be maintained, therefore there must also be ministers of the Word in the congregation. For it is not everyone's thing to teach God's Word and to distribute the sacraments of Christ. But it is with these things as Paul says, "Similarly, as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, but among each other the one is the member of the other and they have many kinds of gifts according to the grace that is given to us," Rom. 12:4[-6]. Again, "there are many kinds of gifts, but there is one Spirit; and there are many kinds of service, but there is one Lord; and there are many kinds of powers, but there is one God who works all things in everyone. But in each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good," 1 Cor. 12:4[-7].

In addition the apostle says, "Grace is given to each one among us according to the measure of Christ's gift, and he has established some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, some as pastors and teachers, that the saints should all be joined together for common service, for improving the body of Christ, until we all extend our hand to the other in one faith and knowledge of the Son of God, to become a mature person who is there in the measure of the fullness of Christ," Eph. 4:7, [11-13]. And Peter says, "Serve one another, each with the gift he has received, as good stewards of God's varied grace: if someone speaks, that he speaks God's Word; if someone renders service, that he renders it out of the strength which God gives in order that in everything God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be honour and dominion from eternity to eternity. Amen," 1 Pet. 4:10[-11].

Out of all these words it is easily understood in the first place, how God places his ministers in his congregations and distributes many kinds of gifts. In the second place, how necessary ministers are in the congregation and what their work and service is. In the third place, that the congregation (since it is one with Christ) has the power to choose teachers and ministers according to the Scripture. But which is the congregation of Christ, which has received such power from Christ (not only to choose teachers and leaders, but, what is more, to bind and to loose, to forgive sins and to retain them), Scripture testifies clearly at many places, namely, that it is a gathering of believers, that is, of living saints and born-again persons who believe the Word of God entirely, teach the same correctly, bear fruit with it, practice the sacraments of Christ fittingly, correctly maintain the ban, walk in love, and conduct and carry out all things according to the gospel, Matt. 16:19; 18:18; John 20:23; 8:30.

Yes, the congregation of Christ is the fellowship of the saints, who through the providence of God the Father, through the grace of Jesus Christ, and in the sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth, was gathered through the preaching of the gospel, and through one Spirit baptised into one body, unified, and joined together, 1 Pet. 1:2; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Cor. 12:13a; Eph. 4:4; so that it is the body of Christ, his bride, taken out of his side, made from his flesh and bone, washed in his blood, cleansed through the water bath in his Word, and sanctified through his Spirit, Eph. 5:30; Col. 1:14; Eph. 5:26.

For therefore he also allowed his side to be opened and pierced through on the cross and allowed blood and water to flow or run from it so that he might gain, purify, and save his congregation, John 19:34; Eph. 5:25[-26]. Therefore it is also his pure bride, his most beloved friend, the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, come here out of heaven from God, and illumined with the glory of God and of the Lamb, etc., Rev. 19:7[-8]; 21:2.

This congregation has the power through Christ Jesus (from whom it has received everything) to choose leaders and ministers. And if anyone should ask, "Where is this congregation?" we answer, "Where God's Word is correctly taught, believed, and kept, for they are Christ's disciples who have his word, believe, and keep it," John 8:30; 17:6; Matt. 18:20; Luke 24:14[-15]. Where now such disciples are gathered in his name, there he is in the midst of them. But if Christ is among them, then they are always a congregation of Christ. If they are a congregation of Christ, then they must also have the same power which Christ gave the congregation. But the power which Christ has given his congregation (namely, not only to choose teachers and ministers of the Word, but also to bind and to loose, to forgive sins and to retain them), has been adequately related and explained above, Matt. 16:[19]; 18:18; John 20:23.

Therefore we conclude that, since God's Word has now come to the [light of] day, there must, therefore, also be a congregation of God; for God's Word is not without fruit, Isa. 55:10[-11]. If then someone says that there is no congregation of God, he must also say that there are no believers upon the earth, yes, that God's Word is nowhere upon earth; for where God's Word is, there is also a congregation of God, be it small or large. But the congregation of God is not only invisible, as some permit themselves to think and imagine an invisible Christian people, but also visible. For believers recognise each other and join with their kind, (as also all animals do according to Ecclesiasticus), Ecclus. 13:[15-16], and love each other since they are the children of one heavenly Father, born out of one God, brought forth out of one seed, partakers of one divine nature, and endowed with one Holy Spirit, John 1:13; 1 John 5:1; 1 Pet. 1:23.

Out of this comes the difference between brotherly and common love, 2 Pet. 1:7. And this is the reason the apostles wrote all their letters to the Christians, to their brothers and companions of faith and not to the world. This would not have taken place if they had not known the Christians and had not known the difference between Christians and the world.

Yes, the Christian congregation is also in part manifest to the world, just as Abraham was manifest to the world through his faith, righteousness, and glorious deed according to God's Word, and left to us as an example in Scripture to teach and admonish that we should follow in his footsteps with sincere trust and fruitfulness of works which God commands us, Gen. 15:6; 22; Rom. 4:3; Gal. 16; James 2:23. Yes, Christ Jesus our Lord and Master, Matt. 23:[8], our Pioneer and Ruler, Heb. 12:2, revealed himself to the world through words and works and thus also commanded his disciples and said, "Let your light shine before people, that they see your good works and praise your Father in heaven," Matt. 5:16.

To this Paul also admonished the believers that they should walk such good lives through which they would become manifest to unbelievers, and says, "Do all things without grumbling or questioning so that you may be irreproachable, innocent, and children of God blameless in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shall shine as lights in the world, that you will remain with the Word of life," Phil. 2:14[-16]. And Peter says that the godless and blasphemers indeed recognise Christians whenever they do not run with them as earlier in their licentious, unseemly, and godless ways, 1 Pet. 4:4.

Herewith it is adequately shown that the congregation of God is not alone invisible, but also visible and in part revealed to the world. But it is not in a particular location or place like the figurative Jerusalem was nowhere on earth except in the Jewish land alone. But the heavenly Jerusalem is everywhere, wherever the Word of God is rightly taught, believed, and kept, Gal. 4:26; Rev. 21:2; Matt. 28:[18], and the sacraments of Christ are used correctly according to the Word. For the Lord has added his sacraments to the gospel, attached them to it, and commanded not only that his gospel should be preached but also that his sacraments should be practised and maintained, Mark 16:[16]; Matt. 26:[26-28]; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:[23-25].

Thus has the Lord ordained and thus it shall also remain to the end. "Heaven and earth," says Christ, "will pass away but my words will not pass away," Matt. 24:35. Therefore we still say that where God's Word is correctly taught, believed, and kept, and the sacraments are properly practised, there is the heavenly Jerusalem, there dwells God the almighty Lord and the Lamb, Rev. 21:2; Heb. 12:22, just as Christ himself testified and said, "Whoever loves me shall keep my word, and my Father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him," John 14:[23]. And in another place God says, I will live in them, and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people," Lev. 26: [11]; Ezek. 37:27; 2 Cor. 6:16, says the almighty Lord.

In the second place, some say that the teachers now should confirm their sending with signs and miracles like the apostles did.

Thereupon we answer that to require signs and not permit oneself to be satisfied with the words is a sign of unbelief as Christ testified with these words: "Whenever you do not see signs and wonders you do not believe," John 4:48. Therefore we may indeed say that they do not have the true faith who demand and desire signs beyond the Word of Christ. But where they have such faith as the centurion had who said to Christ, "Oh, Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; therefore I also did not consider myself worthy to come to you. But speak a word and my servant will be healed," Luke 7:6[-8]. Had they such faith (we say), they should always believe the words of Christ and now demand no signs but allow themselves to be satisfied with the fact that Christ in the beginning and thereafter the apostles have adequately confirmed the teaching of the gospel with signs and miracles.

And should it be that they already saw signs and wonders, they would perhaps mistakenly do as the Pharisees; namely, they might attribute the works of God to the devil or seek another reason in order to blaspheme the works of God. But now that they see no signs they speak with the Pharisees, "We would like to see a sign." But what did Christ answer to the Pharisees? "This evil and adulterous nature seeks a sign but no sign shall be given to it except alone the sign of the prophet Jonah," Matt. 12:38[-39]. What did Abraham reply to the rich man (who desired that he would send Lazarus to his father's house that he testify to his brothers in order that they would not come to the place where he was)? "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear those." But he said, "No, father Abraham; but if some one goes to them from the dead, they will repent." He said to him, "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither would they believe if someone should rise from the dead," Luke 16:27[-31]. And Paul says, "The Jews demand signs and the Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach the crucified Christ, a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Greeks, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, we preach Christ a divine power and wisdom," 1 Cor. 1:[22-24].

Out of these and similar words of Holy Scripture we may clearly observe what kind of people these are who require signs and do not allow themselves to be satisfied with the Word and how one must believe God's Word more than signs and miracles and how those cannot be helped who will not hear Moses and the prophets. But if these are not to be helped, how then shall those be helped who will not hear Christ and his apostles? But if they wish to hear, why do they then demand signs?

It is true that the miracles and signs of wonder are witnesses of the gospel and the divine Word and that they confirm and strengthen the same. The miracles also move the people toward faith but with the understanding that not the teaching which is already accepted and established must be therewith confirmed, but every new doctrine, that it is from God. Therefore these signs are not necessary now at the present time just as they were necessary at the time of Christ and his apostles. [The] reason: Since Christ is the end of the law and a mediator of the New Testament, therefore his teaching had to be confirmed with strong signs and wonderful works, just as the Old Testament was confirmed with signs and miracles, Rom. 10:4; Heb. 7:11; Gal. 3:20; Heb. 12:24. But now that the teaching of Christ has once been established, and no other teaching is taught or may be taught, yes, cursed is the one who preaches another gospel than that which Christ and his apostles have preached to us, Gal. 1:9.

Thus the signs are not a necessity. For the law was after all not established more than once with signs and with the blood of calves and goats, Exod. 19:16; 24:6; Heb. 9:13. And as it was for a period of time obscured and hidden and was again found and came to the light of day, even so, it was not confirmed by signs a second time, 2 Kings 22:8. So also the pious Josiah, as he heard the book of the law read desired no sign but indeed allowed himself to be satisfied with the words and carried out all things according to it, and also kept the Passover. The same no king in Israel had done before him [2 Kings 23:21-23].

Because the gospel has now been confirmed with such glorious miracles (the like of which had never taken place) [and] in addition was empowered with the innocent death and precious blood of the spotless Lamb, Jesus Christ, Heb. 9:13[-14], and was for a long time obscured, but now through the grace of God [has] again come to light, so all devout Christians must allow themselves to be satisfied therewith. So that whoever requires a sign beyond this must hear "an evil and adulterous nature seeks for a sign," etc. Matt. 12:39.

Thus we must again also administer and maintain all the ordinances of God according to the gospel. For to that [end] God reveals his Word to us that we through this should learn to know his will, turn ourselves to God, abstain from sin, believe rightly, 'live a Christlike life, and maintain all his commandments, as Christ says to his apostles, "Teach them to observe all that I have commanded you," Matt. 28:20. But even as we accept and must accept the teaching of the gospel without signs if we would be saved, James 1:21, in the same manner we must also accept the teachers who proclaim the teaching to us without signs and recognise [them as] good. The work always praises the master, and blameless teaching and walk [praises] a Christian teacher. Nevertheless, even though a teacher is blameless in all things, the hypocritical and pharisaical nature will yet not believe the gospel.

False teachers can also sometimes indeed perform signs. One knows well how the Egyptian magicians withstood Moses and what they did through their magic, Exod. 7:11[-12]; 2 Tim. 18. And Christ says that many false prophets and false Christians shall arise [and] do great signs and wonders so that (if it were possible), even the elect should be led astray, Matt. 24:11. And Paul says, "The coming of the antichrist will happen according to the activity of Satan with all kinds

of deceitful signs and wonders among those who will be lost,” 2 Thess. 2:9[-10]. Therefore then, a Christian may not look upon the signs alone, but much more upon God’s Word which is always certain and true, John 17:8.

And if one still requires signs, then one must demand them not only of the teachers but also of all believers. For Christ says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater works, because I go to the Father,” John 14:12. And at another place Christ says, “The signs which will accompany those who believe are these: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will drive out serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and it will become better with them,” Mark 16:17[-18]. But now we do not see that anyone does such outward signs. Who will therefore say that there is no one who believes?

This be far hence! Does Paul not say after all, that they are not all workers of miracles, 1 Cor. 12:29. Therefore, just as external signs do not follow faith at the present time, and there is without the slightest doubt faith to be found in some persons, therefore also external signs do not follow the sending of God. Nevertheless, some without doubt are still sent out from God in order to preach his Word whom one shall not attempt to recognise by the signs (for these are many times false and deceptive), but by their sound teaching and fruits (which will not be found with all false prophets and false Christians).

Paul also describes to us expressly how a bishop shall be qualified, but he does not say that he must also perform signs, 1 Tim. 3:1[-7]; Titus 1:5[-9]. One reads nowhere in Scripture that Timothy, Titus, and others in addition, who were full of the Holy Spirit did signs. Therefore someone can indeed be a bishop and yet not do any sign. But a bishop’s office or service is to preach the gospel and thus to feed the flock of Christ, 1 Cor. 1: 1[?]; [Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 52-4]. But preaching the gospel is more than to distribute the sacramental signs, yet the one was established and commanded with the other of the Lord Christ Jesus, as was said above, Matt. 28:[20]; Mark 16:15.

Out of all this it now finally follows that a teacher may indeed be sent of God, teach God’s Word, and serve the congregation of Christ, yet nevertheless do no signs. Therefore they err who look upon signs and watch for them to come. But [let] them beware that they do not accept and receive Satan (who is very cunning and hides all his wickedness under the guise of hypocrisy) as Christ, 2 Cor. 11: [14-15], and that it not happen to them as with the Jews, to whom Christ said, “I have come in my Father’s name, and you did not accept me; but if another comes in his own name, him you will receive,” John 5:43.

In the third place, some say, that a teacher who is sent of God should not teach secretly but should proclaim the Word of God openly before everyone.

Answer

Thus it also happened to Christ. For his brothers (says the evangelist) said to him, “‘Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples may see the works you are doing. For no man works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world.’ For even his brothers did not believe in him,” John 7:3[-5]. Thus the unbelieving and evil world also says now at the present time [together] with the apostate and false brothers, that teachers, if they are from God, should make themselves manifest to the world. But what did Christ answer his brothers

(who did not believe in him and therefore wanted that he should reveal himself to the world?): “My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil,” John 7:6[-7]. Thus all disciples of Christ must now do also, maintain their silence, accommodate themselves to the time (yet in such a way that they do not act against God’s Word) and not regard what the perverted and godless say, Rom. 12:[12]; Eph. 5:16. For the world has always blasphemed the works of God and cannot look upon them with good eyes. It must all be evil, however good that is which the good Lord Christ Jesus does.

Therefore he also says in the Gospel, “To whom shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market places and calling to their playmates, ‘We piped to you, and you did not want to dance; we lamented, and you did not want to cry.’ John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon’; the Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘See what a glutton and drunkard this person is, a companion of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom must let itself be justified by her children,” Matt. 11:16[-17]; Luke 7:31[-32].

From this one may recognise the evil, hypocritical nature which always seeks a reason to oppose Christ and finds none. Here one may clearly see that the perverted and malicious [persons] who hate the gospel, and it does not help whether it is sweet (as Christ makes it) or sour (as John makes it). But they pervert it into evil every time they [have opportunity to] abuse the gospel. The apostle Paul had to be regarded by the Jews as an agitator and by Festus as mad, Acts 21:38; 26:24. Thus the world has always been perverted like it still is and deals in a perverted manner with the Christians. For if they reveal themselves and come forth boldly and proclaim God’s Word, the world can yet not, above all other things endure such, and abuses them as enthusiasts [and] agitators; yes, persecutes them with sword, water, and fire. But if they keep themselves secret and live their faith in quietness, then the world blasphemes them nonetheless and calls them rabble spirits, corner-preachers, and does not know how to blaspheme them disdainfully enough.

Is this not a perverse nature which castigates Christians whenever they keep themselves hidden and remain quiet, and whenever they are open they cannot endure a single Christian? So there is here now no other counsel to be found than that the Christians, if they are exposed, will be persecuted by the world, and if they are hidden they will be blasphemed and disdained by the world. This is also the prediction of the Lord, as all Christians and God-fearing [persons] well know, Matt. 5:10; 10:16[-17]; 24:9; John 15:18. Therefore then, they do not regard what the world and the false brothers say. Nevertheless we thus wish, through the grace of the Lord, to serve all goodhearted [persons], but give to our ministers a more reasonable answer [and] broader information thereon, and speak thus.

In the first place, we have indicated above, with many clear testimonies of Scripture, whereby a true teacher shall be known and differentiated from a false teacher. Whoever now is such an one, just as the Scripture portrays a true teacher, and remains always conformed to Christ his Lord and master, yes, out of true fervent love of God and the neighbour is driven to his ministerial office, he is without doubt sent of God whether he teaches secretly or openly, 1 Cor. 10:[33]; Phil. 3:17.

The opponent then says, yes, [but] Christ and his apostles taught openly.

Answer

Christ was promised to the Jews and sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, Matt. 10:6; 15:24. To them he proclaimed his Father's Word and performed such works among them as no one else had done in order that they should believe in him, and if not, that they then had no excuse. In addition, Christ could slip away in the midst of his enemies, Luke 4:30. Yes, he caused them to fall to earth through his powerful Word and no one could lay a hand on him before his hour was come, John 18:6. Nevertheless he still hid himself and did not trust the people, for he knew well (as John says) what was in the people, John 2:24[-25].

The apostles were chosen by Christ and sent out to preach the gospel to all creatures, and to be witnesses of Christ to the end of the world, Matt. 28:[17-20]; Mark 16:15; John 15:27; Acts 1:22. Therefore God also worked marvellously with them. But God does not work thus with all teachers, for they are not all like the great apostles, and God also does not want to accomplish through all teachers what he accomplished through the apostles. Therefore he also did not lay upon all teachers what he laid upon the apostles. The apostles were commanded of the Lord to preach the gospel to all creatures which they also did through God's grace, Matt. 28:[18-20]; Mark 16:15; Col. 1:6. The teachers who now follow them must then preach not only to so-called Christians, but also to Jews and Turks and all heathen. But now Paul says to the teachers and bishops of the congregations that they should take heed to themselves and to the congregation over which the Holy Spirit had set them, Acts 20:28.

The apostles spoke at Pentecost with tongues of fire and everyone understood them, Acts 2:[3-]4. This had not happened before that time nor since. Thus God also miraculously released the apostles from prison, Acts 5:18; Acts 12:7; 16:25[-26]. Thus if anyone now wants to say that the teachers should preach openly as Christ and his apostles did, he [should] still consider that Christ was able to free himself out of the hands of his enemies as he willed and that God worked and dealt so marvellously with his apostles. The one must always be observed with the other so that one does not with indiscretion lay upon every teacher [to do] what Christ and his apostles did. But just as God apportions to every individual the measure of the Spirit and faith, and has given him his particular service, he himself will know [what] to observe, and also [what] should be observed by the congregations, 1 Cor. 12:[4-11].

Yes, says the opponent then, God's hand is not shortened. He is still able to help his own as he helped the apostles.

Answer

That we know and indeed believe. The disciples at Damascus also knew and believed that God is almighty, but nevertheless they helped Paul over the wall at night and thus he escaped out of the hands of the authorities of Damascus, Acts 9:25. The Christians at Ephesus also knew and indeed believed that God is almighty and could certainly protect Paul from all his enemies. Nevertheless they would not permit Paul to go among the people and give them a reply, Acts 19:30. But now some wish to expel the teachers into the midst of their enemies, even when it has been shown before their eyes how extremely blood-thirsty the world is and with abominable tyrannies persecutes the teachers unto death. But what kind of a spirit, disposition, and love these people have may be seen and understood [when compared with] the example of these disciples at Damascus and at Ephesus.

Elijah also well knew that God is almighty. He also trusted his Lord and God that he could protect him well. Nevertheless, he feared [for] himself before Jezebel and fled into the wilderness, 1 Kings 19:3. But Jezebel could cherish no more evil purpose against Elijah than the world now has against all Christians, and in particular against the true teachers and preachers of the gospel.

Above all this, Jesus Christ our Lord left the land of Judea when he heard that Herod had thrown John into prison, Matt. 14:13. If then Elijah hid himself from Jezebel [and] Christ from Herod, why should not a true teacher also do the same?

The opponent then says [that] Elijah revealed himself before Ahab and Jezebel and the whole people of Israel, 1 Kings 18:1; [18:17; 18:30; 19:1-2], and Christ did not always remain outside of the land of Judea.

Answer

That Elijah revealed himself was the will of the Lord, therefore he was also driven thereto by the Spirit of the Lord. When God also wills that the teachers should come into the open and not fear for themselves before murderous Jezebel, then the Lord will indeed work and drive [them] thereto through his Spirit.

The opponent then says, yes, since the teachers of this present time are not driven through the Spirit of the Lord to reveal themselves to the world, therefore they should remain silent and not take it upon themselves to teach, to distribute the sacramental signs of Christ, and thus to gather a congregation of God.

Answer

If after all the apostles out of fear of the Jews came together secretly, held their gathering [behind] locked doors, taught, baptised, and broke bread in houses, and that not by day only but also by night, why may and should it not now also take place in this way, John 20:19; Acts 1:13; 2:46; 20:7? Or will one accuse and censure the apostles because of this? Or is it now sin and censurable what in that time was good and useful?

The opponent then says thus: Christ after all said in the gospel, “Whoever does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, so that his deeds will not be punished. But whoever does the truth comes to the light, that their works may be revealed, for they have been done in God,” John 3:20[-21].

Thereupon we answer that these words are not against us. They are spoken by Christ to mean that evildoers hate the light of the divine Word in order that they may not be disciplined nor shamed thereby. Therefore the apostle says to the Thessalonians, “You are all children of light and of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. So then let us not sleep, as the others do. Those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night,” 1 Thess. 5:5[-7]. Again, [he wrote] to the Romans, “The night is gone, the day has come. Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the weapons of light; let us conduct ourselves honourably as in the day...,” Rom. 13:12[-13].

Therefore the previously mentioned words of Christ are not to be understood that one may not teach God's Word secretly (for the contrary there is proof enough in the Scriptures), but that unbelievers and evildoers hate the true light, that is the Word of God, and flee from [it] because God's Word disciplines and judges. Yes, (as the apostle says), 'It is sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of body and soul, also through nerves and marrow, and is a judge of the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is invisible before him....' Heb. 4:12[-13].

Since then God's Word thus pierces, disciplines, and judges, evildoers hate the light of the divine Word so that they may neither be disciplined nor judged by it. For the godless hate discipline, Prov. 9:8 and seek corners to slip into in order to hide themselves. They love darkness and are not eager to be seen, since what they indeed do secretly is a shame to say, as the apostle writes to the Ephesians, Eph. 5:12.

Likewise, let us observe with understanding what this signifies and what our Lord willed to give us to know therewith when he sent Elijah in the time of drought to Zarephath to a widow and there preserved him before Aliab and Jezebel, and fed, nourished, and kept him and the widow through a little oil and meal, 1 Kings 17:9. The Lord could well have fed and kept Elijah even had he not sent him to the widow. He could also have comforted the widow even if Elijah had not come to her. But it now pleased the Lord that Elijah with the widow and the widow with Elijah, would be kept (as is said) through a little oil and meal. But what this signifies we will give to all Godfearing persons to consider. According to our understanding these figures (as also all other figures), happened and [were] written for our learning, "so that by patience and the encouragement of the Scriptures, we might have hope," Rom. 15:4; namely, that God does not forsake his own, but helps them in every need and gathers them to each other that they may live their faith in quietness and solitude, guarded before Ahab and Jezebel, fed and nourished by God through his Word and Spirit. For the Lord does not forsake his saints but in evil times they are kept, Ps. 33:19; and in the time of drought they shall have enough.

The rich must suffer want and hunger, but those who fear the Lord have no lack, Ps. 34:[9-10]. But what [does] Christ say? I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when heaven was shut up three years and six months, when there came a great famine over all the land; and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon to a woman who was a widow," Luke 4:25[-26]. Thus it still goes. For Ahab and Jezebel reign now also at this time and have brought Baal into Israel; therewith they make Israel to sin against the Lord. Therefore the Lord is also angry over Israel and has sent them a time of famine (that is) hunger and want of his Word upon earth, [Amos 8:11], as Israel in the time of Elijah had want of bodily bread. And just as Elijah was sent alone to the widow in Zarephath, so also few are now found who are pleasing to the Lord, so that they receive the comforting and quickening of their souls from God through his Word and Spirit with the co-operation of the servants and ministers of Jesus Christ.

But that Elijah had to keep himself hidden [and] also was not sent by the Lord to many, but alone to the widow in Zarephath, that was not his fault but that of the others. That the teachers must now also hide at this time and not be sent to the world by the Lord-the fault is not the Lord's (for he desires that all persons should be saved), also not of the sincere ministers (for they are of good will and inclined to serve everyone and to proclaim God's Word) but the wicked will not hear nor endure them, Ezek. 18:23; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9.

Finally, since Jezebel is so hateful against all servants of God, it is better to serve God in secret than to bow the knees openly before Baal; better to teach God's Word secretly among those who have a desire for the truth and bear fruit according to it than to keep completely silent about it. It is better to teach the mystery of the kingdom of God and explain it secretly, where it is accepted and understood, as Christ and the apostles did, Matt. 13:11, than to hear that the harmful throne openly serves evil with the law,' Ps. 94:20. It is also better to practice the sacraments secretly with the God-fearing and true believing [persons] according to God's Word than to openly misuse them with unbelieving and false Christians, or to despise them and abandon them entirely as the erring and prideful spirits do who think and say unashamedly, They are rich and have prospered, and need nothing; not knowing that they are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked," Rev. 3:17.

Further, as Scripture clearly indicates, one may not speak about God's Word wherever and whenever one wills, but alone when and where God wills. But the Lord wills that his Word shall be spoken where it bears fruit. Again, where it does not bear fruit, there it shall not be spoken. Therefore Ecelesiasticus says, "Where there is no hearing, there one shall not speak in vain," Ecclus. 32:[4]. And Christ said to his apostles, "Do not give dogs what is holy; and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under foot and tear you to pieces," Matt. 7:6. These words give us adequate recognition that God's Word (which is the holy thing and the pearl) shall not be preached to the persecutors of truth (which are the dogs who gnash their teeth together over the righteous), Ps. 37:12, and the unclean who are drowned in the desires of the flesh (which are the swine).

Moreover, it is well to observe here that the Holy Spirit forbade Paul to speak in Asia but sent him to Macedonia to preach the gospel there, Acts 16:6[-9]. Therefore the same apostle said, "Speak what is profitable, for improvement where it is needed, that it may be profitable to hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in which you were sealed for the day of redemption," Eph. 4:29[-30].

Yes, Christ himself did not want to give the Pharisees an answer to their question and also did not want to answer all the questions of Herod with a single word, [Luke 23:9]. In addition, Christ often spoke to the people in parables, Matt. 13:10; Mark 4:10, but the mystery of the gospel he explained secretly to his disciples to whom he said, "To you it has been given to understand the secrets of the kingdom of God, but to the others it has not been given," Matt. 13:11; [Mark 4:11], as it stands written, "he made known his ways to Moses, his intentions to the people of Israel," Ps. 103:7. And further, "he declares his word to Jacob, his manners and rules to Israel," Ps. 147:19. And Paul says that God's Word, that is, the mystery which was hidden from the foundation of the world, and from former times, is now revealed to the saints. "To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ among you, the hope of glory," Col. 1: [27].

Therefore Christ also says, I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth that you have hidden these things (the gospel) from the wise and understanding and revealed them to those without understanding and the simple ones; yes, Father, thus it has been pleasing to you," Matt. 11:25[-26]; Luke 10:21. And Christ further says, "Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, that is the one who loves me; and whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him." Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world," John 14:21[-22]?

Out of all these words it is easily observed that God himself hid his Word from the world, that Christ spoke to the people in obscure parables, the Holy Spirit forbade Paul to speak God's Word in Asia, and God revealed his Word to his saints and not to the world. How then may the ministers of the Word be blamed with any reasonableness that they act according to this example in these dangerous times, to conceal the mystery of the gospel from this evil world, and in quietness secretly to reveal and speak what is profitable to the goodhearted who are receptive to hear them,' in order that they not grieve the Holy Spirit, Eph. 4:[30]?

In summary, how a teacher shall primarily be tested and recognised by his teaching and fruits is adequately explained above. But whether to teach openly or secretly is beside the point. For to teach openly is good and right according to the opportunity of the time; to teach secretly is not forbidden according to the opportunity of the time. Public teaching, if it is false, does not therefore become good because it is publicly taught. That which is false must be and remain false even if it were taught publicly a thousand times and were it wonderfully decorated with beautiful sounding words. Again, to teach secretly does not therefore become false because it was taught secretly. For what is right, that must remain right (says the prophet) and this shall please all devout hearts, Ps. 94:15. And God's Word is and remains the truth whether it be taught secretly or publicly. And if it were [so] that the true teachers might teach publicly, they should yet proclaim to us nothing other than this same Word of God that is revealed and taught us through the grace of the Lord.

Therefore here is not to be twisted, here no looking around after another gospel, since after all, both angels and people must be cursed who preach us another gospel than that which we have received from Christ and his apostles, Gal. 1:8[-9]. So let us now, according to the word of the prophet, give God the honour, and observe the light before it becomes dark and our feet stumble on the dark mountains, Jer. 13:16.

We also see before [our] eyes how perilous the times now are, much more than at the time of the apostles. Then the apostles and Christians could flee from one city to another, Matt. 10:23, but now all lords and princes, cities and lands have made a covenant against us. Then the heathen government was so reasonable and proper that they did not wish to oppose strongly the faith and affairs of the Christian religion, Acts 17:9; 18:14[-15]; 23:22. But now almost everyone wants to be a lord over the conscience [of others] and a judge of faith (which after all belongs to Christ alone). Now the papal caesardom with all who are included therein, persecutes our faith as abominably as Antiochus persecuted the God-fearing Jews.

[In] particular the remnant of the pharisaic race, the perverted scribes, the presumptuous wise and arrogant of the world shout and rage against us, those who are of the seed of Cain and not of Abel, Isa. 5:21; Gen. 4:8. Therefore they persecute and kill the righteous, 1 John 3:[12]. And even though they are many times warned and instructed by God's Word, both orally and in writing, yet they remain stuck in their blindness, wickedness, and abominable tyranny. How then could it go otherwise with these despisers and persecutors of the divine Word, than it went with the rebellious, unbelieving, and malicious Jews; that is, that the kingdom of God would not come to them or again would be taken from them because they, after all, did not want to bring [forth] its fruits, Matt. 21:43?

And how much more is there to say? The world has no inclination to hear God's Word, therefore it is also not worthy to bear it. It despises righteousness, therefore it has also fled far from it. It persecutes Christ and has no desire whatever for that which [is] his; thus Christ also does not desire it. It will not cease from evil; therefore it also will not be disciplined by God's Word. It

hates the truth, as Ahab did; therefore a lying spirit misleads them in the mouth [of] all the prophets of Baal, 1 Kings 22:[22]. It will not endure true teachers; therefore the Lord sends it false prophets in heaps who speak to it what it gladly hears. And stated in the briefest form it happens even as Isaiah laments, namely, that they are a rebellious people; lying, faithless children who will not hear the law of the Lord; who say to the seers, 'you should not see'; and to the prophets, 'Do not tell us what is right but what is pleasing to us; show us illusions, leave the way, turn aside from the path, let the Holy One of Israel cease among us,'" Isa. 30:9[-11].

Since then the world wants to have such prophets, the Lord thus sends her such teachers as she desires. But they must all come to shame as the Lord says through Ezekiel, "If the prophet be misled and speak a word, I, the Lord myself have misled that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand against him, and will root him out of my people Israel. And they shall both bear their misdeeds, the misdeeds of the inquirer shall be the same as the misdeeds of the prophet, etc. Ezek. 14:9[-10]. Jeremiah also lamented over Jerusalem that it was so miserably led astray by the false prophets and was brought into captivity, and says, "Oh, daughter of Jerusalem, wherewith shall I comfort you? Whom shall I liken to you, daughter of Zion, with which to comfort you? For your injury is great. Who can heal you? Your prophets have preached idle and foolish visions and have not revealed their misdeeds. Therewith they could have avoided your captivity, but they have preached idle sermons, so that they have preached you out of the land," Lam. 2:13[-14].

Thus the false prophets deceived Jerusalem, brought it to Babylon, and [they] themselves also came there. Yes, some received abominable punishments for their deceptive prophecies, Jer. 28:16. Thus it shall also go with the world and her false prophets as long as they do not amend themselves. But the Lord wants to convert them that they may honestly repent and turn to the living God and may come from darkness to the true light that they may be saved.

See, dear brothers, we have written a little through the grace of the Lord, out of brotherly love, about the sending of the evangelical teachers. Our friendly desire is that you will accept this for the best and test it well with the touchstone of Holy Scripture. We certainly might write much more about the matter, but we hope that we have done enough for the understanding and good-hearted. The perverted and malicious are not to be helped, even though an angel from heaven were to preach the truth to them. But the almighty God, a Father of all mercies and a God of all grace, 2 Cor. 1:3; 1 Pet. 5:10, who enlightens, strengthens, and confirms all true teachers and ministers of his Holy Word, whom he has set over his congregation through Christ Jesus with his Spirit, [grant] that they may remain steadfast in the evangelical teaching and show themselves irreproachable workers, who rightly divide the Word of truth, 2 Tim. 2:15, so that at the revelation of Jesus Christ they may receive from him the unfading crown, 1 Pet. 5:4.

And you, dear brothers in the Lord, "you who were straying like sheep, but are now converted to the shepherd and guardian of your souls," to Christ Jesus, 1 Pet. 2:25, remain steadfast in his teaching, hear his voice alone, follow in his footsteps, and be at peace with your leaders and teachers who rightly teach you God's Word, John 10:27; 1 Thess. 5:12 [-13]. [Do this] so that the God of peace may be among you and that the Lord Jesus Christ may recognise you as his sheep on the last day and set you on his right hand and say to you, "Come here, you blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom of your Father that was prepared for you from the beginning of the world," Matt. 25:34. To that end the eternal God help us all through Christ Jesus.

Amen.

D. P.

