

BASIC QUESTIONS AND BRIEF AND SIMPLE ANSWERS TO THE SAME

by Alexander Mack

Mack's foundational catechetical document from 1713, presenting basic religious questions with straightforward answers that address the fundamental beliefs of the Brethren movement as it emerged in Schwarzenau, Germany.

41 Chapters

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European Origins of the Brethren: A Source Book on the Beginnings of the Church of the Brethren in the Early Eighteenth Century. A collection of early 18th century primary source material, translated into English, that traces the start of the Schwarzenau Brethren. Compiled and translated by Donald F. Durnbaugh. The Brethren Press, 1958.

Eberhard Louis Gruber's Basic Questions which were especially submitted to be answered by the New Baptists of the Wittgenstein area along with the accompanying Brief and Simple Answers to the Same, previously published in manuscript by an ARTLESS MEMBER of the church at Wittgenstein and now publicly printed at the request of many.

[Gruber] In God Beloved Friends and Fellow Pilgrims: There have been several persons who have desired a somewhat more definite explanation and report about your new baptism and church fellowship, especially since that which has been said or even written about it from time to time has still left them in great uncertainty. In order to learn about your opinion more thoroughly and accurately and thereby dispel any further doubt in regard to it, these candid and herewith-presented questions are submitted to you. We expect your clear and frank answers upon these soon.

[Mack] Dear Friends: You have requested from us in love our motives. The Apostle Peter teaches believers (1 Peter 3:15) that they must always be ready to give an answer to anyone who calls them to account for the hope that is in them. For these reasons, we have not been able to evade this, but rather have very briefly answered these submitted questions in a simple fashion with frankness in love and in the certainty of faith. We wish to leave them to your examination before God.

Question 01: Do you maintain that for over one thousand years there has been no true and genuine ...

Question 01: Do you maintain that for over one thousand years there has been no true and genuine baptism, and, consequently, no true church on earth?

Answer: We maintain and believe that at all times God has had His church which observed the true baptism and ordinances. This was, however, always hidden from the unbelievers and often consisted of but few members. Despite this, the gates of hell could never prevail against the church of the Lord Jesus. It can also be proved from the histories that God has caused His ordinances to be revealed as a witness to the unbelievers at all times.

Question 02: Could the church of God have existed at any time and in any manner even with but few...

Question 02: Could the church of God have existed at any time and in any manner even with but few members, without the original and outward ordinance of baptism, as the Israelite church (according to Joshua 5:5-7) existed for considerable time in the wilderness without practicing circumcision?

Answer: The church of Christ is ordained in no other way by the true Master-Builder, Jesus Christ, than that it should observe His baptism and ordinances. Christ indeed ordained everything perfectly in His congregation or church through His apostles and teachers, and sufficiently confirmed it by signs and miracles. For this reason, the fact is incontestable that a congregation or church of Christ could never have existed without the baptism and ordinances as commanded by the true Founder. We do not deny that there could have been souls who were attracted in secret to the church of Christ. Whether, however, they followed and publicly professed Christ, or whether they preferred the honor of the world to the honor of God, we will not determine. As far as the Israelite church is concerned, it can be clearly seen that while in the wilderness the children had to bear the reproach of Egypt and suffer for the transgressions of their fathers! However, as soon as they were about to enter the promised land, and before they took the first city, Jericho, they first all had to be circumcised. God said to Joshua (5[:9]): "This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." Only after this did they dare to celebrate the Passover and not before. This is then a sign for us that as long as we walk in the wilderness and in great disorder and uncertainty - even though we have gone out of Egypt and have been rescued from gross sins by the mighty hand of God - we can still neither enter the house of God nor break the bread in the communion of Jesus and His members. God demands also of us that we should be baptized; He will indeed demand it of everyone, although perhaps in secret, if men will only listen to the inner voice and obey it with denial of self.

Question 03: Did, then, the church of God here on earth completely cease to exist during the time...

Question 03: Did, then, the church of God here on earth completely cease to exist during the time that the early ordinance of baptism was no longer observed?

Answer: If the early ordinance of baptism had ceased to exist, then, of course, the church of Christ would also have ceased to exist. Even if there had been souls here and there who lamented the great apostasy, they could not have been called a church. However, we believe, and it can also be shown from the ancient histories, that the early form of baptism as ordained by the ordinance of Christ has never ceased to exist. Consequently, the church has likewise never ceased to exist, even if there were but few members.

Question 04: How would you reconcile this with the promise of Jesus (Matthew 16:18) that the gate...

Question 04: How would you reconcile this with the promise of Jesus (Matthew 16:18) that the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church, and (28:20) that He will be with them always to the close of the age, and similar declarations?

Answer: This has already been answered because we believe that the gates of hell have not prevailed against the church of Christ; it has endured and will endure until the close of the age.

Question 05: What, then, do you think about the salvation of those undeniable witnesses of truth ...

Question 05: What, then, do you think about the salvation of those undeniable witnesses of truth who appeared from century to century, even during that time? Were they not members of Christ and His fellowship or true church which is united by the living spirit, just because they had not been baptized in accordance with the original ordinance?

Answer: Christ says (Matthew 7[:16]): "You will know them by their fruits." We believe that writing fine books and even prophesying are not the fruits of a good Christian, by which alone he is recognized. We cannot, therefore, consider a person to be a Christian for that alone. Yet, we will not judge anyone. Since we did not know those men in their lifetime, we leave them to their God. Neither all their writing nor even their prophesying can make us suspicious of the teaching of Jesus. We cannot consider them to be the church of Christ just because of their prophesying, if they did not walk in the teaching of Jesus, in baptism and the other ordinances.

Question 06: Are you not of the opinion that the baptismal ceremony which has so long been neglec...

Question 06: Are you not of the opinion that the baptismal ceremony which has so long been neglected must be re-established in these latter times, and if so, why do you think so? Has not rather the all-wise God permitted this ceremony (which is not exactly part of the essence of Christianity) to be done away with, like the circumcision of the Old Covenant, for the very reason that it is as yet imperfect and does not yet make anything perfect, so that He could introduce a new economy and housekeeping of the pure spirit for His people, as all prophetic promises have foretold?

Answer: We are of the opinion and believe as the apostle writes (Hebrews 7:12): "For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well." As long as the Levitical priesthood existed, just that long no one dared to annul the law, or circumcision, without incurring God's grave punishment and displeasure. However, when Christ came He introduced a law of life as the eternal High Priest and Son of God. He annulled the first law because it was too weak and could not make anyone perfect. He secured eternal redemption, revealed the paths to the Holy of Holies, and gave only laws of life. He confirmed His will or testament with His blood, so that we believe and profess that if an angel came from heaven and attempted to reveal another or better gospel, the angel would be accursed, according to the witness of Paul (Galatians 1:18). Therefore, we believe that the teaching of Jesus the crucified must be kept until He himself shall come again and take vengeance with flaming fire upon those who were not obedient to His gospel, according to Paul's witness (2 Thessalonians 1:8). For this reason, then, the teachings of Jesus are rightly to be observed by believers in these days. However, there are no commandments for unbelievers.

Question 07: Are you not compelled to recognize and admit that in that particular case [baptism] ...

Question 07: Are you not compelled to recognize and admit that in that particular case [baptism] a direct divine calling is necessary and required for the re-establishment, just as well as for its first institution, which calling, according to the testimony of the Scriptures and the general confessions, has always been present at such great reformations of the church?

Answer: We do indeed believe that a direct calling and impelling by the Spirit of God is necessary for the practicing of the teachings of Christ. That, however, this calling must be confirmed and manifested before men by signs or miracles, we will not presume to dictate to God. If the calling is of God, it is sufficient, whether men believe it or not. This must be left up to the individual.

Question 08: Can any one of you stand up who is willing to state, upon his conscience and respons...

Question 08: Can any one of you stand up who is willing to state, upon his conscience and responsibility in the hour of his death and on the Day of Judgment, that he had received such a direct calling from God to re-establish the ordinance of baptism which was so long neglected, and with it to form an entirely new church of Christ here on earth such as has not existed since the time of the apostles and the early Christians?

Answer: When the Pharisees sent from Jerusalem and asked John whether he was the Christ or a prophet because he was baptizing, he answered: "I baptize you with water (for repentance), but among you stands one whom you do not know; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" [John 1:26; Matthew 3:11]. We likewise say in simplicity that we baptize in water only upon faith in Christ, who lets His voice be heard in the hearts of men in these days. Oh, if we would only follow Him and would know Him rightly, He would be the only one, and remain so forever, who shall establish, sanctify, and cleanse a church in this time with the "washing of water with the word" (Ephesians 5:26). No man would dare to appropriate this for himself, or declare before men that he was sent by God to establish a church, but he would gladly leave the honor to God. Even though God may use some as special instruments for this, they only need to be tested whether they are sent by God, as John says (3:34): "For he whom God has sent utters the words of God."

Question 09: Of what does this direct calling consist? How can you justify and present this to th...

Question 09: Of what does this direct calling consist? How can you justify and present this to the hearts and consciences of those who are still among the sects, as well as to those who have already withdrawn from them, for their outward or inward conviction?

Answer: The direct calling consists in the fact that the person is made inwardly exceedingly certain of it by the Spirit of God, and is not concerned whether men believe it or not. Jesus himself says (John 6:43, 44): "Do not murmur among yourselves. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." It is equally true that no one can come to the teaching of Christ unless he lets himself be drawn by the Father. Whoever follows the guiding of the Father will easily recognize who the called and elect faithful are.

Question 10: May it not properly be expected after the truth that if this work were indeed from G...

Question 10: May it not properly be expected after the truth that if this work were indeed from God and you had received this direct divine calling to it, well-meaning souls would have gathered by the thousands? Would not the same thing have happened as that which took place at the first Pentecost of the New Testament under the direction of the Spirit at that time, and through the power of Jesus Christ in and on the apostles of the Lord?

Answer: Christ says (Matthew 24) to His followers that they should take heed especially in these days that no man lead them astray. He does not say that men will flock to His gospel by the thousands in such miserable times as these are, unfortunately, when love has grown cold in many hearts. Indeed, even the well-meaning souls do not come very willingly to the discipleship of Jesus, where all must be denied if Christ is to be followed rightly. On the contrary, Christ speaks of this time that the great abomination of desolation will be revealed. It only says that we must take refuge in the hills - that is, in the teachings of Jesus the crucified, which is exalted by all believers and is the city of God and the mountain of Zion, as stated in Hebrews 12:22, 23. Here, all true believers have always taken refuge. Many cannot even take their wives or children along, just as it happened to Lot, even though he was led by angels through a divine calling to escape destruction. Despite this, his friends found it ridiculous; yes, he even had to leave his wife on the way. For this reason, Christ urges His followers very briefly to bear this in mind, saying (Luke 17:32): "Remember Lot's wife."

Question 11: Is water baptism so absolutely necessary that positively no one can be saved without...

Question 11: Is water baptism so absolutely necessary that positively no one can be saved without it, no matter how holy and irreproachable his belief and life are otherwise?

Answer: We believe and profess that in the Old and New Testaments blessing and salvation are promised only to the faithful. We can see the way in which the faithful have been minded and disposed at all times in the believing Abraham, the father of all the faithful. He was obedient to God in everything, and therefore obtained the promise because of his living faith which effected works of obedience. Hence, we believe that if a man lives in a holy and perfect way, and his life is effected by true faith in Christ, it will indeed be easier for him to have faith to be obedient to water baptism than it was for Abraham to sacrifice his son. When, however, this person still argues with his God, saying, "Of what use is this water for me?" this "holy life" is nothing but self-righteousness. Man seeks to establish it as did the Jews, about whom Paul speaks (Romans 10:9, 10). No salvation is promised to such selfish holiness. Christ is the fulfillment of the Law. Whoever believes in Him is justified. Faith in Christ produces obedience and submission to all of His words and commandments.

Question 12: Does not the principal passage of Mark 16:16 prove the very contrary, where Jesus pr...

Question 12: Does not the principal passage of Mark 16:16 prove the very contrary, where Jesus prudently says: "...he who does not believe (not he who is not baptized) will be condemned?"

Answer: We do indeed believe and profess that eternal life is not promised because of baptism, but only through faith in Christ (John 3:15, 18). Why should a believer not wish to do the will of Him in whom he believes? If it is the will of Christ that a believer should be baptized, then it is also the will of the believer. If he thus wills and believes as Christ wills, he is saved, even if it were impossible for him to receive baptism. Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son Isaac, but it did not happen; the son was not sacrificed. Yet obedience was fulfilled, and the blessing was received. Therefore, a believer who desires to be baptized, but cannot obtain it because of necessity - like the criminal on the cross - is still saved. If, however, a man does not desire to be baptized, he is rightly to be judged as unbelieving and disobedient, not because of the baptism, but because of his unbelief and disobedience. Christ has rightly said, "He who believes..." [Mark 16:16]. If He had made salvation dependent on the water, men would be much more willing to be baptized, and retain their own will in other things. The Antichrist does this in assigning salvation to the water only, although the person lives otherwise as he pleases.

Question 13: If water baptism is so absolutely necessary, why did Christ not mention it in His Se...

Question 13: If water baptism is so absolutely necessary, why did Christ not mention it in His Sermon on the Mount when speaking of the Beatitudes (Matthew 5)? Why did He not make the least mention of it in His description of the judgment (Matthew 25), where He deals especially with all those who should be saved or condemned?

Answer: It is surprising how little men recognize the pure mind of God! Christ indeed speaks (Matthew 5) about many kinds of blessings. We might well ask from where such blessings may be obtained. Christ says: "Blessed are the meek..." [Matthew 5:5]. Now notice well how Christ calls (Matthew 11:28, 29), "Come to me... and learn from me." Therefore, we profess that Christ alone is the Savior. Whoever wishes to be blessed, as He preaches in Matthew 5, must necessarily accept Him in true faith, and must submit himself to Him in obedience, as clay in the hands of its potter. It is He who must make everything new and save all, and of Him all of the prophets have spoken. God himself refers to His Son. Since then, Christ, as Savior and as the Good Physician, considers baptism necessary for believers, obedience to this commandment of baptism is also necessary for salvation. Even though Christ counts as blessed (Matthew 25) those who fed and clothed Him - and mentioned nothing of the new creature or rebirth about which He spoke (John 3), that without rebirth no one could enter the Kingdom of God, and at the latter place in turn did not say anything about visiting Him in prison or feeding His members - who would think that He counts as blessed in Matthew 25 those who were unrebored men or unbelievers, merely because of their outward works? Oh, no! Who would assume that they despised baptism? I believe that not a single person was among them who despised water baptism. There may have been some who were not baptized out of necessity, but not out of contempt for it.

Question 14: How can you prove that John the Baptist was himself baptized, for he said to Christ ...

Question 14: How can you prove that John the Baptist was himself baptized, for he said to Christ (Matthew 3:14): "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" Or was he perhaps saved by a special exception?

Answer: Many questions could be asked in the same way: Where were Peter and John baptized, or where was this or that saint of the Old Covenant circumcised? More questions might be raised than would tend to edification toward God in faith. Paul records (1 Timothy 1[:4]) that there were even men who concerned themselves with endless genealogies. Nevertheless, we will also answer this in patience. John was indeed willing to be baptized by Christ, and desired this. We ascribe salvation to this faith, according to Scripture, and not to baptism. Even though it does not state explicitly in the Scriptures that he was baptized, at any rate it does say that he did not despise baptism. In addition, John will not be found among those who say, "Oh, of what use is water baptism for me?" Rather, he showed his obedience to Christ, as Abraham showed his obedience to God in the offering of his son. The son was not sacrificed, yet the obedience was fulfilled.

Question 15: Were, then, all those who lived and died after the time of the early Christians who ...

Question 15: Were, then, all those who lived and died after the time of the early Christians who did not receive baptism in the original form completely lost and damned even though they faithfully observed the rules of Christ and true Christianity in all other respects - some even spending their blood and lives for it - only because they were content with their baptism received in infancy out of ignorance or lack of a higher motivation?

Answer: If they had had the same experience as Abraham when he offered his son, namely, that they had the true faith in Jesus, which is the foundation of all the rules of true Christianity, they were certainly saved. They were certainly saved even if they had not obtained outward baptism, perhaps in times of persecution or because of other circumstances. However, if they thought that their infant baptism was valid, then they were of course ignorant of the fundamentals of the Christian religion. They will probably have lived up to the fundamentals of Christianity to a small degree or not at all. They will scarcely have achieved the new creation which alone is acceptable before God. Still, we will not judge those who lived many years ago, but leave them to their God. However, similar ignorance of men today who perhaps oppose baptism because of lack of knowledge will not help them at all on the Day of Revelation.

Question 16: Does not the commandment of baptism apply also to children, as did the commandment o...

Question 16: Does not the commandment of baptism apply also to children, as did the commandment of circumcision in the Old Covenant? Consequently are not children in danger of forfeiting their salvation as long as they are not baptized? Also, will they not be damned if they die without baptism?

Answer: Just as circumcision did not concern children before the eighth day - to have circumcised before that time would have even been a violation of circumcision - the baptism commanded of believers does not concern children before they are able to profess their faith. The eighth day of circumcision is a prefiguration of this.

Question 17: Were children damned in the Old Covenant who died without having received circumcisi...

Question 17: Were children damned in the Old Covenant who died without having received circumcision? If so, how are the comforting words of David (2 Samuel 12:23) to be understood which he spoke about his child conceived with Bathsheba that died on the seventh day?

Answer: The children who died before the eighth day had violated the commandment of circumcision as little as the female infants who were not circumcised at all, which did not hinder their salvation in any way. Enoch led a godly life, attained many hundred years, and was not circumcised; yet he was obedient to God, for that was not demanded of him. This is the way of God's commandments: where there is no law, there is no violation; where there is no violation, there is no punishment.

Question 18: At what age then are the children to be baptized? Is it not proper to use all dilige...

Question 18: At what age then are the children to be baptized? Is it not proper to use all diligence to help them to be baptized as early as at all possible, even in their infancy?

Answer: Children are to be presented to the Lord Jesus in prayer, but baptism should be delayed until they are able to prove and profess their faith. This may be considered the "eighth day" or the first day of the new creation of a person. If they were to be baptized in their state of ignorance, it would be as if the Jews had practiced circumcision before the eighth day. This would have been a violation of circumcision rather than an obedient act.

Question 19: Are not the children as capable of being baptized as of having faith (according to L...

Question 19: Are not the children as capable of being baptized as of having faith (according to Luke 1:41-44; Matthew 18:3; Luke 18:16, 17; 1 Corinthians 7:14, etc.) even though they do not know how to express this with many words as do the adults? Is this not in accordance with the Word (Mark 16:16) that it is not so much a matter of an easily deceptive oral profession of faith as the truth of faith itself?

Answer: There is only one example of this in Scripture. John was moved in his mother's womb through the Holy Spirit because he was a child of the promise and was to be a forerunner of the Lord. Yet, it is obvious that he could not have been circumcised in his mother's womb but only after he was born. Despite this, they waited with circumcision until the eighth day. Therefore, even the moving of Saint John did not cause a change in the plan of God concerning circumcision. Rather, he was circumcised like all other children on the eighth day. It is exactly the same with baptism. Even if the children of believing parents were to move in their mothers' wombs, they would have to wait with baptism until they were born. Again, once they were born, they would have to wait until they were moved by the Holy Spirit to desire baptism with specific words. Only then might they be baptized, because outward water baptism requires an outward expression of desire, as may be seen from Christ himself (Matthew 3:13). This desire must be effected by the true faith in the Lord Jesus. Otherwise, it is not permissible to baptize a child. Salvation is not dependent upon the water, but only upon the faith, which must be proved by love and obedience.

Question 20: Does it not run counter to the evangelical character of the New Covenant to make an ...

Question 20: Does it not run counter to the evangelical character of the New Covenant to make an outward ceremony indispensably necessary for salvation? Is this not rather identical with the doctrine of the old Law-zealots against whom Paul wrote so emphatically in his letters to the Galatians and the Colossians?

Answer: We do not make of outward baptism anything else than what is commanded by Scripture. Since it says that believers should be baptized, we consider it disobedience to oppose that which God has commanded. Whoever opposes God in one thing - even if it is as insignificant as outward baptism - such a person will be properly punished for this disobedience. However, I do not think that a single commandment of the Lord Jesus dare be considered insignificant, if we consider the power and might of the Sovereign without reluctance. Concerning that about which Paul wrote to the Galatians and Colossians, it has only to do with the laws of the servant Moses, because they were too weak (see Hebrews 7:18). The Galatians wanted to follow these laws in order to be spared the cross of Christ and to set aside the teachings of Jesus. Paul reminded them of the baptism when he wrote: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27). Consequently, Paul is not at all against baptism, but rather for it.

Question 21: If baptism is made an absolutely necessary commandment for salvation, will this not ...

Question 21: If baptism is made an absolutely necessary commandment for salvation, will this not introduce a new papacy, and bring about salvation by works?

Answer: It has been testified sufficiently above that we do not seek to earn salvation with these simple works, but by faith in Christ alone. If it is to be a saving faith, it must produce works of obedience. Where that faith is not present which produces obedience (not according to the pope's doctrine and command but rather by the command of Jesus the crucified), then no salvation is promised for a single work done without faith.

Question 22: Can the outward ban be an essential part of the church of Christ, when Christ himself...

Question 22: Can the outward ban be an essential part of the church of Christ, when Christ himself did not practice or enforce it even upon Judas, who was wicked through and through?

Answer: The ban is an essential and necessary part of the church of Christ, as long as it remains in combat here in this wicked world among wolves and evil spirits. There can be no church of Christ without the ban. Otherwise, the devil and his leaven of wickedness would soon contaminate the good. The true believers have never rejected this, insofar as they have remained in the faith. They have considered it an evidence of divine grace and the great love and solicitude of God. They have used it as a firm wall around the church of the Lord. Concerning Judas, we maintain that Christ did sufficiently exercise the ban upon him. He turned him over to Satan so that he hanged himself. The fact that he was not placed in the ban by Jesus before his outward act is not against the ban, but rather in its favor. This has always been the plan of God, as can be seen in Adam. He most probably had had contact with the Tempter before, but he was not driven from Paradise until he had actually eaten of the forbidden fruit. Similarly, Judas had earlier considered treachery, but the long-suffering Jesus had borne with him, tolerated him, and urged him to repentance, until evil finally gained the upper hand and committed the evil deed. After that, he came sufficiently under the ban of Christ. The ban was practiced properly upon Judas.

Question 23: Is not the binding and loosing of the apostles a prerogative granted only to them, w...

Question 23: Is not the binding and loosing of the apostles a prerogative granted only to them, which dare not be usurped by anyone else?

Answer: That the loosing and binding is a special prerogative of the apostles is true. It is, however, of the following manner. Moses had a special prerogative in that the Law was revealed to the house of Israel through him, but despite this it was not a prerogative which meant that the Law was to die with the death of Moses; rather, the descendants submitted themselves in obedience, insofar as they were faithful to God, to that which was revealed by Moses in the house of God. Christ, the true Householder, has likewise founded a church and household and has given to His apostles, as the elect witnesses, the prerogative that they should introduce the ordinances of the house of God and confirm them by signs and miracles. This was so that none of their descendants should presume to introduce other ordinances, perhaps out of impertinence or arrogance, but that they should willingly submit themselves to the ordinances by which the apostles were appointed the stewards over God's mysteries. Since, then, the ban was commanded by Christ and His apostles, their prerogative is rightly left to them. But the believers must subject themselves to it in faith, and exercise it without the respecting of persons.

Question 24: Did Christ institute a universal law for the church of the New Testament with the wo...

Question 24: Did Christ institute a universal law for the church of the New Testament with the words of Matthew 18:17, or did He not rather speak of it with special regard to the character of the Jews? Did He not, in addition, give His followers a completely different lesson in the following twenty-first and twenty-second verses?

Answer: We have shown above that Christ has given a universal law for His church with the words of Matthew 18:17. They are by no means annulled by the following twenty-first and twenty-second verses, but are rather confirmed by them. This is still more clearly expressed in Luke 17:4, where Christ says: "...if he (your brother) sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, and says, 'I repent,' you must forgive him." Without the admission of the sin, there is no forgiveness of sin, not even by God. Just so must believers be minded that if the sinner admits his sin, he must be forgiven. If he does not acknowledge it, then the ban is rightly to be exercised, as Christ says (Matthew 28[20]): "...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."

Question 25: Did the apostles ever forbid administering the necessary spiritual or physical servi...

Question 25: Did the apostles ever forbid administering the necessary spiritual or physical services of love to a banned person?

Answer: The apostles have never forbidden the administering of the necessary spiritual or physical services to a banned sinner. Rather, the banned person should be called to repentance; if he does not listen or accept it, then one is at liberty. It is the same with physical things - if there is an abundance of goods and the banned person is in need, he should be shared with as necessary.

Question 26: Have you, the New Baptists, ever had the same divine effect and result with some of ...

Question 26: Have you, the New Baptists, ever had the same divine effect and result with some of those whom you have banned as did the apostles?

Answer: We firmly believe that the ban has an inner effect and result here and now with all those on whom we have exercised it according to the Word of God. On the Day of Revelation it will indeed become outwardly manifest if they have not repented during this time of grace. However, it has not yet happened that men were immediately struck dead as was Ananias. This was recorded only once even of the apostles. Many were put into the ban by the apostles, but no other died outwardly like this. Nevertheless, the power of the ban had its full effect upon them.

Question 27: Is the true spiritual rebirth inseparable from water baptism?

Question 27: Is the true spiritual rebirth inseparable from water baptism?

Answer: The spiritual rebirth is nothing else than true and genuine obedience toward God and all of His commandments. A reborn person will readily say with Christ (Matthew 3:15): "...it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." We can, therefore, answer that the desire for obedience toward water baptism is inseparable from the true rebirth. If because of necessity, but not out of contempt or dis- obedience, water baptism does not take place, it will not be of harm for the rebirth.

Question 28: Are all of those whom you baptize immediately reborn of God in truth?

Question 28: Are all of those whom you baptize immediately reborn of God in truth?

Answer: That would indeed be a good baptism, if all those whom we baptize in water were truly reborn. It cannot be proved that all of those baptized by Christ and the apostles turned out well. If, however, true faith is present, and the Word is grasped or accepted in the water bath by faith, then a considerable rebirth or cleansing occurs in the "washing of water with the word" (Ephesians 5:26).

Question 29: Could not a person be truly reborn even before he is baptized, since water baptism -...

Question 29: Could not a person be truly reborn even before he is baptized, since water baptism - as you yourselves will not deny - does not insure the true, spiritual rebirth?

Answer: Adam was created in Paradise in the image of God. When he was disobedient to his God, he lost his divine stature and had to accept the curse and death because of his disobedience. Therefore, a person may, of course, have attained a goodly proportion of rebirth before water baptism. But unless he becomes ever more obedient and humble, he may very easily lose again that which he had previously attained. The food of the new creation, then, for its sustenance and growth, is true obedience to the Lord Jesus. If they do not eat this food - which is indeed the food of the new creation (John 4:34) - but eat the food of the serpent - which is disobedience in manifold wisdom and cleverness against the Word - then the same thing will happen to them as happened to Adam in Paradise. Since, then, water baptism is commanded by Christ, each reborn person must humble himself in obedience and fulfill this righteousness.

Question 30: Is not the true brotherhood of Christians founded much rather upon rebirth than upon...

Question 30: Is not the true brotherhood of Christians founded much rather upon rebirth than upon water baptism?

Answer: The true brotherhood of Christians has always been founded upon true faith and obedience to Jesus Christ and His gospel. Therefore, true brethren in Christ have never been able to refuse outward water baptism, because they observed it in their first-born Brother, who also commanded it of them. He, Christ himself, considers only those His brethren who do the will of God (Matthew 12:50).

Question 31: Are not those who have proved their rebirth by their lives before God and man to be ...

Question 31: Are not those who have proved their rebirth by their lives before God and man to be considered rightfully as brethren, even though they have not been baptized? (See Matthew 12:49, 50.)

Answer: We indeed consider brethren all those who prove their rebirth by their lives before God and man. However, they will not oppose water baptism, but will let themselves be baptized upon their faith and inner motivation. Christ himself considered only those His brethren who were His disciples, and who had been baptized. (See Matthew 12:49, 50 correctly.)

Question 32: Can you testify before the countenance of Jesus Christ, the omniscient Searcher of h...

Question 32: Can you testify before the countenance of Jesus Christ, the omniscient Searcher of hearts and Judge of the living and the dead, that you yourselves have always been one heart and one soul?

Answer: God does not require of us that we should be at this time in the perfection of one heart and one soul. We cannot say that we are completely one in spirit, but we must be one in purpose. That is, we must help one another until we all attain to the same faith and to that unity of fullness in faith of which Ephesians speaks (4:11-13). No one can say that the church at Jerusalem was one heart and one soul in the state of perfection. In the beginning they were united in their discipleship of Christ with denial of everything worldly. That they were not one in understanding may be seen in Acts 15:5, etc. Those who came from Jerusalem taught differently about circumcision than did the apostles. They had great trouble in working toward unity. It is therefore surprising that this perfect unity is demanded of us in these dreadful days, in which darkness and gloom cover all peoples. Indeed, those who boast of the inward baptism of the spirit are so disunited that they show only ignorance and discord even in the plain and clear commandments of water baptism, as well as in other fundamental points of faith.

Question 33: Do you not regard your church as superior to those of all other Baptist-minded [Tauf...

Question 33: Do you not regard your church as superior to those of all other Baptist-minded [Taufgesinnte] of these or previous times, and if so, in which way and why?

Answer: It is true that we consider our church fellowship superior to these now-deteriorated Baptists [Mennonites], with whom we are acquainted, and whom we know. The reason is that they have deteriorated in doctrine and life, and have strayed far from the doctrine and life of the old Baptists [Anabaptists]. Many of them notice this and realize it themselves. We cannot answer concerning the previous Baptists, because we did not know them in life. We are completely agreed with them as far as their doctrine is concerned, which does not teach anything in contradiction to the gospel.

Question 34: What are your reasons for considering your newly established church, the practices o...

Question 34: What are your reasons for considering your newly established church, the practices of baptism, ban, etc., equal to those of the apostles, inasmuch as you can prove neither your divine calling, talents, nor results in your lives?

Answer: We consider ourselves far inferior to and still unworthy in the matter of power of working miracles, as compared to the apostles. Concerning the doctrine and the intention, we must pray to God that He might make us resemble the intention of the apostles, yes, even His Son Jesus.

Question 35: Can and dare your teachers and elders bring the testimonies of their consciences bef...

Question 35: Can and dare your teachers and elders bring the testimonies of their consciences before God that the Holy Spirit established them as shepherds in their churches to look after their flock as churches of God? Do they possess and can they demonstrate the spiritual gifts required and necessary for this, as given in Second Corinthians 6, etc.?

Answer: Of course, they must be able to bring it before God; otherwise they would not be true shepherds. They should not be worried or grieved if men do not believe this, but rather rejoice, if their names are cast out as evil by the people (Luke 6:22).

Question 36: Must they not admit before God in their souls that many among them were much more lo...

Question 36: Must they not admit before God in their souls that many among them were much more loving, meek, humble, and so forth before their baptism than afterwards?

Answer: Our answer to this is "No," unless it would be for those who were cut off as withered branches, or unless this meant the simulated love which is feigned for the sake of bread or honor, and which does not punish sins and errors. This kind of love says: "Leave me alone in my own will, opinion, and actions, and I will leave you alone in yours; we will love each other and be brethren." If this is meant, then we confess that it is true. Unfortunately, we stayed long enough in this pernicious hypocritical love, while we were still among the Pietists. Now we have learned, and must continue to learn, that kind of love which hates and punishes wickedness and evil.

Question 37: Is it not true that you began your new baptism with much uncertainty and wavering an...

Question 37: Is it not true that you began your new baptism with much uncertainty and wavering and have continued in this way up to now? Has this not also been shown in other things, as, for example, you once rejected the married state, and then soon permitted it again - once did away with work, then introduced it again?

Answer: We have begun the baptism of the Lord Jesus in accordance with His command in great assurance of faith. The dear God has sustained and confirmed us in this to this day by His grace amidst great opposition. We indeed can say with great certainty that those who believe should be baptized. But it is true that we had to continue discussions on marriage, work, yes, and still other matters, after the baptism. Before our baptism, when we were still among the Pietists, we were not taught otherwise by those who were deemed great saints. Therefore, we had much contention until we abandoned the errors which we had absorbed.

Question 38: On which point, then, can the undoubted divinity of your new church be recognized be...

Question 38: On which point, then, can the undoubted divinity of your new church be recognized before all others in the whole world?

Answer: We indeed have neither a new church nor any new laws. We only want to remain in simplicity and true faith in the original church which Jesus founded through His blood. We wish to obey the commandment which was in the beginning. We do not demand that undoubted divinity be recognized in our church fellowship. Rather, we would wish that undoubted divinity might indeed be recognized in Christ himself, and then in the church at Jerusalem. If this and its divinity in teaching, words, and commandments were to be acknowledged, then it could be determined whether a church has this divine teaching in it or not. If this is realized, then we think that it would be sufficient to recognize a church before all other churches in the whole world, if she is subject, as a true wife to her husband Christ, to His commands, yes, if it still strives to be even more submissive. Whoever has not known Christ in the divinity of His commandments will hardly recognize His church even if the twelve apostles were serving as its bishops and teachers.

Question 39: Are you yourselves assured, and have you already received the eternal assurance in t...

Question 39: Are you yourselves assured, and have you already received the eternal assurance in the divine test of fire, that God himself recognizes you and would have you recognized? How do you propose to prove this and make it credible?

Answer: We must certainly have assurance before God, as Paul describes it (Romans 5[:1, 2]): "Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God." This assurance, however, is no longer promised, as it was also promised to the apostles, by the Lord Jesus (John 15:7): as long as they abide in Him, and His word abides with them, they are His rightful disciples. Whatever they asked for would be granted them. Thus it remains: he that is faithful in the teachings of Jesus, even to the end, will be saved.

Question 40: Do you expect a better outcome for your church than that of the former Anabaptists? ...

Question 40: Do you expect a better outcome for your church than that of the former Anabaptists? From where should this come? What is the assurance of your souls before and from God, who is impartial and who utterly humiliates and destroys all that is high and exalted, even all sects that pride and seek only themselves?

Answer: If we remain in the teaching of the New Testament, we expect this outcome, namely, that the fulfillment of our faith will be eternal life. In return for insignificant shame and suffering, we will obtain immeasurably momentous glory. We cannot testify for our descendants - as their faith is, so shall be their outcome. Nevertheless, we can say this, that the outcome of the former Baptists has turned out far better than that of all other religions. The Baptist seed is still far better than the seed of Luther, Calvin, and also that of the Catholics. These have had a completely wild, yes, bestial outcome, which is self-evident. The Jews and the Turks are scandalized by the horrible wickedness of these three religions. Not even with gallows and torture can they keep them, who are of one faith, from murdering one another in their homes, which happens often enough. What is still more horrible, they go publicly to war, and slaughter one another by the thousands. All this is the fruit of infant baptism. No Baptist will be found in war, and few in prison or on the gallows because of their crimes. The majority of them are inclined to peacefulness. It is still possible to sleep unconcernedly among them and not need to fear robbery or even murder if one has much money. It would indeed be desirable that the whole world were full of these "deteriorated" Baptists. Their outcome has turned out far better than that of many from among the Pietists who have again taken an evil turn. Hardly had they left the great Babel several years before than they voluntarily returned to it. When the beginning is like this, the outcome will be very miserable and wretched. May God keep all Baptists in His grace so that they may not turn toward evil once more and then their outcome will be as mentioned above, namely, the eternal life of joy.

[Gruber] These are the most urgent questions about your new baptism and church, that were deemed necessary to present at this time to you, dear friends, for your own sake as well as that of others. You may now consider them, and prepare your corporate, clear, and candid explanations with your accompanying reasons. You should do this in such a manner as you can dare to account for such an important matter before the countenance of Jesus Christ, all His holy angels, and the elect on the inevitable day of most strict examination of this, your new work, without contradicting His noble Spirit in your consciences or those of others.

[Mack] Beloved Friends: Upon your request, we have published in love these answers to every one of the forty points of the searching questions which you have submitted to us upon our good consciences before God. They are answered according to our faith and good conscience before the God who sent His Son out of love to the world that we should hear, believe, and have eternal life through our faith in Him. If, then, your salvation and blessedness are dear to you, hasten and bow your necks under the scepter of this great King. Believe that His teaching is true and His

baptism is saving and blessed for poor sinners. Do not say, "Of what use is this water for me?" and do not try to comfort yourselves with your infant baptism, which was introduced into the world in contradiction to God's Word. Otherwise, may this simple testimony (which is published by the Baptists at Schwarzenau upon urgent appeal) be a witness along with your own consciences, at the great Day of Judgment of the Lord Jesus, who will come with flaming fire to take vengeance on those who were disobedient to His gospel. Now, to the strangled Lamb, who alone has might and power in heaven and on earth, be praise, honor, and glory, from eternity to eternity. Amen. "Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, every one who pierced him" [Revelation 1:7]. Amen.

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