

## **Sunday after Christ's Ascension;**

### **John 15:26 & 16:4**

*John 15:26-16:4*

*But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning. These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me. But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them. And these things I said not unto you at the beginning, because I was with you.*

1. The first part of this Gospel, referring to the Holy Spirit, we will reserve for consideration on Pentecost, at which time it is appropriate to state why Christ calls the Holy Spirit the Comforter and the Spirit of truth; also, how he distinguishes him from the Father and the Son, namely: He is the person who proceeds from, or is sent by, the Father and the Son; therefore, the Holy Spirit is called, at the same time, the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, that is, of Christ, as St. Paul and St. Peter respectively call him in Gal 4, 6, and 1 Peter 1, 11. It is here also testified that Christ is truly eternal God with the Father when he states that he and the Father send forth the Holy Spirit and bestow the same upon the Christian Church. This is stated more fully in the explanation of chapters 15 to 17 of the Gospel of St. John.

### **I. THE COMFORT CHRIST IMPARTS TO HIS DISCIPLES.**

2. But the Lord Jesus Christ speaks these words, and all of the discourse of these three chapters, before his departure and ascension, in order to comfort his beloved disciples, and not only the disciples but all Christians to the end of time, concerning all that shall happen to them in the world after he shall have left the world and gone to the Father; to comfort them when he is no longer visibly present with them and when he rules, not temporally but spiritually. He says these things that we may be strengthened and

comforted through faith in his Word, to withstand the great and serious trials which confront Christians on earth, as we shall further hear.

3. He often announced to them how the world would array itself against them because of their office. He plainly told them, in order to forewarn them, that the world would not agree with them, nor accept their doctrines. They had hitherto hoped that all the world, and more especially his own people, would gladly accept him. Now he tells them that the world will not only despise their teaching and regard their words as vain assertions of foolish men who preach about simply a crucified man, but will, for the sake of himself, hate and persecute them. In a word, he told them that they should not expect friendship and kindness of the world; he wished them to learn that his kingdom is in no respect a temporal one.

4. But Christ would not have them be dismayed by his words and think: What shall be the outcome of this? Shall we preach if no one will hear us - if even our own people are to become our enemies if we open our mouths to speak, not to think of what others will do? Let us be silent and let the world go its own way; let it believe and live as it chooses, rather than that we should speak only to be compelled, with shame and amid mockery, to remain silent. We should not be able to accomplish anything, for what are we and what can we poor, despised few do against so many, against the wisdom, power and might of the world? He would not discourage them; therefore he comforts and strengthens them beforehand with these words: *"But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall bear witness of me."*

5. Be it so, he says, even though they hate and persecute you for my name's sake, and though the devil, who is responsible for such hatred, aims thereby to prevent you from speaking; nevertheless they shall not be able to stifle and nullify your preaching, for after my departure, when they think that I am forever dead, another shall come whose mouth they shall not be able to shut. He will publicly testify of me and will speak before all the world, whether the world smile or be angry. This one, he says, shall be the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and is sent by me. If I now go to the Father, through suffering and death, and begin to reign in divine power and majesty, then I shall speak through him; not, as now, personally and with my weak human will, in this small corner of the world, but publicly and before all the world. For I will send him in such form that he shall be in you, and he shall be your Comforter, since you will obtain no comfort from the world. He shall give you courage and strength to withstand the enmity of the world and the fear of the devil, enabling you to confidently and publicly testify of me. This testimony of yours shall be called and be the testimony of the Holy Spirit, given by you in your official capacity. He shall be sent to you by the Father and by me, and you may know, and the world will be compelled to see, that what the Holy Spirit

shall say through you is by my power and authority, and according to the will and command of the Father.

6. This is the consolation which Christ gives the disciples to strengthen their faith. They would have need of it in their coming work for him. This promise is a promise to his whole Church that, after his resurrection and ascension, the word and teaching of the Holy Spirit shall at all times, so long as Christ sits at the right hand of the Father, testify through the apostles and their successors, and that this testimony shall remain in the world, no matter who hears it or hears it not. For the disciples were not to be concerned as to who did or did not hear and receive their testimony, but they should know, because it is the testimony of the Holy Spirit, that he would be present and working with them, to the end that some might believe. Nor should the world be able to hinder or prevent this, though it should rage against it with its hatred and persecution. Yea, even if no person on earth received their teaching, nevertheless the world should be reprov'd through the preaching of his Word. He says: The Holy Spirit will reprove the world, which will thus receive the judgment of its condemnation because it heard the preaching but nevertheless would not believe it and therefore has no excuse; as he said afterwards: *"If I had not come and spoken unto them," and "had not done among them the works which none other did, they had not had sin."*

7. Now, when he says: "Ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning," he thus presents the apostles as special examples for all preachers and confirms their preaching so that all the world is bound to their word, to believe the same without contradiction, and is assured that everything the apostles teach and preach is the true doctrine and the preaching of the Holy Spirit, heard and received from himself; as I Jn 1, 1-2 testifies, saying, "That which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we have beheld and our hands have handled concerning the Word of life .... declare we unto you." No other preachers on earth have testimony like that of the apostles; all others are commanded to follow in the footsteps of the apostles, to remain in the same doctrine, and to teach none other.

8. In addition, the true criterion is given by which the preaching of the Holy Spirit may be tested, when he says, "The Holy Spirit shall testify of me;" that is, he will preach nothing except concerning this Christ, not concerning Moses, Mohammed, or our own works. St. Peter says, in Acts 4, 12, "and in none other is there salvation, for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved," except through this crucified Christ. *"These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues, yea, the hour cometh, that whosoever killeth you shall think that he offereth service unto God."*

## **II. THE PROPHECY OF THE WORLD'S HATRED AND PERSECUTION OF BELIEVERS.**

### **A. Hatred and Persecution Analyzed.**

9. He pointed out clearly enough what should happen to them in the world as a result of their preaching. He mentions two sources of opposition to the Gospel, than which none could be stronger: One, that the preachers should be excommunicated and put to death; the other, that the persecutors would regard this as rendering a service to God. Who can withstand such persecution? or who will or can preach if those who testify of Christ shall be thus abusively treated and slain? Nevertheless, he has said that the Holy Spirit should testify of him and that they also should bear witness; and he assures them that their testimony shall not be effaced by this rage and persecution of the world. He gives them this assurance beforehand for the very purpose that they may know and be prepared against these same abuses.

10. Now, it is a strange and almost incredible thing to bear that not only the world shall oppose, with its bitter hatred and rage, Christ, the Son of God and its Saviour, but that also the apostles themselves must be offended at such judgment of the world. Who could ever conceive that Christ and his Gospel should be received in this manner among his own people, to whom he had been promised by God, and from whom they were to expect nothing but that which is good, as indeed they have received from him? But here you are told that the Gospel is a teaching which, according to human judgment, gives nothing but offense; that is, men regard it, not only as a great error or folly and justly mocked and despised of the world, but as a thing unworthy to be heard or tolerated - to be condemned as if it were the very devil's most dangerous gift from hell.

11. The kingdom of Christ on earth shall so come that it must be apparent to all that it is not an earthly kingdom, after the manner of men. But the world shall refuse to recognize its nature. It shall not be called the kingdom of Christ or of God, but a destruction and subversion of all good government, both spiritual and temporal. It is well nigh inconceivable that the Son of God should be so received by those who are called the people of God and who are regarded as the most irreproachable in the world; for he speaks here not of open, malicious, wicked knaves and godless men, but of those who are regarded as the most eminent, the wisest, the most holy, and, as he here says, the servants of God.

12. Hitherto no one has understood these words, nor can any one among the papists interpret the expression, "They shall excommunicate you" etc. They can say nothing else of this passage than that it is now an old and, in fact, a dead thing, referring to the Jews, who were a wicked and hardened people, that would not endure Christ and his apostles. It is hard to believe that even now there can be such wicked people on earth among Christians or in the Church as those who would excommunicate their brethren.

But it cannot be Jews nor Turks who are meant; they have nothing to do with the Church. Nor has it ever been known that among the papists any one of them was excommunicated or persecuted or killed for the sake of the Gospel or the knowledge of Christ. Then, of course, this sermon does not concern them, and gives them neither instruction nor comfort.

13. But we, thank God, have been compelled, by our experience as preachers of the Gospel, to learn something of Christ's meaning here and why he has spoken these things. We discover, in connection with the controversy concerning doctrine which we carry on with our adversary, that the papacy with its numerous adherents has been and still is composed of the tender, pious, holy people of whom Christ here speaks, who excommunicate his Christians for the Gospel's sake and think that thereby they are rendering service to God. They certainly did this when by force they suppressed the Gospel and compelled submission, the Church accepting and obeying their mandates, and when, if anyone dared a single opposing word, he was promptly burned at the stake.

14. To exterminate the accursed heretics and enemies of God was called doing a holy work for God. In our time, also, they have shown this spirit in many examples and still show it in their treatment of numerous pious people whom they foully put to death, solely on account of their confession of faith in Christ and God, and will not consent to spare their lives even were they willing to recant. Therefore this passage does not need many annotations other than that we learn from it the difference between the true and the false Church, and thereby receive strength and comfort in our hour of a similar persecution. In view of this, let us briefly examine the words of the Gospel.

15. The words, "they shall excommunicate you," are to be understood, as the Greek text clearly sets forth, in the sense of banishment and exclusion from the synagogue or the assembly of God's people and virtual separation from all fellowship of the Church, the offender being committed to the devil, to be cast into the abyss of hell, never to have any part in the kingdom of God, of grace and of everlasting salvation. This is, indeed, a severe and terrible word, at which every pious heart must be greatly affrighted.

16. It is an incontrovertible truth that God has given such authority and power to the Church that whoever is excommunicated by it is truly excommunicated by God; that is, is placed under the wrath and curse of God and deprived of all fellowship with the saints, as Christ says in Mt 18, 17-18: "What things soever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven," and again, "If he refuse to hear the church let him be unto thee as the gentile and the publican." What fate more terrible could happen to a man than to have the curse and imprecation of God and of all men pronounced upon him, and to be forever deprived of all comfort and salvation?

17. When, therefore, this ban and curse are pronounced, these other words of Christ must follow: "Whosoever killeth you shall think that he offereth service to God." This is the punishment and execution which the world thinks it must carry into effect upon those who are publicly excommunicated that they should, without any mercy, be exterminated from the earth. This penalty is to apply especially to such as oppose God's people with a new teaching and faith; just as the apostles were accused of preaching against the Law, the temple, and the people of God. Indeed, God specifically commanded in the Law that those who are guilty in these matters should not be permitted to live, but should be condemned without mercy, and that no one should favor his nearest friend nor brother, his son nor daughter, if an offender. Deut 13, 8. This, Christ says, shall also happen to you - you will be not only excommunicated by your own people and be put under the curse of God, but they will also carry out the sentence of punishment upon you as the enemies of God, and think that they can render no service more praiseworthy than to exterminate such accursed people, to the praise and glory of God. Thus, the disciples of Christ shall fare even as their Head and Lord himself fared; they shall be regarded as such evil, dangerous, corrupting, accursed people that everyone is in duty bound to assist in exterminating them from the earth; he who does this has performed a good work, one acceptable to God in heaven, and can render him no better obedience.

#### **IV. What Moved Christ to Prophecy Of this Hatred and Persecution.**

18. Behold, should not this persecution prove too heavy to be borne by the disciples? Christ tells them later that it shall be their lot to personally see and suffer such treatment, not only with reference to their Lord, in whom they believe, but also for themselves; that they, for Christ's sake, must be shamefully cursed and put to death by those who are called the people of God, and who possess the authority of the Church and command the honor and respect of men for not only doing right, but for serving God most zealously, as pious and holy people, ardently promoting the honor of God. What great tribulation must be in store for the rest of the little flock of Christ's Church, if these things happened in its beginning and first planting, when the Holy Spirit so powerfully manifested himself in miracles before the whole world! What better things could they later expect from idolatrous heathen, if they are to suffer these at the hands of their own brethren and friends, the Jewish people?

19. Christ's words, then, mean that the Church is to be established in a most wonderful manner, beyond and inconsistent with all human understanding. Who has ever heard that this is to be the way in which God will introduce Christ's kingdom upon earth, establish his Word in all places, and gather his Church, if it is to begin in such an inconsistent manner and to meet with such opposition that the dear apostles must, in shame and disgrace, yield up their lives and not they, with their few followers, but their

adversaries, bear the name of God's people and God's Church? This ought to be sufficient to drive out of the hearts of the disciples the erroneous delusion they had held concerning the temporal kingdom of Christ, and to teach them not to expect from it worldly and temporal good and honor and power and peace, but to perceive that he meant to give them something else, since he permitted them to suffer shame and death.

20. With this word of consolation, Christ prepares his disciples, and future Christians, assuring them that the Holy Spirit will testify of him in the face of so much discouragement, as was greatly needed. That the disciples could understand his words, must be due to the revelation of the Holy Spirit. How otherwise could they believe that this crucified, accursed and condemned Jesus, represented by his disciples and pupils, could be the true Son of God, the Lord of life and of eternal glory?

21. There is presented to us in this text a picture of the reception accorded this kingdom of Christ in the perverse, opposing kingdom of the world, concerning which God prophesied in the earliest promise of his Word - the promise in which the Church had its first beginnings - where God said to the serpent, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; he shall bruise (crush) thy head, but thou shalt bruise his heel." Gen 3, 15. This enmity, then, must continue in the world, an unending enmity and contest; as soon as Christ comes, teaching the Word, he meets the serpent, which immediately becomes venomous and at every opportunity attacks and bites with its poisonous fangs, for it fears the loss of its head. But in spite of all efforts, it has not yet gained anything and is still under the feet of the Seed of the woman, who tramples on its head, until its venom and wrath against him shall have been spent in vain and its power utterly destroyed.

22. We have the comfort of this victory of Christ - that he maintains his Church against the wrath and power of the devil; but in the meantime we must endure such stabs and cruel wounds from the devil as are necessarily painful to our flesh and blood. The hardest part is that we must see and suffer all these things from those who call themselves the people of God and the Christian Church. We must learn to accept these things calmly, for neither Christ nor the saints have fared better.

23. It was also a bitter and hard thing for our first parent, Adam, to learn to understand the fulfilment in his own children of this same truth, "I will put enmity between thee" etc., when his first born and God-given son murdered his own brother because of his offering to God and his obedience to him. The patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and others who, for the time being, were the true Church, had to pass through the same experience when brothers who had learned from the same father one and the same faith, Word and worship of God, became enemies and one received persecution at the hands of the other. We ought not to be surprised, then, if a similar experience must be ours, not alone at the hands of the papists, from whom we have already received condemnation and whose

disposition toward us is plainly apparent; but also at the hands of those who are still among us as evangelical Christians, and who yet are not upright.

### **C. The Cause of This Hatred and Persecution.**

24. This is the first part of this Gospel and prophecy of Christ. The second part now follows, explaining how it is that such worthy people, the best, the wisest and most holy among God's children, who earnestly seek to serve and honor God, should so bitterly and mercilessly persecute Christ and his people. *"These things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father nor me."*

25. There you have the reason. Christ tells what moves them to such hatred and persecution of Christians. It is, he says, because you preach concerning me, whom they do not know; for they jealously regard their own office of teaching and preaching in the capacity of chief-priest and scribe (and in this day of pope, bishop, etc.) repudiating all doctrine that differs from that of Moses and the Law. They rigidly follow the command of Moses in Deut 13, 6ff. How, then, shall the apostles be permitted to promulgate this utterly new doctrine concerning an unknown Messiah, one, too, whom they reject as a false prophet, yea, whom they have crucified as a deceiver and blasphemer? Who, in opposition to all recognized authority and intelligence, would acknowledge as Christ this executed victim? These so-called people of God boast to the apostles of their authority, saying, in Acts 5, 28: *"Did we not straitly charge you not to teach in this name?"*

26. That they do not know this Christ is true without a doubt. Their own confession and deeds prove it. It is plainly evident in what high esteem they hold themselves as being the people of God, who possess the Law, and the promise, the priesthood and worship of God (even as our people possess the Scriptures, baptism, the sacrament and the name of Christ); yet they are blind and without the true knowledge of God and of Christ, and consequently have become hardened, opposing God and his Son with their acts of ban and murder, under the very appearance and with the boast of thereby serving God. But Christ strengthens and comforts his own people that they may not fear harsh judgment, nor be intimidated by jealous authority from preaching and confession, but may say to their adversaries as the apostles answered the chief-priests and the council at Jerusalem, in Acts 5, 29: *"We must obey God rather than men."*

27. In this connection Christ fixes the standard of judgment and points out the difference between the true and the false Church. The Church is not to be judged by name and external appearance; but insight must be had and the identifying mark be forthcoming, by which the holy Church and the true people and servants of God may be recognized. Reason and human wisdom cannot furnish the necessary qualifications for the true Church. The actual test is in ascertaining who have the real knowledge of Christ



and who have it not. Judgment cannot be passed in this case according to mere external appearance and name, according to the office and authority and power of the Church; in all these externals the Jews excelled the apostles and the papacy excels us by far.

28. Accordingly, we concede to the papacy that they sit in the true Church, possessing the office instituted by Christ and inherited from the apostles, to teach, baptize, administer the sacrament, absolve, ordain, etc., just as the Jews sat in their synagogues or assemblies and were the regularly established priesthood and authority of the Church. We admit all this and do not attack the office, although they are not willing to admit as much for us; yea, we confess that we have received these things from them, even as Christ by birth descended from the Jews and the apostles obtained the Scriptures from them.

29. In view of these prerogatives, they make their perverse boast against us and censure and curse us as obstinate and recreant apostates and enemies of the Church. It is unpleasant to suffer such reproach, and for this reason the devil easily terrifies the hearts of some of the ignorant and overwhelms men with the thought: Alas! the Church has pronounced the ban and it really possesses the office; this is certainly a thing not to be made light of, for Christ says in Mt 18, 18: "What things soever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven." Therefore whom the Church excommunicates is undoubtedly also condemned by God. Most assuredly they do not excommunicate in the name of the devil, nor of the pope, but in the name of God the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, by the authority of Christ etc., embellishing the ceremony with appropriate and high-sounding and solemn words.

30. It is necessary to a thorough understanding of the matter that we understand what Christ here says concerning the two Churches: One is the Church which is not recognized by the world, but is robbed of its name and exiled; the other, the Church that has the name and honor but persecutes the small flock of believers. Thus we have the opposing situations: The Church which is denied the name is the true Church, whilst the other is not the reality, though it may occupy the seat of authority and power, and possess and perform all the offices conceded to be offices and marks of the holy Church and yet we are obliged to suffer its ban and judgment.

31. The reason for the difference in the two Churches is contained in Christ's saying: "Because they have not known the Father nor me;" that is, the false Church regards itself as superior to the teachings of Christ, when a knowledge of Christ is the very basis of distinction between the true and false Church. It is not enough merely to have the name and the office of the Church since these could be unlawfully assumed and abused; the second commandment and the second petition of the Lord's Prayer indicate that the name of God is often abused, not hallowed but blasphemed and dishonored. Hence, we must not be too ready to endorse the declaration: I say or do this in the name of God or

of Christ, and at the command and by the authority of the Church. But we should reply thus: I accept the name of God and of the Church as they are dear and precious to me; but I do not concede to you that in this name you should prescribe and sell whatever you please.

32. Thus we say to the papists: We grant you, indeed, the name and office, and regard these as holy and precious, for the office is not yours, but has been established by Christ and given to the Church without regard for and distinction of the persons who occupy it. Therefore, whatever is exercised through this office as the institution of Christ, and in his name and that of the Church, is at all times right and proper, even though ungodly and unbelieving men may participate. We must distinguish between the office and the person exercising it, between rightful use and abuse. The name of God and of Christ is always holy in itself; but it may be abused and blasphemed. So also, the office of the Church is holy and precious, but the person occupying it may be accursed and belong to the devil. Therefore, we cannot decide according to the office who are true or false Christians, and which is the true or false Church.

33. But the basis of distinction shall be: to know Christ or not to know Christ; that is, to know the doctrine and faith of Christ and to confess him. It is evident, as supported by Christ's own statement, that some know neither him nor the Father; it is determined by him that they are not the Church of Christ, rather that those constitute the Church who bear the name of Christ and have his truth, yet are persecuted by the others. Under authority of this conclusion, Christians are to be undaunted; they are not to be concerned even though they may be denounced as heretics and be cursed, but are to regard it as a comforting sign that they are the few who belong to Christ, when they are excommunicated by the majority in power. For excommunication certainly is not exercised among members of the false Church for the sake of the knowledge of Christ and of faith; their policy is to stand approved and unchastised, yea, they dare even to denounce crowned authority to the extent of curse and ban, protected as they are by the name and sanctity of the Church.

34. Now, what does it mean to know Christ and the Father? The papists, forsooth, boast of such a knowledge, even as the Jews boasted of being able to recognize the Messiah when he should come, Indeed, who should so well know the Messiah as the same Jews who possessed his Law and promises, his temple, priesthood etc., and who worshiped the true God, creator of heaven and earth and promiser of the Messiah? But here you learn that an intellectual knowledge of God is not sufficient - the Law and temple service cannot avail; he who wishes to know God truly, must know him in this Christ, that is, in the Word, in the promises which the Scriptures and the prophets have spoken concerning him. The teaching and preaching of the Gospel is nothing else than that Christ is the Son of God, sent by the Father as a sacrifice and ransom for the sin of the world, by his own blood, that he might appease the wrath of God and effect

reconciliation for us, redeeming us from sin and death and securing for us righteousness and everlasting life. It must follow, then, that no one, by his own work and holiness can atone for his sins - or appease the wrath of God, and that there is no other way to attain the grace of God and eternal life than by the faith which thus apprehends Christ.

35. This teaching points out the true Christ and the real knowledge of him. He who thus knows Christ, knows the Father also; for the knowledge of Christ teaches him that, for the sake of his Son, God will be gracious to us and will save us, that no one shall come to God except through him who is the bearer of our sins and is our mercy-seat, and that all this and nothing else is the eternal counsel, desire and will of God the Father.

36. This knowledge is the article of faith by which we become Christians, and it is the foundation of our salvation. Whenever, therefore, we have the knowledge of Christ, we must cease trusting and boasting in self-righteousness, in works and in worship of the God of the Jews merely performed according to the Law, and we must place no confidence in all the trumpery of the papal selfordained juggling and baubles; for if Christ alone shall bear my sins, I cannot at the same time atone for them by my own works and my own pretended worthiness.

37. The former Jewish saints would not, nor will our present papists, accept nor believe this preaching of Christ; they testify, then, by their own deeds that they do not know Christ nor the Father who sent him. The Jews meanwhile set up their own God, who has regard for their holiness - a holiness consisting in the Law, the priesthood and temple-service - and they set up a Christ who, when he comes, will be highly pleased with such holiness and, because of it, promote them to positions of great honor and glory before the whole world. If they hear the apostles preach that no one can be justified before God by the works of the Law, and that no other name is given whereby we can be saved than that of this crucified Christ, they will not suffer the doctrine, but must bitterly persecute its advocates, pronouncing the ban and condemning and slaying the apostles and the Christians.

38. Even so do the papists; they will not endure the teaching that we, for Christ's sake and not by our own works, may be accounted righteous before God and be saved. Even though they retain the name of Christ and of faith, yet they rob Christ of his work and power, justify the erroneous doctrine of human merit, and admit only that faith and Christ are indeed of some help if love and good works be present. This means simply that Christ does not count so much as our own works; but whatever merit he confers is because of our works, as they teach in the schools: *Propter unum quodque tale etc.*, and as they publicly say: Faith, which must always believe in Christ, is useless, void, yea, dead, does not avail, if it is not clothed and made alive by love, which is the soul and life of faith. They say that therefore Christ and faith may be found even in a person who is impenitent and lives openly in mortal sin. This is nothing else than to make Christ a

mere empty husk or container and to make out of works the grain and the gold; to regard Christ as a dead body but our works as the soul. When works are added to faith, they say, faith becomes a living body, a full container. This is a shameful and blasphemous interpretation of Christ, that his merit and power must be dependent upon our works, that he must receive his ability from them, and become a beggar of us for that which he should give us.

39. From these two convictions - that they do not know him and that they persecute and slay his advocates - Christ now passes the judgment that the so-called Church is not the Church. He then concludes that with their false doctrines and persecutions they are both liars and murderers of God and of Christ and of all his saints.

40. From the analysis given, you may decide for yourself in which group you are to be found; for you must be on one side or the other, and it is useless to wait for human council in this matter. It has already been unalterably determined that the two divisions can never agree. The larger body, which has the recognized authority, will always persecute the minority, even to the extent of excommunication and murder, as practiced from the beginning. Those who know Christ - the true Christians - will accept Christ's classification and be numbered with the minority, who have the Word and the knowledge of Christ, and they will suffer persecution for the faith rather than, for the sake of the friendship and honor of this world, to belong to those who, condemned by Christ, are the bitterest foes of God and of the Church, and who cannot see the kingdom of God, nor be saved.

41. In this article of faith, distinction must be made between the true Church and the false; for it is the command of God and of Christ that one shall not be confused with the other. Therefore, we must separate ourselves from the papal Church, regardless of the fact that they trust in their Church authority and condemn us as apostates.

42. If they excommunicate and persecute us because of our evangelical preaching and our knowledge of Christ, we already have the decision of Christ that they are not the true Church, and their office and all the authority of which they boast cannot avail against us; that rather our teaching and judgments against them shall avail before God in heaven. We are certain, by reason of the test which Christ here applies, that the true Church is with the few who know Christ and are united in doctrine, faith and confession of him. And where the true Church is and abides, there remain, also, the offices of the Church, the sacraments, the keys and all things to it by Christ; it needs neither to ask nor to receive them from pope or council. In the true Church, not only is the office pure in itself, but those who exercise it use it lawfully.

43. We admit that the papists also exercise the appointed offices of the Church, baptize, administer the sacrament etc., when they observe these things as the institution of

Christ, in the name of Christ and by virtue of his command (just as in the Church we must regard as right and efficacious the offices of the Church and baptism administered by heretics), yet if they attempt to pervert the right use of these offices by exercising them against us, we may, by virtue of the judgment of Christ, declare their action void and regard themselves as apostates of the Church of Christ.

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