

Arnold's words blow on the simmering coals of our hearts  
and set us on fire for Christ. — **Sister Helen Prejean**

J. Heinrich Arnold

# Discipleship



Living for Christ in the Daily Grind

Foreword by Henri J. M. Nouwen

# Discipleship

J. Heinrich Arnold

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**D**iscipleship is not a question of our own doing;  
it is a matter of making room for God  
so that he can live in us.

*J. H. Arnold*

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I am very grateful for this book. It is a prophetic book in a time in which few people dare to speak unpopular but truly healing words.

I pray that those who read this book won't be afraid to be confronted, and I trust that the word of God that comes to them through it will bring true comfort, true consolation, true hope, and true courage.

Henri J.M. Nouwen







Arnold's Christ-centeredness gave him an unusual courage to confront sin. He could not tolerate indifference to the demands of the Gospel. But just as he fought evil in others, he fought it in himself, and the fight was never against a person, but against sin. At times, this earned him the criticism of being too "emotional," but how can one who loves Christ be coolly detached when the honor of the church is at stake? "I protest against the idea that it is wrong to react with strong emotion or excitement when God is attacked, when brothers and sisters are mistreated, or when the church is harmed. I will protest my whole life long against cool soberness in the face of cruelty or anything else that destroys God's work."

It was this, too, that enabled him to call for repentance so sharply at times: "Are we ready to let Christ's Word cut deeply into us, or will we repeatedly protect and harden ourselves against it? We do not realize how often we stand in God's way. But we can ask him to cut us with his Word, even if it hurts."

With the same vigor and insistence that Arnold called for repentance, he strove for compassion and forgiveness. If anyone took seriously Jesus' injunction to forgive so that we may be forgiven, and to forgive seventy times seven, it was Arnold. People who had hurt him or broken his trust were given his undiminished trust again and again. Why? Because he believed deeply in the power of full forgiveness; because he trusted God to the depths of his being, and because this trust enabled him to overcome all fear of man.







# The Disciple

# The Disciple

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1 Cor 6:3

he says that the church “is to judge the angels.” This should give us an inkling of the deep meaning of our calling and of what it means that we are made in the image of God.

Acts 17:24

1 Cor 6:19

**G**od created heaven, earth, and all the constellations of the universe. He also created something else, something very mysterious: the human spirit. God created this spirit and placed it in us because he wants to live in us. The Bible says that he does not live in temples built with hands—we ourselves should be temples for him.

**M**y father used to say to us that stupidity is the greatest sin. He did not mean simplicity of mind, but spiritual dullness: having a dead conscience and not listening in one’s heart to God.

Very few people today have any idea of the riches of the human heart. Our hearts are created to experience great things; most of us have no idea of what could happen in our lives if we would overcome our stupidity and dullness. Paul says:

Eph 3:16-19

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that being rooted and established in love you may have

power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

If we were to grasp this one passage, we would understand the whole Gospel. We are not filled with the fullness of God and it would be arrogant to think we were. But Paul's prayer should awaken and inspire us!

Isa. 55:3

**G**od said to Israel: "Pay heed to me and listen, and your souls will live!" It is tremendously important to be able to turn to God with one's whole being and to believe that he will speak. Everything depends on our asking him to speak to us. If we hear nothing from God for a long time, it may be because there is something between us and heaven—perhaps we lack love to our brother, or we are at odds with our spouse. If this is the case, our waiting is in vain.

Of course, we cannot expect answers from God after only five minutes of silence. Think how long Jesus himself sometimes had to wait! But the more our lives belong to Christ, and the deeper our relationship with him, the more quickly he will answer us, and the more quickly he can use us for his tasks, because he knows that here is someone who is completely ready for him.









is nothing of self-will or self-glory mixed into it, it is not wrong.

Jn. 14:13

**I**t is completely foreign to the way of Jesus to make selfish requests in his name, for instance to wish for a successful career or for a thousand dollars. When Jesus says, “Whatever you ask in my name, I will do,” he means whatever glorifies the Father and the Son.

**I**n our prayer life we need to listen to the spirit of God. What God wants to tell us is of greater importance than what we want to tell him. Therefore common silence shared in the faith that he wants to speak to each heart will always be meaningful for us.

**W**e should always believe that our prayers will be answered, even if they are not answered straight away. Daniel prayed earnestly to God for days for the forgiveness of his sins and for the forgiveness of Israel’s sins. Yet he received no answer for three weeks. Then an angel appeared to him in a vision and said:

Dan. 10:12-13

Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the very first day that you applied your mind to understand and mortify yourself before your God, your prayers have been heard, and I have come in answer to them. But the evil angel prince of the

kingdom of Persia resisted me for twenty-one days, until Michael, one of the chief princes of heaven, came to help me.

So Daniel's prayers *were* heard from the beginning, but dark powers made it difficult for the angel who answered him to break through.

Today, despite the victory of the cross, there are still dark powers at work. Our prayers, like Daniel's, may often not be answered straightaway. Yet God hears them. We should firmly believe this.

*From a letter:* **G**ive everything over to Jesus. The more you give everything over to him, the more his spirit will fill you. Even the most sincere Christians go through times of inner dryness in which God wants to test them. But then he floods them with his great love. So do not despair if you feel inner dryness.

# Repentance

The Gospel begins with a call to repentance. Repentance means that everything must be changed. What was up must go down, and what was down must come up. Everything must be seen as God sees it. Our whole being has to be renewed; all thinking of our own has to cease. God must become the center of our thinking and feeling.

Jesus Christ came to save people, but he first called them to repent and follow him. Many Christians are attracted by his promise of salvation, but they do not want to repent fully. It is tragic that the worst enemies of Jesus are often religious people, not unbelievers. Even in Jesus' own lifetime, those who hated him most were not the soldiers who crucified him, but the very religious Pharisees and scribes, who hated his message of repentance.

When John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, he called people to repent—to change their hearts and minds. He certainly did not flatter those









Once we see the darkness of sin and the horror of separation from God, we can feel something of what Jesus means by repentance. Yet repentance means more than recognizing our sin; it means turning toward the kingdom of God. It also means being ready to run around the world in order to undo all the wrong we have done—even though we know we cannot undo anything. Finally, it means giving ourselves to Him who gives forgiveness and freedom from sin.

*From a letter:* I am grateful that you recognize your sin, but I plead with you to stop thinking about yourself, your past, and your depression. You will only become more depressed. That is not repentance. Think of your inner being as a clear pond that mirrors the sun, the stars, and the moon. If you stir up the mud at the bottom, everything will become unclear and cloudy, and the more you stir it, the cloudier it will get. Become quiet and stand firm against the devil. Then the water will clear again, and you will see in its mirror Christ's love to you and to the whole world.

## Conversion

Jn. 3

In John 3 we read that we must be reborn of water and the Spirit. This cannot be understood humanly, as Nicodemus tried to understand it. Rebirth is a secret, a mystery, a miracle. But if we believe that Jesus was sent by God the Father, and if we believe in the power of the Holy Spirit, he can give us rebirth. It all depends on belief.

Lk. 9:62

**A** decision to follow Jesus cannot be a decision to follow him for one or two years; it must be for always. Jesus said, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.” But if we remain faithful to him, he will wash us clean and give us unity with God and with one another, and he will grant us eternal life.

Mt. 11:28

**T**hose who want to follow Jesus must not only open their hearts to him and say, “Come into my heart and purify me”; they must also be ready to say, “I am willing to do anything you ask of me.” Jesus says, “Come, all who are heavy-burdened.” If you are willing to





Mt. 12:33

Jesus says, “By the fruits you will recognize the tree”; that is, by the fruits of a person’s life we will recognize whether or not he is a hypocrite. “For not everyone

Mt. 7:21

who says ‘Lord, Lord’ will come into the kingdom of God, but only those who do the will of the Father.”

Jn. 15:1-2

Doing the will of God means showing the fruits of repentance. Jesus also says, “I am the vine, and my Father is the vinedresser, and every branch that does not bear fruit, he cuts away. But those who bear fruit he purifies so that they may bear more fruit.” Here we see that we cannot simply be converted, baptized, and “saved,” and live from then on without temptation. If we are to bear good fruit, we must repent and be purified again and again.

Jn. 15:4

A branch cannot bear fruit of itself—it must be connected to the vine. In the same way, none of us can bear fruit without a personal relationship to Jesus. Without such a relationship we will die inwardly and bear no fruit. And if we do not bear fruit, we will be cut off the vine, thrown into the fire, and burned.

Jn. 15:6

That is the great challenge: to remain on the vine—to remain in Jesus.

# Faith

**W**ho is God, and how can we find him? One answer to this question is that something of the light of God already lies deep in each of our hearts. At times this is to be felt only in a deep longing for goodness, justice, purity, or faithfulness. But if such a longing turns to faith, we will find God.

The early Christians said that if men seek God they will find him, because he is everywhere. There is no boundary that cannot be crossed, no hindrance that cannot be overcome to find him. Think of Nicodemus, who at first would not believe that he could change in his old age. Even he found faith. We cannot excuse ourselves for not finding faith. If we knock at the door, it will open.

**G**od comes to the heart of every person who has faith that he will come, to everyone who seeks him. But we must look for him and wait for him to come to us. If we live our lives in dullness it will not happen. We must first seek; only then will we find.

Jn. 4:42

It is a miracle of faith when people find Jesus and recognize him as the Christ. We see this happen in John 4:42, when the Samaritans answer the woman who met Jesus at the well: “We have heard him ourselves and know that this is indeed Christ the Savior.” If only this faith were alive here and now in our church and among the many who thirst for something new!

To the Samaritans, Jesus was just a man—hungry, tired, and thirsty. No ordinary person could have seen in him the slightest trace of his identity. Who could be blamed for failing to recognize him immediately? If we met a complete stranger, we would not straightaway take him to be the Savior of the world.

Jn. 4:42

Jesus’ appearance was anything but that of a savior: he was a humble man; he grew up in a small town, came into conflict with religious leaders, and suffered a shameful death. Therefore it is a miracle when a person comes to believe in him. When we can say like the Samaritans, “This is Christ, the Savior of the world,” our heart has been opened and filled with light.

*From a letter:* It seems that a new, green blade of living faith is beginning to grow in your heart. Guard it, and do not give in to the flesh, to self, or to any form of sin. Prove to yourself, to those around you, and to God that this is a new chapter of your life.

Faith and a good conscience are completely interoven with one another. If we do not listen to our con-

Tit. 1:15

science, our faith will suffer shipwreck. And if we lose faith, we lose the possibility of having a pure and living conscience. Therefore the Apostle says that the consciences of those who do not believe are not clean. It is bound to be like this, because without faith the conscience has nothing to hold on to.

I once met some people who were critical of our giving “too much” honor to Jesus. We were talking about a saying of Jesus, and one of them asked me, “Do you believe this because Jesus said it, or because it is true?” I said I believed it for both reasons: because Jesus said it and because it is true. I have always felt I should have said more; I should have been willing to be a fool and to say, “Even if I did not understand it, I would still believe it, because Jesus said it.” These people were horrified that anyone could have a childlike faith in Jesus.

Anyone who has not been troubled by the scandal of Christ’s suffering and his complete humiliation is ignorant of the meaning of belief in him.

Jn. 3:16-17

The Bible says, “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son. He was not sent to condemn the world, but to save it.” But it also says that the world will be judged because of its unbelief. We must

Rom. 11:20

be overwhelmed by what it means that God “so loved the world”; then we will see how terrible it is not to believe in him. We must ask God to be newly awakened to a deeper faith and belief—to a faith that meets all personal problems, all problems of communal life, and ultimately the problems of the whole world.

*From a letter:* Peter told Jesus that he was willing to die for him, but he still denied him three times. No one of us can say he will have the strength to endure. Such a thing is possible only in the power of God. He alone can give us strength.

1Cor. 13:12

When people feel lonely and unsure of themselves, it is often because they do not believe deeply enough that God fully understands them. Paul writes that if we love fully, we will understand as we are fully understood.

1 Jn. 4:19

John’s words are very important, too: God loved us before we were ever able to love him. This is what must enter our small hearts, and what we must hold on to: the love of the great Heart which understands us fully.

We live in a time when the whole world is in turmoil, and we can expect even more shaking events than we have already seen. There is only one hope, only one thing to hold on to in every situation: Jesus and his kingdom. In life and death, in joy and judgment, he remains our only Savior.

As Paul warns us, false and dangerous teachings are widespread, also among so-called Christians. Let us therefore remain simple and childlike in our faith in the Son of God and the Son of Man, and let us build our life of brotherly love on the rock of this faith.

**W**hy are there so many people today who cannot find faith? I think there are several reasons. Some are satisfied with what is happening; they are proud to be living in a time of great culture and civilization, and they are blind to the suffering of humankind and the whole of creation. They have lost sight of God.

Others despair. They recognize the injustice of mammon, and they suffer with those who are oppressed. But in their compassion they forget the guilt of men—the guilt we all must bear. And if they do see guilt, they see only the guilt of a certain class or nation, not that of all men. They see the creation but not the Creator. They, too, have lost sight of God.

Still others see the sin, guilt, and weakness of men, but they have no heart, no patience with the oppressed, and they do not suffer with them. Because they have lost sight of God, they do not hear the cry of all creation. They have no real faith, or they have found faith only for their own souls and not for suffering humanity.

We can find faith only if we first find God. When we have found God, we will begin to see the need of man from His viewpoint, and we will believe that He

can overcome this need. Men must recognize that God loves the world even in our time. In the night of judgment that is passing over our so-called civilization, men need to hear that God still loves them and loves his creation. The message of faith is a message of love.

### Doubt

*From a letter:* You will never be able to prove—even to yourself—that Jesus exists. Belief must be an inner experience. As long as you try to prove the object of your belief intellectually, your efforts will stand in the way of such an experience. I am not able to prove the existence of Jesus—I have nothing but my living faith. Thomas doubted that Jesus really rose from the dead; he said, “Unless I put my hand into his wounds, I will never believe.” Then he saw Jesus and believed. But Jesus said, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.”

Jn. 20:25-29

To question God’s love and his nearness leads to death for someone who has already given him his life. It is good to recognize evil in oneself. But we should never doubt God’s great mercy, even in judgment. Doubt leads to torments that make a person feel he is living in hell. We must be led to an ever-renewed deepening of our faith.

Anyone who thinks he is too great a sinner—anyone who doubts that Jesus can help him—binds himself to









I do not mean at all that our lives should show more religiosity. There is no one as broadhearted as the crucified Christ, whose outstretched arms seek all men. It is a matter of decisiveness in one's heart, of living *only* for Christ. If we have this decisiveness, we will have broad hearts, though not, of course, in the worldly sense of tolerance for anything and everything.

*From a letter:* **T**he main thing is that we are united in the things we find precious—love, openness, and sharing—in our struggle against coercion, in our fight against selfishness, in understanding our children, in seeking freedom from private property, and so on. It is for these things that we live together. We want to follow Jesus and none other; we want to go in his footsteps. We want God's kingdom to come to this earth.

Mt. 17:27

You want a life free from the sins of society. Yet not even Jesus was free from the “guilt” of using unjust mammon. There is a difference between direct personal guilt and the collective guilt of fallen creation. We cannot separate ourselves from collective guilt; we would have to live alone on our own piece of land, and we would lose all contact with our fellow men. It is better to have a business relationship with a person than no relationship at all.

In what sense do you mean: “Why can't we work to reclaim the earth and help bring it back under God's power, instead of joining in the world's ways of destruction?” How shall we do what you suggest except by







converted to the Anabaptist way of life. When he was caught and sentenced to be beheaded, a wealthy nobleman offered to take him and raise him as his own son, if he would only recant. But the boy kept faith with God and was executed. If discipleship is really the way we want to go, we must be prepared for such sacrifice—however hard it is, and in spite of ourselves and our failures.

**A** promise made to God cannot be made on the strength of human faithfulness. We must depend on God's faithfulness. No one is strong enough in his own strength to endure, for instance, what the early Christian martyrs and others throughout history endured; but God is faithful. If we give ourselves to him, his angels will fight for us.

**D**o we still have our first love to Jesus, our readiness to give everything, even to face death for his sake? Today we have house and home, but we do not know what the future will bring. The times are very uncertain. In the course of our Bruderhof history we have had to go from one country to another. We can offer no human security. Jesus promises his disciples that they will be persecuted and that they will suffer. We can promise nothing better. Our only security is Jesus himself.













that we cannot grasp it. Yet in spite of it Jesus cried out, “Father, into thy hands I give my spirit.”

Here we find the crowning of faith. Jesus’ experience of godforsakenness did not take away the trust and faith he had in his and our Father; he gave his spirit into his hands.

If we want to be healed of the wounds made by Satan’s tricks and arrows—by evil feelings, thoughts, or ideas—we must have the same absolute trust in Jesus as he had in God, so that even if we feel nothing yet, we give ourselves absolutely and without reserve to him with all we are and have. Ultimately, all we have is our sin. But we must lay our sin before him in trust. Then he will give us forgiveness, cleansing, and peace of heart; and these lead to a love that cannot be described.

**W**hen depression or anything other than Jesus threatens to rule our hearts, we must go to Jesus. There we will find victory and peace. I am quite sure that at the cross we can be victorious over all things that come to us in life, whatever they may be.

## Sin

**M**any people no longer know what a good conscience is; they are burdened daily with the sins of our time. We must take care to keep our consciences pure, and we must do this from childhood on. Once we get used to living with a bad conscience, we will lose everything: our relationship with God and our love to others.









Heb. 9:27

is to die; after that he must be judged by God. If you do not want to face judgment now, you will have to face it later. We will not force you. Hebrews 10:26–27

Heb. 10:26-27

says, “If we remain willingly in our sin after we have recognized the truth, there will be no sacrifice for us anymore, but only the expectation of terrible judgment and the wrath of fire.”

Heb. 12:15

Hebrews 12:15 says that no one should forfeit the hour of God’s grace. You are free to continue playing with God, but then we can have nothing to do with you, and you will have to answer to God alone. There is still a chance for you to turn around!

Rom. 8:1-2

**T**here is no condemnation for those who are united with Jesus Christ, because in him the life-giving law of the Spirit has set you free from the law of sin and death.” This is such a joyful thought—all sin is overcome. But if we look at our own experience we see that it is not overcome everywhere, and the reason is simply that we are not living in Christ Jesus but in our old nature. It is an illusion to think that we do not have this lower nature. We have come into the world with it, and we ourselves cannot change it, even with the best intentions. But Christ can change it if we trust him and give ourselves unconditionally to him.

Rom. 8:5

“Those who live on the level of their lower nature have their outlook formed by it.” We experience this again and again: people whose outlook is based on their lower nature come forth with hatred, jealousy,

Rom. 8:7-8

and envy—as if Christ had not come, as if he had not died on the cross, as if his sacrifice was in vain. This is extremely painful. Paul says, “The outlook of the lower nature is enmity with God. It is not subject to the law of God; indeed it cannot be: those who live on such a level cannot possibly please God.” It cannot be put more strongly: those who cannot overcome their desires may mean no evil, but in actual fact their lives are hostile to God. They are not subject to his law. This goes for anyone who lives in impurity, hatred, jealousy, deceit, or other sinfulness. It is impossible for him to please God.

Rom. 8

**P**aul speaks in Romans 8 about the lower or fleshly nature, and we must be clear that this includes our desires for food, comfort, and sex. All must be subject to the Spirit. We need food and housing, and we affirm sex within marriage, but if these things rule us instead of Christ, we are sinning. God knows that we need food on the table every day, but that must not rule us; we must not become dependent on good food or spoil our children and ourselves. Food is just a simple example, of course. If we are ruled by *anything* but Christ, even spiritual things—religious thinking and reading—we are living by the flesh. Even if we were to adhere to the most self-mortifying philosophy, like that of the Buddha, it would still be fleshly, because we would be blowing up our pride by putting ourselves in the center instead of Christ.

Rom. 8:9

Everything depends on whether we are completely given over to Christ. Romans 8:9 says that he who does not have the spirit of Christ is not even a Christian.

Mt. 7:7-8

Yet we cannot acquire it ourselves; we can only receive it by giving ourselves to him. The Gospel says that “everyone who asks receives . . . to him who knocks, the door will be opened.” In other words, he who asks will receive living water without needing to pay anything.

Rom. 8:1-2

We have great compassion with people who struggle in vain, year in and year out, to overcome their weaknesses, but at the same time we must admit that actually they are guilty. There is no excuse for them, because they do not give themselves in faith to Christ. As Paul writes, “There is no condemnation for those who are united with Christ Jesus, because in him the life-giving law of the Spirit has set us free from the law of sin and death.” This possibility is open to everyone. We cannot hide from God and say, “We are too weak,” or “We want to change, but cannot.” Ultimately these excuses have no foundation. Paul continues:

Rom 8:12-13

It follows, my friends, that our lower nature has no claim upon us; we are not obliged to live on that level. If you do so, you must die. But if by the Spirit you put to death all the base pursuits of the body, you will live.

These are very strong words. Who can really say that the lower nature has no claim on him? Such freedom

from sin depends on absolute dedication to Christ. We must put to death every form of sin. Then it will be impossible for jealousy, hatred, impurity, lying, or any other sin to be victorious in us.

**T**here are people who do not break with sin because they think they cannot. But that is an untruth. Jesus Christ is always there, and so is the Holy Spirit, and if any soul really cries out to God, the Spirit will speak to God for him. So there is no excuse whatsoever not to stop sinning. There is no one who has as much compassion and love for sinners as Jesus, but he does not excuse sin. Let us plead that everyone may find freedom from sin in Christ Jesus.

**S**elf-pity and pride, which are closely related, have nothing to do with the cross. Both of them are concerned only with me, me, me. We must turn away from them, otherwise we cannot experience complete victory over our sinfulness. It is said that in the time of the early church, the demons cried out, "Who is he that robs us of our power?" The believers answered with the exultant shout of victory, "Christ, the crucified!"\* That should be our proclamation.

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\* Eberhard Arnold, ed., *The Early Christians* (Rifton, NY: Plough, 1970), p. 8.

Jn. 13:34

Love one another” is one of the most important commandments of Jesus, and we cannot take it seriously enough. There are other commandments that we must obey too: we should not love money; we should not commit adultery; we should not defile the flesh; and there are many other sins we must avoid. Yet Christ’s greatest command is love. And therefore I think lovelessness is the greatest sin.

Mt. 5:22

God will judge all forms of lovelessness, but especially contempt—the act of making someone believe he is a fool. Christ says, “Anyone who nurses anger against his brother must be brought to judgment . . . and if he sneers at him, he will have to answer for it in the fires of hell.” Who has never been angry with his brother, or never sneered at him? Who has never spoken degradingly of another? Christ challenges us to live in perfect love.

*From a letter:* I feel guilty of being too harsh and even angry at times with my brothers and sisters. We must learn from Jesus how to be kind and gentle. On the other hand, we must never be wishy-washy; our compassion must always be mixed with the salt of Christ.

The idea that we are “in the world” but not “of the world” cannot be understood by the intellect alone.

Jn. 17:15-16

Certainly, we will remain in the world as long as we live. But we are not to be “of it.” Some people say dancing is “of the world” or “of the flesh.” Others say it is worldly to wear short dresses. Still others say that alcohol is worldly, or that certain music or certain cars are. There are many so-called worldly things. If we are living in the Holy Spirit, we will feel in our hearts those things of the world which we must give up. May we not desire what is of the flesh; but may we be saved from making rules and regulations to prevent worldliness! May God show us what is of the Holy Spirit and what is of the spirit of the world.

If we had only the Law, we could still hate someone even if we didn't kill him; we could still think evil thoughts of someone without shedding blood. But that is not enough. As Paul rightly says, the Law can never change our hearts. It is Jesus who must live in us. Through him we can love our enemy, and through him we can fill our hearts with thoughts of God.

Rom. 7:22-25

*From a letter:* **Y**ou need to become absolutely determined to follow Jesus. It is not true that you are too weak to overcome sin—that is a lie of the devil. In Jesus it *is* possible to overcome sin. That is why he died on the cross. Live totally for him.

Mt. 5:6-8

“**B**lessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, blessed are those who are merciful, blessed are those

who are pure in heart.” To be pure in heart is perhaps the hardest. It is easier to hunger and thirst for righteousness or to be compassionate or merciful. We ourselves cannot make our hearts pure.

Only children have pure hearts, and therefore Jesus says that we must become like children. Yet we know that even if we strive to become like children, things that are not of God—impurity, envy, and vanity—enter our hearts continually, and so we need to be purified again and again by Christ.

## **Confession**

*From a letter:* I have deep understanding for anyone who feels oppressed and burdened by sins of the past and has a longing to confess them. But confession itself is no help. People pay a lot of money to tell psychiatrists all their sufferings and sins, and these psychiatrists help them to find ways of quietening their consciences. But psychiatry alone does not bring true freedom.

You say you have confessed your sins but not found freedom. You will find it only when you confess your sins in faith: faith in God and in the cross of Jesus Christ, who died for the world’s sins. All other confession consists of simply unloading your burdens onto another person, and later the burden will just come back. Peace is found only by those for whom confession of sins is bound together with a living faith. I wish you this faith.

**W**ith regard to confession: every conscious sin should be confessed, but this does not mean digging in the subconscious for every little thing. Where God tells us through our conscience that something is wrong, we should confess it and clear it up so that it can be forgiven. But confession should not make us self-centered; we want to find Jesus, not ourselves.

Mt. 16:23

*From a letter:* **Y**ou ask which evil thoughts one ought to confess. Every human being has thoughts come to him to which he must say, “Get behind me, Satan!” If you meet evil thoughts with this attitude you do not need to confess them, though you should forget them as soon as possible. Even if you have to fight against an evil thought for some moments before you reject it, you do not necessarily have to confess it. But if you give in to an evil thought and let it become part of you, you should confess it. I would advise you not to occupy yourself too long with your thoughts.

*From a letter:* **I** uphold the sanctity of private confession in the fear of God, and I do not think it right if people who unburden their sins are then labelled because of them. However, in keeping the secrecy of confession, there is a point at which I would be sinning if I kept what I heard to myself. When a member

of the church has committed a serious sin such as fornication or adultery—or even murder (which has never yet happened to us)—I would feel I was betraying God if I kept quiet about it.

### Spiritual Pride

The Bible says we must fight against the flesh, and people usually understand this to mean our sexuality, or perhaps excessive food and drink. But that is not the only meaning of the word “flesh.” Certainly, sexual impurity and a luxurious lifestyle are “of the flesh,” but so is the ego, and so is spiritual pride and everything else in us that is not of Christ.

We must ask God that the flesh in us—particularly our pride—may die. If we are proud, God cannot come to us. Pride is the worst form of the flesh, because it leaves no room in the heart for God.

Jesus warns us very sharply against false piety—against wanting to be seen by others as “spiritual” or “good.” All who want such recognition will find no reward in heaven. In being honored by others they have their reward already now. The same applies to people who do deeds of love and make a show of it. Christ says that the left hand should not know what the right hand does.

**W**e all have within us the desire to be liked, respected, or honored for our goodness. But Jesus warns us against this temptation and says that our piety should not be paraded before men. God sees what is hidden, and he will reward it.

**A**s soon as we feel that we are something special or that we have something special to represent to others, we are in danger of losing everything we have received from God. No matter what we have experienced of God, we ourselves are still spiritually poor. There is a religious truth in Jesus' words, "Woe to the rich; woe to those who have much." As soon as we hold to our own recognitions of truth instead of to the living God, our religious experience will become like a cold stone in our hands. Even the deepest or richest spiritual experience will die if it becomes a thing in itself.

Lk. 6:24-25

*From a letter:* **D**ear brother, you have been proud of your work; you have thought little of your brothers and sisters, and you have lived in false humility, which is the deadliest form of spiritual pride. There is no question that you are gifted, that you are strong, that you are smart, and that you can get a lot done, but that is not the issue. We do not live together on account of these gifts. They are all mortal and will pass





*From a letter:* I cannot say it strongly enough: your spiritual pride—your listening to God’s Word in order to be exalted, instead of to be judged and given new life—is completely opposed to the way of Jesus. Give up your religious vanity. It leads to death.

cf. Lk. 7:47

*From a letter:* I believe that your bondage to sin has its roots in a terrible self-righteousness and pride. When you see little wrongs in others you feel spiritually great. It should be the other way around. As Christians we should be lowly and remember that whoever is forgiven much loves much. Pride is a poisonous root that draws love to itself and away from Jesus and our brothers. If we are humble, the root will die, because it will find no food and water in our hearts.

Phil. 1:15

In Paul’s time some believers proclaimed Christ out of jealousy and a quarrelsome spirit, not out of goodwill. This was terrible, and it came about because they wanted human honor. Let us become humble and recognize that all human honor takes honor away from God, to whom alone it belongs. Let us honor no one but God, and let us never accept honor for ourselves.

What matters is that God works in us, inspiring both our will and deed. For him to do this we must give ourselves to him and give up all self-glory and honor.

## Self

Those whose thoughts turn only around themselves forget that Christianity has an objective content. Christianity is a cause for which a person must completely forget himself and his little ego.

When we put ourselves in the center we make God out to be very small. It is important to recognize that he exists even without us. His cause is so very much greater than our existence. It is wonderful if we are used for God's cause, but it would exist even if we were not there.

The best way to experience nothing is to keep looking into yourself. But the more you are able to look outward and forget yourself, the more you can be changed by God. There are some people (and I have great pity on them) who are inclined to watch themselves constantly, as if in a mirror, and because of this they are often unnecessarily tense and cannot hear what God is saying to them.

We cannot redeem ourselves or better ourselves in our own strength. All we can do is to give ourselves completely to God. When we give ourselves to him without reserve, he helps us. That is our faith, our belief, and our experience. Self-redemption is out of the question, and here we must recognize the limitations











**W**hen a person gratifies sexual impulses on his own body, he harms his soul, which is made in God's image. It is desecration to employ something destined for a sublime end in a manner contrary to that destiny. In the same way that royalty would be debased by being enslaved, so man debases his noble destiny as an image of God when he abuses his own body sexually.

*From a letter:* **D**ear brother, it is not necessary for your whole life to be cramped up in a struggle for personal purity. But you must give up all secret attraction to impurity. That is where your inner cramping comes from. Jesus can free you completely of this. If you know you are utterly dependent on him, then there is hope for you.

*From a letter:* **D**ear sister, it seems to me that there is an atmosphere of eroticism around you, and I want to warn you about this. There is nothing surprising about the fact that the powers of eroticism and sex are problems any person has to face, and you are no different from anyone else. But I plead with you to value the gift of purity—the light of absolute chastity and virginity. Do not let the smallest shadow of an overly casual relationship with boys or men come into your life, also not in the way you dress or the way you walk. Please take this advice as from someone who loves you.

*From a letter:* **D**ear brother, you say you have not resisted evil, especially in the area of sex. It is of great importance that you take a stand for Jesus' sake. I know it is often hard to do, especially at college. But as the times become more and more corrupt, it will be necessary to have a strong character and say "No" to things which the general public approves of. I wish you the courage to do this.

*From a letter:* **Y**ou must seek a pure heart. Then you will stop sinning when impure images or your imagination or anything else tempts you.

You recognize that you must break away from these things, but you also acknowledge that you were playing around with them. That is sinful. Apathy and indifference will only weaken your stand against temptation. In the end it boils down to whether or not your life is founded on Jesus. You will find a pure heart only in him.











## Reverence

We should fear God, and we should fear hurting or offending anything created, but we should not be afraid of God. The Bible speaks of the fear of God, but there is a different fear that leads away from God and makes love grow cold. Woe to us if we confuse the right fear with the wrong. Our fear should be born of love and reverence.

Lk. 5:8

When Peter recognized Jesus as the Son of God he said, “Depart from me; I am a sinful man.” He was afraid to be confronted with the purity of Jesus. Such fear is right. But fear that takes away trust and confidence or destroys one’s childlikeness is wrong. We must fear God in the right way.

1Jn. 4:18

*From a letter:* John writes that he who has fear is not perfect in love. This has given me much food for thought, because several of the parables of Jesus, like that of the ten virgins, could make one fearful. The

Mt. 25:1-13

Book of Revelation, too, can be frightening. And Jesus says that even though we should not fear men who can kill the body, we should fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. So there is a fear of God that is

Mt. 10:28

right and good. Ultimately, if we are in God we will fear nothing but God. That is the perfect state for a Christian.

Ex. 20:7

**W**e have always been reserved in using the name of God, not only because our own inner feeling makes us cautious but because the Ten Commandments say: “You shall not use the name of the Lord your God in vain.” It is important for parents to teach their children to respect God so that misusing his name will not even come into question for them.

Lk. 2:25-39

**P**eople are so terribly inclined to forget God and his deeds of love. That is the worst thing that can happen to humankind. When no one is interested in God any longer—when no one wants to know about him or testify to him—it is even worse than being hostile toward him, because hostility at least shows an interest.

We should be stimulated by the story of Simeon and Anna, who expected the Messiah on behalf of the whole people of Israel. It does not matter if there are only two—for even then the earth has not entirely forgotten God. We should be eager to testify to him, to love him, and to expect his coming.

## Surrender

Despite the circumstances of our time we must be open and free to live for God's will for the future—for brotherly community and the kingdom of God. We must be ready and willing to give up our resistance to God; then he will work in us through his Holy Spirit.

God is always ready, always there. It is we who are not ready for his cause. If we would only yield to God's authority, to the way of Jesus, and to the power of the Spirit, then the flame which gives light to the whole world could be kindled.

We know Jesus' commands: "Leave everything you have, and come follow me! Sell all your possessions." "Do not wait to bury your father." "Leave your fishing boat and your tools and come with me!"

The disciples, too, knew Jesus' commands. They also knew that every man—each in his own way—is "rich" enough to resist them by holding on even to the little he has; to tell Jesus, "I cannot come." That is why they asked, horrified, "Then how can anyone be saved?" Jesus answered, "It is impossible for men. But with God all things are possible."

If we open ourselves to God's working and give up our self-will, he is always ready to give us faith and love.

Mt. 19:21

Mt. 8:22

Mt. 4:19

Lk. 4:20

Mt. 19:25-26

**G**od wants us to ask him for help. It is not that he cannot or does not want to act without our asking, but he waits for us to open our hearts and lives so that he and only he can act.

Many people ponder why God is like this, why he doesn't force his will on men. But that is how God is. He waits for our readiness. It is true that he punishes individuals and nations to call them to repentance, but he never forces his goodness on them. If a parent were to take his child by the throat and force his good intentions on him, the child would instinctively feel that this was not love. For the same reason, God does not force his will on anyone. So we are confronted by a momentous question: Are we willing to surrender ourselves to God voluntarily? Are we willing to open the windows of our hearts so that God in his goodness can enter and take over?

**W**e have to give ourselves wholeheartedly to God, and if we fail, we must give ourselves again. We all need daily forgiveness for our sins and failures. But what matters is whether we want to be faithful—faithful to the end of our lives. This means surrendering everything—our self-will, our hopes for personal happiness, our private property, even our weaknesses—and believing in God and in Christ. That is all that is asked of anyone. Jesus does not expect perfection, but he wants us to give ourselves wholeheartedly.

*From a letter:* **W**hat is true and unconditional surrender? A person may yield to a stronger person, or an army to a stronger army. One may yield to God because he is almighty, or because one fears his judgment. None of this is full surrender. Only if one experiences that God is good—and that he alone is good—is it possible to surrender to him unconditionally one's whole heart, soul, and being.

When a person has surrendered to God with heart and soul, he will then seek others in whom the same love is clearly expressed and surrender to them also. But he can commit himself to others only if his first commitment is to God.

*From a letter:* **I**f we ever found a group—even if it were a much smaller group than ours—where the love of Jesus was expressed more fully and clearly than it is among us, I hope and believe that we would want to join them, even if it meant losing our Bruderhof identity.

*From a letter:* **G**od must lead us to the point where we recognize how wretched and weak we are—yes, how poor in spirit and completely helpless. Whoever feels even the least bit strong must have his weakness revealed to him. When God shows us how wretched and poor we actually are, we feel completely helpless before him. But then he helps us with his grace and strength-



world more important than fetching it. If someone had said to them, “You are called to greater things; anyone can fetch a donkey,” and they had not done it, they would have been disobedient. But there was nothing greater for them at that moment than to fetch the donkey for Christ. For myself and for each individual I wish that we might do every task, great or small, in this obedience. There is nothing greater than obedience to Christ.

## Humility

**J**esus calls each of us to be humble. If a person seeks human greatness, Christian community is not the place for him. Any one of us might be tempted by ambition, but we must take an attitude against such temptation.

2 Cor. 12:7-9

*From a letter:* It is good to be weak. Our human weakness is no hindrance to the kingdom of God, as long as we do not use it as an excuse for our sins. Read 2 Corinthians 12:7–9, where Paul writes that the Lord will show himself in the most glorious way through our weakness. Certainly this is not the most important passage for the church as a whole, but it is perhaps the most important passage in the Gospel as regards personal discipleship.

*From a letter:* In reading the Gospel of Mark, I have been struck by how Jesus emphasizes our need for hu-

Mk. 10:45

mility. He did not come to be served but “to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.” This must be our way too, even though we know we fall very short of fulfilling it.

Mt. 5:3-12

**T**he Beatitudes do not call for great saints who shine in the world, but for lowly people.

*From a letter:* If you know you are sometimes critical and lack humility, then seek humility. Humility is a virtue that one can decide for. It softens the heart and makes a person open for God. Criticism is not necessarily wrong; it can be positive. But it can also be very destructive.

Gen. 4:5

**W**e should not think too much about our small hearts or our weak characters. No one is pure and good except Jesus. His is the only really healthy character, and in his unending mercy, he can purify our hearts for his purpose. Let us give ourselves to him so he can lead us and use us as he will. Let us turn our back on the temptation of Cain, who envied his brother’s closeness to God. Let us be joyful in simply belonging to Jesus, and willing to let him place us where we can bear the most fruit to the glory of God.

*From a letter:* If we accept the weakness and smallness of our lives in a way that leads us to humility before God, we will recognize that our only help lies in complete surrender to him and dependence on him. It might be a very painful recognition, but the victory will be life!

Phil. 2:3

**P**aul says, “There must be no room for rivalry and personal vanity among you.” He does not only mean the vanity of wanting to look beautiful—which is also unchristian—but the religious vanity of people who want to shine among men and be honored by them. There should be no room for such vanity among us. He continues, “You must humbly reckon others better than yourselves.” That is the opposite of wanting to outshine one’s brother or sister. If we want to follow Jesus, how can we want to make ourselves great or important? Jesus “humbled himself, and in obedience accepted even death—death on a cross.”

Phil. 2:8





approach to life, a new feeling for life that expressed itself in many ways. This inward urge led to fellowship in hiking, singing, and folk dancing, and even in communal settlements. A gathering around a blazing fire became a deeply-felt inner experience, and the rhythmic movement of a circle dance brought to expression something from the depths of the heart. There was an effort to give shape only to what was truly genuine, and it meant rejecting all human pretense, including fashion. The inner experience was all-important, and it found vivid expression in every area of life.

*From a letter:* It is not the obvious sinner who stands in the way of God. God's greatest enemies are those who receive and accept Christ's call to discipleship but then—despite their use of religious language—continue to serve Satan at the same time.

Mt. 25

Mt. 24:48-49

Most of Jesus' parables deal with such people, not with people of the world. The ten virgins in Matthew 25 all go out to seek the Bridegroom, but five of them fall asleep; and in Matthew 24:48–49 the servant is appointed by his master but becomes unfaithful, and so on. That is what hinders God's kingdom the most: when those who have heard his call and answered it go on to serve Satan while still using Christian words.

If we stay close to Jesus, we will find genuineness in its clearest form. How sharply he speaks against the piety that tries to cleanse from the outside! How clearly he

Mt. 23:26-28

tells us that the inside must first be cleansed!

*I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that being rooted and established in love you may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

Eph 3:16-19

# The Church

## The Church

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## The Church

**W**e know humankind is tormented and divided. Part of this torment is loneliness, which can be overcome only by experiencing the living church. This church cannot be identified with a specific group or organization, but it does exist; it lives and comes down to humble, seeking people. The fact that the church exists is the most important reality on earth. When God speaks in the innermost chamber of our hearts, our sinful separation and loneliness are overcome; we experience inner community with our brothers and sisters.

**W**e cannot say that the church is here or there. The church comes down from heaven to those who are spiritually poor. It comes to those who give up all things for Christ's sake, including their own ideas and rights. This can happen anywhere, and when it does it always brings people together in unity.

According to the early Christians, the church existed even before creation. It exists in the Holy Spirit. Christ sends the church wherever two or three meet together in his name—and wherever they give up all rights, power, property, and self for him.

When we are asked whether we are the church, we have to say, “No, we are not the church.” But when we are asked whether the church comes to us, we have to testify that it does, especially if we are broken and poor before God. The poorer a group is spiritually, the closer the church can come to it. Our own ideas, especially the idea of having influence or power over other people, must be given up completely. We must become poor as beggars before God.

If we speak of the true church, we certainly do not mean the Bruderhof. We simply mean all those who live their lives in full unity with Christ. Only the fruits can show where this is.

In the writings of the early Christians, for instance in Hermas’ *The Shepherd*, we find again and again the thought that the church existed before anything was created.\* It is a deep and remarkable thought—a complete contrast to the idea of a little congregation or even a gathering of millions of people calling themselves the church.

When we speak of the Bruderhof movement as a church, we certainly do not mean to imply that this is *the* church. The church is something far greater. It goes back to the beginning of all things, before the creation

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\* Eberhard Arnold, ed., *The Early Christians* (Rifton, NY: Plough, 1970), p. 278 ff.

of the world. But we long that it is at work today, also among us.

The 16th century Anabaptist Peter Riedemann compares the gathering of believers in the church to a lantern. A lantern is of no use unless there is a light in it. The same is true for the church. It may hold all goods in common, with no private property; it may have love, complete dedication, and true community. But that does not guarantee it is alive. The church is a gift from God. It comes to the spiritually poor, and it is united and enlivened by the Holy Spirit.

*From a letter:* In this hour of world need and world despair there is nothing more important than a life of brotherhood, a life of unity and love. It may be so small in comparison to the whole of world need that it is almost invisible, but it will have an effect.

People today do not need long sermons or religious words; they need to be shown deeds and a practical way of discipleship. Our time needs the tangible demonstration that God is stronger than all hate, all need, all sin, and all disunity.

God needs a people who devote their lives completely, without reservation, to his cause. They should be people who do not consider their own salvation first but who intercede in prayer for the needs of men and hope and believe in the victory of God.







selves, and for this that we want to live.

We need to feel a certain inner urgency; we cannot let life pass by without giving ourselves completely to the church. The church was with God before the world was created, and it is now with God in heaven as the “upper church,” the cloud of witnesses from every nation, tribe, and race. We cannot stand undecided before this holy reality.

*From a letter:* **A**re we as a church so dedicated, so full of truth and salt, that we are able to influence the whole earth in the way that even a pinch of salt flavors a whole dish of food? It is not enough to live together in community, to love one another and make each other happy; to make jam for our neighbor, who then makes jam for her neighbor. More is demanded.

I believe that we are living in the end time. It is a crucial hour. Everything depends on whether our lamps are trimmed, whether we are ready to meet the Bridegroom. Jesus’ farewell words in the Gospel of John make it clear: the church must be so united that the world can recognize God as the Father who sent Jesus. It shakes me to the depths of my heart to ask, Are we really showing this to the world?

Mt. 25:1-13

Jn. 17:21

# Community

We must give up all private property and all thirst for collecting things for ourselves. The enjoyment of wealth for oneself, one's family, or even one's community leads to inner death. Wealth brings about death because it isolates the heart from God and from one's fellowman. We seek an answer to this in sharing everything in a way that makes it impossible to fall into the sin of collective wealth. Our door is open to everyone who seeks God and the truth. Under the stewardship of the church, everything is available to anybody in need.

Mt. 19:21

The way of Jesus means complete possessionlessness! We have chosen this way, and our children must know that from an early age. They should know that our money belongs to God and not to us. Jesus says we should not store up treasure for ourselves on earth, but seek our treasure in heaven.

Mt. 6:19-20

*From a letter:* You ask, "How can we, as separate persons and families, become part of each other?" This has





for the whole way of life Christ has brought. It is the expression of a living experience. Our challenge is not to join the Bruderhof, but to live in brotherhood. We do not wish to add anything to the Gospel, but we feel strongly that nothing can be taken away from it, and that we must face every demand it makes upon us.

You ask whether we as a community need to isolate ourselves in order to be in the world but not of it. We live apart only in the sense of separating ourselves from the evil root of self-interest, greed, and injustice— from all that is loveless in the present world order. Society is basically no different today than it was in Jesus' time. Men are still self-centered, proud, and eager for their own gain, power, and position. The fruits of this evil pervade society in many forms: impurity, hatred, alcoholism, poverty, juvenile delinquency, mental illness, violent crime, and finally war. These are the fruits of mammon, the fruits of an unchristian society, the fruits of the present world order. This is the world out of which Christ called and still calls us. He calls us out of it and brings us together to build the city of God, where the Spirit alone rules—to build the city on a hill, which cannot be hidden but shines into the world.

The Gospels tell us that we will know a tree—or a person or a group—by its fruits, for a good tree cannot produce evil fruit and an evil tree cannot produce good fruit. The fruits of a life based on Christ are not just preaching or speaking. It is our deeds that are important. Christ said all men would know we are his disciples by our love for one another—not by our *talk*

Mt. 7:16-18

Jn. 13:35

Mt. 7:21













## Leadership

**A** true Christian church cannot be a living organism unless there is clear leadership. The ship of community needs a helmsman to guide it, and he must let himself be guided from above in deep humility and must honor and respect the brotherhood he leads. Being led from above means listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit as it speaks to the church as a whole. A leader must not isolate himself. Through close cooperation with all members, a perfectly clear direction in all matters can be found. This is true for all matters of faith, all practical things, and for the overall inner attitude of the church.

**A**ny true service done for the church—including the service of leadership—is done as by an organ of the body, and it must therefore be done lovingly, sincerely, honestly, and in a childlike way. Someone who carries a responsibility is no higher than someone who does not: no one is higher, and no one is lower. We are all members of one body.

**T**True leadership means service, so it is a terrible thing to use it as a position of power over others. When such abuse of leadership takes place in a church community, it is especially devilish, because brothers and sisters give themselves voluntarily, trustingly, and openheartedly to the church. In a dictatorial state, people might yield to a greater power even though their souls reject it as evil. But in a brotherhood of believers, where members trust their leaders, the misuse of power is real soul-murder.

**W**hen we ask brothers to lead the church, we must ask God that much is given to them. But we must also let them be themselves—as God made them. They should not be presumptuous; they should express only what is given them by God. We do not expect more. It would be disastrous if anyone were to feel himself pushed into a role that was not genuinely his. We do not expect someone who is meant to be an ear to be an eye.

**W**hen we speak about the authority of leaders in the church, it should be very clear that we never mean authority over people. Jesus gave his disciples authority, but he gave them authority over spirits—not people. In the same way, those of us appointed to lead the church are given authority, but not over people. It is all too easy to forget this. We must seek for humility again and again.



**W**e do not want a brotherhood that is bound to a man. I fear nothing more than a service in the church—whether teaching, counseling, or whatever—that binds someone emotionally to another person. It is terrible, and I want to have nothing to do with it. We must be bound together *in Christ*.

**T**here is nothing I hate more than human beings having power over the souls and bodies of others, especially in Christian community. I have vowed to myself to fight this evil until the end of my life, and if anyone can point out to me where I have used power over a human being—even without my knowledge—I want to repent deeply for it. Personal power is the greatest enemy of a living church.

Mt. 18:3-4

**J**esus put a child into his disciples' midst and said, "Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Here we see that Jesus loves the childlike spirit. This should also be true among us. In a marriage, both husband and wife must want to be the least. And in church community, each member—whether elder or steward or whoever—must also want to be the least. That is our goal.

Mt. 18:3

Mt. 11:25

Speaking the truth, which is a task of a leader of the church, is not a gift given only to especially clever and superior men. If it were, most people would have reason to fear being a disciple of Jesus or a leader in the church. It is not man's intellect that is receptive to the truth; it is his childlike spirit. Jesus says, "Become like a child—only then will you be able to enter God's kingdom." The childlike spirit is and remains *spirit*, and because of that it is authority and revelation. The realization—that the truth is revealed only to children and to the simple-hearted—is crucial in the discipleship of Jesus.

*From a letter:* I was so thankful for your concern about our last members' meeting. So much was at stake, and yet we lost ourselves in trivial talk. The leadership I should have given as elder must have been lacking. There is always a tension: one does not want to dictate, but if everyone just talks as he pleases it is not good either, for then God's spirit cannot speak.

Someone who is given special responsibilities by the church—for example, a servant of the Word, house-mother, steward, work distributor, or shop foreman—will either serve with humility or lord it over others as if they were his subjects. This is a danger for adults who work with children too. There is an inclination in each of us to want to be great. And even if it is a

small inclination—perhaps someone tends to be a bit bossy—it is the beginning of a much greater evil that will in the end bring much suffering.

It is unbelievable what heartache can result when someone in a position of responsibility lets his authority be felt and treats his brothers and sisters as subjects. If a servant of the Word is bossy, it takes a certain courage to risk something and protest. But I wish all members that courage. No one but Jesus is our master, and we are all brothers.

Jn. 21:15-17

Leaders of a church have no rights whatsoever over the souls entrusted to them. Consider how Jesus entrusted his flock to Peter. He did not give him any rights over the lambs. He only asked, “Do you love me?” And then he said, “Feed my sheep.” It is a terrible sin—really nothing less than murder—when someone entrusted with a pastoral service thinks he has the right to govern souls. This also applies to those who care for children.

I want nothing to do with human honor. I ask you never to honor a person, whoever he may be, but only Christ in him. We denounce the honoring of men, because it leads to sectarianism. In a sect the leader thinks he is great, but that is a horrible delusion. We want to honor Christ in our brothers and sisters; we want to love one another—Christ commanded us to.





## Gifts

*From a letter:* **N**ever forget that an act of love to one's fellowman is the only important act of the day. Everything else is of no value before God and may even tear us from him or separate us from our brothers. How strongly Jesus impresses this on our hearts in his prophecies about the Last Judgment! The question is never whether we are well-organized or act correctly, but whether we feed the hungry, take in strangers, clothe the naked, or visit those who are sick or in prison—in other words, whether we act out of love and compassion. Let us never pass by the need of another or forget the words and actions that strengthen love.

Mt. 25:31-46

**J**ust as no one has so few gifts that he cannot be moved by God, no one has so many gifts that he is too good to do simple manual work. We must be willing to do any service asked of us, to serve in the humblest place. A man may be the most gifted person in his community, but if he lacks humility, if his heart is not moved by the spirit of Jesus, his life will be unfruitful.

Mt. 25:14-30

1 Cor. 12:8-10

Mt. 25:24-30

The parable of the talents is perhaps best understood in the context of the church: the talents are gifts given to different brothers and sisters. One person receives the gift of wisdom, another knowledge, another faith, healing, prophecy, discernment, speaking in tongues, or interpretation. These gifts are all required for the various tasks of the church, from leadership to any other. There is no difference in their importance; they all are parts of one body. The eye is no more important than the ear—they simply are two different organs.

Some people would like to see no differences. They think that if everyone were the same no one would know who was who, and then true justice would be established. But that is not the Gospel of Jesus. In Matthew 25, we read of a man who was given only one talent. This man felt he had not been given his fair share, and so he hated his master. He did nothing with his talent but hardened his heart. He not only lacked love, he was filled with hatred. He said, “Master, I knew you to be a hard man.” That is the worst thing that can happen to us: to feel we have not been given our fair share; to feel that others have received more from God; and then to become so envious and loveless—so separated from the Body—that we do not contribute to it in any way at all. The master in the parable said, “You should have at least put the money in the bank.” He meant, “Do at least the little you are able to do.”

Mt. 25:18

One person is brilliant, another deft with his hands, another very musical. These are natural gifts, and they should not be buried, though for the common good of the church they often have to be sacrificed. It would be wrong if someone with intellectual gifts thought he could do only intellectual work—otherwise he would be “burying his talents”—or if a very musical person thought she was wasting her talent by doing menial work. We must be willing to sacrifice our natural talents for the sake of the whole Body.

*From a letter:* You write that you are not very gifted. That does not matter. No one has so few gifts that he cannot be moved by God. What matters is that you use the gifts you *do* possess—that they are brought into movement by God. It is never a lack of gifts that is the problem, but a lack of readiness to be used by God.

1 Cor. 12-13

In 1 Corinthians 12 and 13, the apostle Paul speaks of many different gifts, including prophecy, leadership, healing, and speaking in tongues. But then he says that all these great gifts are nothing without love. Our communal life is a gift too, but unless God gives us love over and over again, it will become as lifeless as a machine.

The gift of discernment of spirits is vital for a living church, but it must be given by God. It is not a hu-









# Forgiveness

Mt. 6:15

It should be quite out of the question for anyone to come to prayer without having forgiven his brother, his neighbor, or even his enemy. Jesus clearly says, “He who does not forgive will not be forgiven.” We cannot change one iota of this truth. The only way to find inner peace in Christ is through peace with one’s brothers. Unforgiving thoughts lead to separation, and separation brings inner harm and leads to death. Complete peace demands complete honesty. We can live in peace with our brothers only if we carry the truth in our hearts and are honest in our love.

Eph. 1:7

Col. 1:14

*From a letter:* **T**True forgiveness of sins is possible only in Jesus. In the world people forgive one another’s sins, but without Jesus, which is no help. At the time of the Reformation, the Catholic Church, which had tremendous influence over people, “forgave” sins through the sale of indulgences. Today, psychologists and psychiatrists “forgive” sin. They tell people, “You have not sinned; your behavior is quite normal; there is nothing wrong with it. You don’t need to have a bad conscience; you can’t help it.” That is how the world forgives sin.

Mt. 5:23-24

Things go wrong in churches and Christian communities because Jesus' words about making peace with one another before bringing a gift to the altar are not taken seriously anymore. Jesus himself said this, and as his followers we are entrusted with witnessing to his words. To us this means we should not come to prayer or partake of the Lord's Supper unless there is complete peace among us. Too often it happens that things are left unresolved when people pray together. But communal life will not endure like that, and neither will marriage. We must clear things up and forgive one another again and again.

Mt. 6:15

If we hold a grudge against someone, the door to God will be closed. It will be absolutely closed, with no way to him. Only if we forgive others will we be forgiven. I am sure that many prayers are not heard because the person praying has a grudge against someone, even if he is not aware of it. Jesus says more than once that before we pray we must forgive. If we want Jesus, we must have a forgiving heart.

Mt. 18:18

Just as it did in the time of the apostles, the church of Jesus Christ has the authority to represent his kingdom today. It has the authority to loose and to bind, to forgive and to leave unforgiven. Without the forgiveness of sin no conscience can live, and without it no

Mt. 6:14-15

one can enter the kingdom of God. But unless we first forgive others, we cannot receive forgiveness.

Jas. 5:16

**I**n the Letter of James we read that we should confess our sins to one another so that they may be forgiven. But this is possible only if Jesus lives in us. Without him there is no forgiveness.

Unless forgiveness of sins is spoken out in communion with Jesus, through his Holy Spirit, it means nothing. It is Jesus who promises that he will forgive us at the last judgment, and it is he who will also overcome demons and devils on that day. We ourselves cannot overcome evil, even if we live together in brotherhood, even if we are burned as martyrs. Unless Jesus lives in us and we in him, our efforts are all in vain.

Rev. 1:5-6

**T**he words “To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins . . . be glory and power for ever and ever” indicate that it is not we who can forgive sins. Forgiveness of sins is possible only through Christ, who loves us and frees us with his life’s blood.

We pronounce forgiveness of sins in the united church, yet this forgiveness descends from heaven—we ourselves have no authority whatsoever. Nothing human can take over. The grace of the cross must be present.

**A**s a burning candle consumes itself and gives light, so the light of the risen Christ shines out to us through his death. When Christ arises in us—when the Sun comes up—night is overcome by day. So it is with the forgiveness of sins. We must experience what it means to be burdened with sin *and then freed*. Then we will see how the sun of Christ shines anew through the forgiveness of sins.

**T**he redeeming power of forgiveness, which is in Jesus alone, must remain the center of the living church and of our expectation for the whole world.

Forgiveness means personal redemption and freeing, but it must always be seen in the greater context of redemption for the whole world. We should expect it to bring the kingdom of peace to whole nations and to all men. This expectation, which can be found on every page of the New Testament, is from Jesus. It must be alive in us so that it is not just something we believe in but something that burns in our hearts.

**B**ecause Jesus died for us, his blood speaks louder than the blood of Abel, who symbolizes the innocent man who has been slain. In Jesus even a murderer can find forgiveness. The blood of Jesus speaks louder than the accusing blood shed by the hand of man.





*From a letter:* **Y**ou ask for forgiveness for your envy and hatred. We personally will gladly forgive you. But the forgiveness of the whole brotherhood, which means the renewal of unity with Jesus and his church, cannot be given until you turn fully away from your sin.

We are not angry with you, but we cannot pronounce forgiveness on behalf of the brotherhood for your sinful attitude until you prove your repentance more deeply. This may have already begun. If so, continue in that direction. God is good, and he will not reject you. The brotherhood loves you, too, and will not reject you either. But we cannot unite with you as long as there is envy and hatred in you.

*From a letter:* **Y**ou wrote that it was impossible for you to work because you were so upset about the hurt done to you. Your resentment must come to light and be overcome. Ultimately, the wrongs other people have done to you cannot separate you from God; only the wrongs you do to others. This is of utmost importance: all hurt and bitterness must be overcome.

*From a letter:* **H**old firm to hope and faith, and deep joy will fill your heart and heal your wounds—joy that will overcome all fear and pessimism. After all, we are called to a way of joy—joy in God and in one another, for in the deepest sense love means joy.

# Unity

Mt. 23:37

Jn. 17:21

In Matthew 23:37 Jesus says, “How often have I wanted to gather you to me as a hen gathers her chicks, and you would not.” This plea, along with the plea in Jesus’ last prayer—“May they all be one, Father, even as I am one with thee”—is a decisive and constant challenge to us. It calls us to a way of complete brotherly love and oneness in Jesus, and it calls us to follow him in unity so that the world may recognize we are his disciples.

Nothing binds or unites people more deeply than having the same hope, the same faith, the same joy and expectation. It is very sad, therefore, when individual believers stand alone. There have always been people who had to stand alone on account of their faith—some of them in prison, for years. But where there is true expectation, people are usually drawn together; their common faith leads to community, and they can strengthen and encourage one another. Standing for God always has a unifying power. Let us pray that we may be gathered together with all those who live in expectation of him.





Mt. 12:30

Our faith in Jesus Christ unites us as brothers and sisters and urges us to call others to follow him with us. We do this in absolute poverty of spirit—it is not that we want to make more members. But we do feel urged to call others to unity. The Holy Spirit does not scatter; it unites.

Acts 2:37

The attempt to reconcile different churches and confessions is without any doubt good. But true unity—the unity that breaks down all barriers—starts with repentance. When the Holy Spirit came down at Pentecost, people asked, “Brothers, what shall we do?” They were deeply struck in their hearts, and they repented for their sins and became of one heart and one soul. Unfortunately, in today’s ecumenical movement barriers or fences often remain, and people shake hands over them. But we must testify to the possibility of true unity among men. It comes only through repentance and through personally facing Jesus—as man, as living spirit, and as Lord.

*From a letter:* The ecumenical movement tends to resolve differences by making concessions. Concessions take the place of repentance, deep reconciliation, and the unanimity that grows as the fruit of repentance, and in the end serious evils are often smeared over.

A merely emotional feeling of unity is not enough. In our communities we promise to speak openly to one another when there are problems—to admonish each other and to accept admonition. Whenever we avoid this brotherly honesty because we fear the consequences it might have, our unity is no longer a reality. God’s will is deed, and we must live according to it with deeds. When we do this, Christ can bring about a truly united church, purified by the Holy Spirit. We will no longer nurse feelings against others, and we will become of one heart and one soul, as in the early Church.

Mt. 12:33

Lk. 6:44

Jesus said more than once that a tree is recognized by its fruits. We must never forget this. All of us can see what kind of tree today’s society is: its fruits are murder, injustice, impurity, unfaithfulness, and destruction.

Jn. 17:21

What were the fruits Jesus wanted to see? The first fruit is unity. How else shall the world recognize his disciples? Jesus said, “May they all be one, Father, even as we are one.”

Jn. 8:44

How can we show the fruits of unity and remain a part of today’s society? It is impossible: society is ruled by mammon, the spirit of this world, which is “a liar and a murderer from the beginning.” It is ruled not by the spirit of unity but by the spirits of disintegration, destruction, and separation. True unity can be found only in a life of brotherhood.

Is it not true that Christ demands the surrender of the *whole* man to his new order? The time is urgent. Let us come to a true sense of responsibility! Let us gather with Christ and unite with him as branches on the tree of life!

In a brotherhood ruled by the Holy Spirit one can see many aspects of Jesus, just as one sees different colors in a rainbow. Each of us is different, but God created us, and we should not try to be something that we are not. We should give our heart, soul, and being to Jesus and let him do with us what he wants. Then our lives will find true fulfillment, and we will love each other as we are, with our differences—even our national differences. The same Jesus is expressed in every brother and sister.

## Church Discipline

In our Bruderhof communities each member makes a covenant with God at baptism and promises never again to sin willfully against him. If after baptism someone does sin willfully against God, he must undergo church discipline in order to make a completely new beginning.

The small sins we all commit every day can be forgiven through our daily prayer. If the sins are worse, they can be forgiven through confession. James says, “Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, and then you will be healed.” For more serious sins, church discipline is necessary.

Discipline is carried out only at the request of the person concerned. In some cases a person may be excluded from common prayer and from members’ meetings until he has repented and is forgiven. In others, a person is put into the “small exclusion.” This means that he may not take part in common prayer and should not be given the greeting of peace, though he may still participate in the daily life of the community. If an even graver sin is committed, the church may use the “great exclusion.” In this case, a person is pronounced cut off from the kingdom of God, and he

may take no part in the communal life of the church until he has found a repentant heart.

1 Cor. 5:1-5

When someone has to repent of an especially dark, willfully committed sin, we use Paul's words, "I give you over to Satan for the destruction of your flesh and the salvation of your soul." Paul was speaking of a man who lived with his father's wife, yet even after such a sin he believed that exclusion could lead to the salvation of this man's soul. We also believe—and have experienced it—that through discipline people who have sinned can find full repentance and full forgiveness and can become true brothers and sisters again.

Heb. 12:15

**P**aul warned the early church to let no bitter weed grow up to poison the whole. If this warning was given to the earliest believers, then it surely applies to us too. That is one reason we use church discipline: so that no poison may destroy the church. Another reason is to give the person who is disciplined a chance to begin anew, to find forgiveness of sins, and to purify his or her life.

**W**e can exclude a brother or sister only if we recognize that the sin in our own hearts must be judged as well. Church discipline is not carried out to judge a person, but to separate the evil in a person from the church. This has to happen again and again in our own hearts.

When brothers and sisters accept church discipline, it should remind us of the grace of repentance. If they really repent, they do something for the whole church—in fact, for the whole world—because evil is overcome by Jesus. In this sense we must have deep respect and reverence for those who are disciplined, because we know that we need God’s mercy and compassion ourselves.

We must be very careful not to load onto a person even one milligram more than his actual guilt. We should be thankful that repentance and reconciliation with God is possible for those excluded, for us, and for all humankind.

Church discipline is a victory of light over darkness; it is the beginning of healing in a person. If it is accepted in this sense—the only true sense—it is a grace.

I believe that the question of exclusion and reacceptance—as indeed of church discipline altogether—is closely connected with Jesus, the loving and redeeming Savior who bears the sins of the whole world. He accepted death on the cross so that all men would be given the possibility of finding reconciliation with God again and again. This reconciliation cannot be separated from the forgiveness of sins.

The whole question of church discipline is something that has become blurred or softened in Christendom today. But it is not a matter of the Bruderhof’s point of view versus the view of Christianity in gen-

Mt. 18:15-20

eral. Our understanding of church discipline is based wholly on the words of Jesus and his apostles. They are our only guide.

Mt. 5:23-24

In a church that is almost dead or totally dead, people gossip about one another's weaknesses. There is little, if any, church discipline, and therefore no forgiveness either. Jesus commanded, "When you go to the altar to bring your sacrifice and you remember that your brother has something against you, go back and make peace with him, and then bring your sacrifice to the altar." He also said that we should not pray unless we forgive *every* person in the whole world, whether the person is right or wrong, friend or enemy. These commands have been almost entirely forgotten.

Mk. 11:25

Mt. 13:24-30

Jesus' parable about the weeds among the wheat is often used as an excuse for a dying church. But I believe that this parable is not chiefly meant for the church; it is meant mainly for the world in general. We cannot use it as an excuse for tolerating evil. If we know there is sin in the church, it must be rooted out through church discipline, out of love to the person involved and to the church. Otherwise the whole church will be lost. Paul says that the church should not have spots, blemishes, or wrinkles, but be pure and holy as Jesus himself is holy. We cannot excuse evil by saying that where there is wheat there is always chaff.

Eph. 5:27

Col. 1:22

**T**here is no better way to defeat the devil in our own hearts than by giving ourselves completely to Jesus. This is especially true for members under church discipline and for those who struggle with evil thoughts and feelings. They must give themselves over to Jesus again and again. That is the only way victory is possible in the struggle of the heart in daily life.

Heb. 4:12

**I**n the Letter to the Hebrews it says that the spirit of God is as sharp as a two-edged sword. We should apply this sharpness to ourselves first of all. But the New Testament also speaks of the great compassion, love, and warmth that come from the Spirit, and we should always show this love to others, especially to sinners.

**W**e can come to Jesus with any need, and we will find compassion and grace. But we must be willing to accept his sharpness, too. Every Christian needs someone who speaks the truth to him in the love of Christ, no matter how painful it is, in order to cut through what is evil in him.

**W**e must pray that along with the salt of the truth we may have compassion and merciful love. Then we will not fall into extremes, and we will not speak to each other without love. My father once wrote, “He who admonishes his brother without love is a murderer.”



name—that is, in a spirit of total and unconditional surrender to him—there the keys to bind and to loose are given. Forgiveness is not merely a private matter.

**G**od wants us to become clearer in discernment, but he also wants us to become more loving, more understanding, and more merciful. Church discipline must exist, but we must remember Jesus' words, "He who judges will be judged" and "With the same measure you use, you will be measured." Love is the greatest gift.

Lk. 6:37-38

# Baptism

In baptism three things are of utmost importance: faith in Jesus Christ, assurance of the forgiveness of sins through repentance, and incorporation into the Body, which is the church.

Baptism is a covenant with God and his church in which we give ourselves wholeheartedly to Jesus with all that we are and have, in the belief that he will forgive our sins. This forgiveness of sins is possible only through the death of Jesus, though he has given his church the power to forgive sins in his name.

May God forgive the sins of each person who desires baptism, and may Jesus purify each of them with his blood and make them children of God and true brothers and sisters.

Baptism is a confession of repentance, and therefore it means absolute dedication: it means giving ourselves, pouring ourselves out totally for Jesus Christ, as a vessel is poured out, so that we become empty of ourselves and poor before God.

Eph. 1:7

Jn. 20:23

1Jn. 1:7

1 Pet. 3:21

Rom. 6:3-4

Gal. 3:25-27

**B**aptism is the declaration of a good conscience before God, which is possible only through the gracious help and cleansing power of Christ's blood. It is Christ's spirit, the spirit of truth, that speaks to the believing conscience and directs it toward unity with the will of God. Only in such unity—the unity of a good conscience with God—is there true peace. Here the conscience is freed from the Law and from the powers of the spirit of our time.

Col. 2:12

**J**esus was baptized in the Jordan River, and I believe he meant baptism to be a real immersion. But the form is not important—if there is no water available for immersion, water can also be poured over the person being baptized. The important thing is that we are buried with Christ in baptism and raised with him through the faith which God works in us, just as Christ was raised from the dead.

**T**he step of baptism is a step of total dedication to God and the church, and we do not want to persuade anyone to take it. But we must call people to repentance; we must point out that the Gospel contains the sharpest condemnation of sin, though it also contains the warmest welcome for repentant sinners. God calls us again and again to come to him with our trespasses and our need, and we can always turn trustingly to him, no matter what the circumstances.

*From a letter:* **W**e do not become better people through baptism; we do not climb up to become gods. We will always remain lowly sinners to whom God comes down. It is a miracle we are never worthy of, yet God is full of grace.

**I**t is better to remain unbaptized than to take the step half-heartedly for the sake of parents or someone you love, or in order to find security in church membership. Baptism must be a personal decision. No one can make it for you.

Millions of people are baptized, but for many of them baptism is a completely dead form. I would advise anyone who wants to be baptized to ask himself, “Am I willing, for the sake of Jesus, to love nothing more than him—neither wife, parents, nor children—so that he can live in me? Am I willing to give everything to Jesus and my brothers?” If you are not, don’t be baptized. You must be willing to die for him so that he himself may live in your heart. Jesus must be your only treasure.

**I**f you are baptized for the sake of Jesus, he will receive you and love you and give you his forgiveness and peace. He will live within you, and help you conquer every temptation. You will be purified and washed clean by his blood.

Rom. 6:3-4

Mt. 10:38-39

Jn. 12:24-26

**T** rue baptism is deeply related to the death and the resurrection of Jesus. It cannot be separated from them. Baptism really means dying with Christ and then rising with him. The phrase “dying with Christ” has been so overused that perhaps some of its power has been lost; but when we consider deeply what it meant for God to come to this earth and die for us, we will begin to feel the seriousness of his asking us to die with him.

**B**aptism requires a personal decision to confess one’s sins and to give one’s life to Jesus completely. It means wanting to die rather than consciously sin again. You must personally experience that Christ is your peace of heart and that he died for you. But this is not enough. You must have a much greater vision of Christ. It would be wrong to forget your personal experience, yet you must see beyond it and recognize the greatness of the suffering and sin of the whole world. And you must also recognize the greatness of God, the greatness of the universe, and the greatness of Jesus, who is king over the kingdom of God and holds the key to the underworld. He has power over all powers.

Rev. 1:18

**B**aptism is not a human institution: it is a step in which sins are forgiven and demons are driven out through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. No man can do this, nor can any group of people. We need





## The Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper is an outward symbol, a sign of giving ourselves in brokenness to Jesus, whose body was broken and crucified. Christ wants to be present in the heart of each one who breaks the bread and drinks the wine. He wants us to become weak with him so that we may then become strong in his strength and have communion with him. Bread and wine are only symbols, but the purifying unity with Christ which they symbolize is a great reality. At the Lord's Supper we experience community with Christ.

1 Cor. 10:16-17

Just as grains of wheat from different fields are ground and formed into one loaf, and grapes from many vineyards are pressed to produce wine, so we, who come from different countries and cultures, can be united in the Lord's Supper. But this unity is possible only when we sacrifice our self-importance.

The Lord's Supper is a meal of unity, and we should prepare ourselves so that we may partake of it in the right way. It is a meal at which we remember Jesus, whose redeeming spirit of forgiveness is there for the whole world—for all people and all races. And it is also

a time for us to renew our covenant of faithfulness to God and unburden our hearts so that they may be freed for service and rededicated to him.

As we remember how Jesus appointed the meal on his last evening on earth, we should also remember that every Christian should be ready to sacrifice his life—in fact *should* sacrifice his life—like him. We live in a world that is just as hostile to God's kingdom as it was in Jesus' time, and he did not promise us that we would fare better than he did. Rather, he said that his disciples would be persecuted and that what was done to their Master would be done to them too.

Jn. 15:18-20

**B**y celebrating the Lord's Supper we testify to the love of our Lord Jesus, whose death made it possible for us to find forgiveness of sins, love, and unity with one another. It is actually a very simple meal, but Jesus asked his disciples to hold it in memory of him, and so we celebrate it in that sense.

1 Cor. 11:29

**P**aul says that he who eats the bread and drinks the wine unworthily at the Meal of Remembrance eats and drinks judgment on himself. It is clear by this that we should not go to the Lord's Supper with a conscience burdened by unconfessed sin. But we should not allow feelings of unworthiness to torment us. Paul is speaking here mainly about the inner attitude with which we should come to the Lord's Supper. We should come











simply part of our human weakness. Who is destined for you, or whether or not someone is destined for you, is not for me to say. The important thing for you is to give your life to Jesus.

## **Marriage**

Mt. 5:28

**J**esus takes the bond of marriage so seriously that he calls even a lustful glance “adultery in the heart.” He speaks so sharply about this because he wants to protect the wonderful and holy gift of unity between two people.

In a true marriage a man and a woman become one first of all in spirit. This means that they are one in faith, one in their experience of God, and united in the purity of the church.

Second, marriage means that a man and a woman are one in soul. One can be of one spirit with any believing person. But there is a difference in the bond that exists between a married couple and between others. There is a special love between these two, and a special joy when they are near to one another. Because they love one another quite specifically, they are faithful to one another and keep their relationship pure.

Third, marriage means that a couple becomes one flesh through the act of physical union. If this union is broken by unfaithfulness, it is a terrible sin, because—in God’s eyes—everything in the marriage is smashed. What was first a blessing becomes a curse, and nothing is left except the hope that through repentance and God’s grace something new can be given again. There

is no excuse for adultery, especially not for anyone who believes in Jesus.

The blessing of God is on any couple—young or old—who experiences unity in the right order: first unity of one spirit, then oneness of heart and soul, and then physical union. Too often a couple becomes one in body when there is little oneness of heart and only very little oneness of spirit.

Mt. 5:27-32

**W**e take Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount about lust, divorce, and remarriage very seriously and maintain a sharp stand against sexual immorality. No Bruderhof member may divorce and then remarry, and no remarried person may become a committed member while continuing to live in such a marriage relationship if a former spouse is still living.

We believe in life-long faithfulness, also for the sake of any children there may be. The covenant of marriage between two people must be a covenant for life, and it cannot be tampered with: "What God has joined together, let no man put asunder."

Mt. 19:6

**T**he basis of a true marriage is love to Jesus. You must accept Jesus as a living power into your relationship. You must surrender completely to him.

Eph. 5:23

It is the task of the man to represent Jesus as the head, but this also means that he must follow Jesus' example of lowliness. A man who does not want to be lowly cannot be a disciple.





The bond of marriage is a promise to be faithful through thick and thin, through good days and hard days, and to be completely dependent on the love of God for the whole of life.

One of the greatest dangers in marriage is nagging—showing dissatisfaction over very little things because one feels one's partner is not perfect. If a person always thinks he is in the right, he will not be open to love. He might fear God and listen to his will and his Word, but the Enemy will always be watching to tempt him, even if in little things. When nagging begins in a marriage, love will slowly cool off. We must be aware of this danger. But if we are willing to dare all things, hope all things, and forgive all things, then every day will be a new experience of love, even if our marriage goes through hard days.

*From a letter:* I think you must seriously ask yourself whether you have shown sufficient love and patience to your wife, and whether you went out of your way to understand her situation and her needs. A husband should lead the family, but this means that his first duty is to understand the needs of his wife and children. Without understanding them, he cannot show them love or give them leadership.





A true man represents Christ as the head, even if he is a very weak person. But this must not be taken as if he were an overlord. His is the apostolic task: “Go out and gather! Teach all people. Submerge them in the atmosphere of God, in the life of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” Women are in no way excluded from this task, but it is in a special way the duty of the man.

It is quite clear that the differences between man and woman are not absolute. A true woman will represent Christ and the apostolic truth, and a true man will have in him the submission and humility of Mary.

Today's religion is psychology, and psychology analyzes man as an animal and not as an image of God. Freud is right on many points, but he forgets the main factor: God. Because he analyzes man as if he were not made in the image of God, he explains the sexual urge as man's motivating force. He even sees the relationship of child to father and mother as based on sex.

Psychologists are right in teaching that there are many urges in us – not only sexual urges, but also the desire for property and for power. But their conclusion that it is not good to suppress these urges is wrong. It completely ignores the reality of God and the fact that man was created in his image.

The love and unity between two people in a marriage is deeply symbolic. The Apostle Paul says, “I take it to mean Christ and the church.” Such are the holy terms in which marriage is presented, and for this reason it needs to be completely subordinated to God. Its real nature can be understood only in relation to Christ and to eternity. The moment the sensual or sexual sphere is isolated from God and treated as an end in itself, the soul becomes defiled and sick. Certainly, sex is something distinct from love; yet there must be a deep harmony between sex and married love.

Sex is intrinsically intimate and mysterious, and it should remain so because of its close connection with love, the deepest and most spiritual of all experiences. It would be a serious error to believe that when two people meant by God for each other become one flesh, it is solely for the purpose of procreation. It is simply not true that marriage is purposeful only in this limited sense.

In contrast to all other areas of bodily experience, the sphere of sex is deep in and of itself. Its sensuality has certain essential elements that penetrate to the very roots of man’s physical being and directly into his soul. It has a depth and an earnestness that reaches far beyond the limits of the body and into the experiences of mind and spirit.

Therefore when a man surrenders himself to lust he is defiled in quite a different way than, for instance, by gluttony. Satisfying sexual lust wounds man in his innermost heart and being; it attacks and harms the soul at its core.

The sexual aspect of the sensual sphere has a central place in man because there body, soul, and spirit meet as they do in no other area of human experience. Thus the sexual life has an intimacy all its own which the individual instinctively hides from others. Sex is *his* secret, something that he feels touches on his inmost being. Every disclosure in this sphere reveals something intimate and personal and lets another person into his secret. That is why the area of sex is also the area of shame: we are ashamed to unveil our secret before others.

**H**ow dreadful is a time and age in which man so despises himself and his human worth that all sense of shame is lost! To the pure man the sexual sphere is his own individual secret, and when it is uncovered, it is uniquely revealed as the complete surrender of self in wedlock to only one person.

**T**he sex revolution of today is destroying the inner soul of man. We want to witness with our lives to something quite different: the fact that absolute purity and faithfulness in marriage are possible.

The whole idea of the sexual relationship between man and woman comes from God. It is nothing to be ashamed of; it is simply too holy to be constantly talked about.

Because of its unique nature, sex can take two very different forms: it can be an awe-inspiring, mysterious, noble, chaste, and peaceful act, in which case it will have a redeeming effect. But it can also be a forbidden surrender to naked lust, and then it will sicken the soul of man and become the domain of evil and of diabolical appeal.

Desecration of any sort is sin. If I abuse a human being by treating him as a thing instead of a human being, I violate his dignity as an image of God. It is desecration to seduce another human being with no thought of responsibility for his or her soul. It is a crime against the spirit, soul, and body of the other person *and* against oneself.

To seduce a person of the same sex is even more terrible. It is godless and perverse, and the Old and New Testaments, as well as the early church fathers, speak earnestly against it.

**T**o enter marriage solely in order to satisfy physical desire is completely out of the question. But one cannot deny the senses entirely. When you hear lovely singing, you do not deny your sense of hearing. And when you see the beauty of God's creation, you do not deny your sense of sight. When you smell spring and flowers, you do not deny your sense of smell. The same is true of the sense of sex. Divorced from God, sex is horrible darkness; that is true. But if you try to deny it completely, you force yourself into something unnatural.

**P**eople come much too close to the fire of love and sex without any inner foundation. They go into sexual relationships lightly, without reverence for God, and their inner life is destroyed. Even faithfulness in marriage has become more and more uncommon. Yet God remains faithful, and he wants us to be faithful.

*From a letter:* **S**ex has no purpose apart from marriage. Outside of marriage it is sinful. The Bible demands chastity before it and outside of it; that is very clear. So if you have not always followed the chaste and pure way, then you must find forgiveness in order to stand upright before God. But Jesus wants to give you this forgiveness.

## Celibacy

**W**e must recognize that to give up marriage is a great sacrifice. But to belong completely and undividedly to Christ is a great gift. In a sense, a relationship with Christ can acquire deeper meaning for a single person than for a married person, because his or her heart can be directed solely toward Christ, and a complete and undivided personal relationship with him is possible.

Christ compares the kingdom of God to a marriage banquet more than once. He calls the soul to union with him, and he wants to give himself undividedly to each person. There is nothing that surpasses the inner warmth, tenderness, and fruitfulness of unity with Jesus. This highest, most intimate bond of the soul can fill any void. Think, for instance, of the many believers through history who suffered in prison for years—even decades—for the sake of their faith. Through grace, each of us can find this bond of love and unity too.

Lk. 14:16-20

In Luke 14:16–20, Jesus speaks of those who reject his invitation to the banquet for love of other things. Ultimately, it is a matter of becoming totally undivided. In order to be wholly filled by God and completely free to follow him, we must be inwardly empty of all else. The danger of a divided heart is especially great when we are concerned with things or people worthy of love. When our inner eye is no longer directed toward Christ alone, then motherhood, fatherhood, family, children, and even the community of life and love in marriage can become idols that easily absorb our love.













*From a letter:* **A**s regards children's education, I would say that in general I am wary of extremes—of the pendulum swinging from one side to the other, from hardness to softness, from depression to exaggerated joy, from a negative approach to a positive approach that no longer sees any real problems. One must find a way that tackles all difficulties in patience, joy, and loving clarity.

**A**s parents we must overcome the illusion that our children are good. We must be careful not to have too rosy a view of them, and we must not be touchy if someone questions their behavior. We must love our children so much that we are ready to fight for their souls.

*From a letter:* **Y**ou say that you feel completely helpless in connection with your child's difficult behavior. Please do not hide behind this excuse. All of us are helpless and dependent on God; you are no different. But it is a sin to throw up your hands and cry out, "We are helpless." As parents, you are called by God to help your child and to love him, but also to fight for him and to be firm or even strict when necessary. The main thing is for you to win your child's heart.

*From a letter:* **Y**ou are concerned about your children's selfishness, self-centeredness, and unpeacefulness. Take a firm stand against these things. Because your children want to be the center of attention, they become, as you write, bossy, touchy, and disrespectful. Turn away from the softness that you have confessed; but don't become harsh. That is not the answer either. You must find the right firmness in God's love. He does not tolerate the things you speak of. We fail our children when our emotional feelings and ties push us around.

*From a letter:* **I** plead with you to fight for your children. There is no reason for despair if one fails again and again. One must simply keep up the fight. It cannot be tolerated that a child goes to the dogs. Be compassionate, be strict, be gentle again. It will not always be easy going, but you are responsible before God for your children.

*From a letter:* **I** want to encourage you to have patience with your children. A certain sharpness toward children is healthy, but impatience is not. May God give us patient hearts.

*From a letter:* **T**hank you for your letter about your son. His behavior is quite normal for a two-year-old.

In my own upbringing, if my parents said something, then they meant it, and there was no way around it. This does not mean that we were always obedient at two years of age. But later it would have been unthinkable for us to disobey our father or mother. They were not hard on us, but they were firm, and they did not tolerate the slightest doubt that they meant what they said.

*From a letter:* **T**hank you for your letter in which you tell about the trouble you have with your three-year-old son. Children at this young age need an inwardly sure hand. Outbursts of sharpness are not good for them, but serious, firm, and kind leadership will help.

*From a letter:* **I**t is quite natural that the difficult situation with your daughter pains you. It would be unnatural if a mother did not feel such pain. But use it to deepen your faith in God, in Christ, and in the church. Then you will be able to find faith for your daughter and help her.

Augustine, the mystic, lived a sinful life as a young man, but he had a very devout mother, Monica, who did not stop believing and praying for him until he broke down and repented. Later he became a servant of Christ, and for centuries he has influenced people in their search for God. I wish you the faith of Monica.

















school. I can well understand that there is a lot that tempts you, especially in the way of impurity. But if you take a stand for Jesus, his clear light will give you a disgust for all sin. May Jesus guide you every day, and may you never stray from his will.

*From a letter to a 13-year-old:* **A**lready at your age you have to make a decision either for or against Jesus. If you do not decide for him, you will decide against him. This is simply a fact; you cannot sit on the fence.

Jn. 10:14

*From a letter to a college student:* **J**esus says that he is the good shepherd and that his sheep know him and know his voice. You belong to his flock, and I hope you find moments of quiet to hear his voice for inner refreshment. I know there are many things in the city that distract you and tire you out, including the many hours you have to work every day. But it remains that your inner life is more important than your getting a degree, even if you are already very close to reaching that goal. I encourage you to hold on. It is good for one's character to stick something out to the end.

**Family Ties**

**C**hrist laid down his life for the church, and he loves her deeply. But he is also the Savior of the church, and the church is subject to him. In marriage, the bride is compared to the church and the bridegroom to Christ.

Rev. 2:16,23

Christ loves his church not only with gentle words: he also disciplines her with sharpness. We must be careful that a soft emotionalism does not enter our family life, either between husband and wife or between parents and children. Emotionalism ruins the Christlike clarity in a relationship.

Eph. 5:22-33

Lk. 14:26

*From a letter:* I understand your struggle to fulfill the commandment to honor father and mother. You write that you love your father very much, and that is the main thing—that is the same as honoring him. But the fact that you have to disapprove of his ways is also right and true before God. Jesus says, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, his own life—he cannot be my disciple.” The word “hate” should not shock you. Jesus does not teach hatred. Here “hate” means taking a stand against something wrong. If you accept both this passage and the command “Honor father and mother” as a guide, I think you will find the right attitude to your father and mother.

Ex. 20:12

Mt. 10:37-38

Jesus’ demand for holiness reaches even into the closest family relationships. He says, “Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.” If we















*From a letter:* Dear sister, I can well understand that you still suffer under the loss of your father. It is never easy to cope with death and the need it brings; death is the enemy of God and will be overcome only at the last resurrection.

But we must also see that for those who have followed Christ, death means closeness to him. It is understandable that the thought of eternity shakes you. But you should not look fearfully into the future. Give everything over to Jesus.

*From a letter:* I am very sorry that you have to bear such a heavy loss. A painful experience like this, the death of your child, always reminds us that this earth is not yet fully our home, nor will be until Jesus Christ is its only ruler, and sin, death, sorrow, fear, and pain are completely overcome and vanquished. But until that day—the greatest of all days—we can be sure that your child and all children are in Jesus' hands.

In regard to the question of praying for someone who has died, I have to admit that I do not know just what the right answer is. I don't know whether you are familiar with the following passage from the Gospel of John, or whether you have ever accepted it in your heart. It says:

Truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes Him who sent me, has eternal life; he











Nowadays occultism is often regarded as just another science to be studied. But we want nothing to do with it.

**A** person who lives a childlike life in Jesus does not need to fear possession by an evil spirit. On the other hand, someone who has practiced magic or sorcery does have reason to be afraid. We reject even the most “harmless” forms of spiritualism, as well as superstitious practices such as wearing health rings, tipping tables, or talking with the dead. These things may start innocently, but they can bind a person to Satan without his realizing it. They have nothing to do with a childlike faith in Jesus.

**W**e ask for God’s judgment so that his light may break in. The more strongly his light breaks in and the more strongly the love of his only begotten Son burns in our hearts, the more clearly will his truth be revealed. When Jesus comes and touches men with his light, it means judgment as well as freedom and redemption. All doubts, all things that chain and burden men, all the sins that hold them down, are touched, and men are freed. This freeing and redemption brought about by the breaking in of Christ’s light is given to the whole world, as is also the faith brought by him. For Christ said that he came not to judge the world but to save it.

Christ wants those who are most oppressed and desolate to turn to the light and be saved. Just those who are most crushed, who feel themselves most unworthy and burdened, should allow themselves to be touched and moved by God's great love. And once they feel it, they will know that they are included and freed by it. They are the very ones Jesus took to himself: the evil-doers, the tax collectors, the prostitutes, the despised of men. He did not criticize those who were possessed; he freed them. But in their freeing was judgment, for darkness was revealed and driven out. Evil was in no way ignored, but men were freed from it.

*From a letter:* **U**ntil Jesus comes back and frees us completely, we will always have to fight sin on this earth. This fight is first a struggle against the lower nature. Second, it is a battle of spirits, a battle against Satan and his demons. Your fall was not only a matter of your lower nature; it was also satanic. The Bible says that when Judas betrayed Jesus, "Satan entered into him." I would not dare to say this about you, but I do think your situation tends in that direction. I do not think Satan could have entered Judas if Judas had not sold himself to him first. Judas had already gone to the high priest; he had already accepted the silver pieces when he went to the paschal meal with Jesus, where Satan entered into him.

Lk. 22:3

Even if this comparison is too strong to apply to you, you did open your heart to evil powers. Where



















Jn. 18:15-27

trusting one another, even though we know that men can and do fail. Peter denied Jesus three times, yet he was one of the most trusted apostles. He failed, but then he went away and wept bitterly. There is no other way for us either, than to repent as deeply and to weep as bitterly as he did.

Even if we have to recognize that we have failed, we must not see everything as black—or think the foundation has been taken away from under our lives. God’s judgment is God’s goodness; it cannot be separated from his mercy and compassion. If we repent deeply and become humble before God, we will become nothing, and then Christ can live in us.

It is certainly sinful to use God’s working in us to build up our own pride. But it is also sinful to deny God’s working when we fail him. Our failures should lead us to humility and to God.

Rev. 3:1

**P**erhaps the worst thing that can be said against a church is what was written to the church at Sardis: “Though you have the name of being alive, you are dead.” If a church is dead, it is like the salt spoken of in the Sermon on the Mount, which has lost its taste and will be thrown away and trodden upon. Every church is in danger of going to sleep, of losing its life. Yet Jesus says that if he finds life even in a few, he will have patience and give them time to repent.

In the short history of our Bruderhof we have known the struggle for purity in our church. We have

known the struggle against deadness and against being a church that has the name of being alive but is in actual fact dead. Yet each time Jesus chastises us, he gives us time to repent, as a church and as individuals.

Mt. 5:13

One passage in the Gospel has become very clear to us: we must be salt. We have realized with a shudder how dangerous it is for the church if the flavor and power of its salt is lost. Salt gives taste to something tasteless, and salt wards off decay. Our age needs salt.

We are guilty of having tolerated false spirits for too long. Jesus warns us very sharply against false prophets and against those who speak of peace where there is no peace, or of love where there is no love.

Col. 3:12-17

*From a letter:* We must find the way to follow Jesus' command to forgive others just as he forgives us, but at the same time we must be clear and let no darkness come into the church. This is sometimes a great tension for me. In Colossians 3:12–17, Paul says that we should have understanding, forgiveness, and kindness in our hearts toward our brother. These we must have. Still, the spiritual struggle we are in makes it adequately clear that we cannot allow anything dark into the life of the church. May God help us to find his—and only his—way out of this tension.

**W**hen God alone rules in every heart we will have a healthy community, full of joy, full of dedication, and full of love. Everyone will feel this in the atmosphere. Each member will go to another and ask forgiveness for where he has caused hurt or harmed love in the past. And this will be done not because someone has said it should be done but out of an inner urge.

**E**very church needs voices that dare to speak for Christ, even when this is painful for the person speaking as well as for other members. But speaking out must always be done in the love of Christ, otherwise it is a sin.

1 Jn. 3:8

**J**esus came to earth to destroy the works of the devil, and he has millions of angels of God at his disposal to help him in this spiritual struggle. But Satan also has many angels—evil spirits, devils, and demons—at his disposal.

This spiritual struggle shows itself like this: the Holy Spirit, which is the spirit of Jesus, helps us to find God and to give us his thoughts and his love. This spirit helps us to overcome all evil and impure emotions. At the same time, the devil works in our hearts, giving us thoughts of evil, impurity, murder, envy, mistrust, and the desire for power. Yet all of us have guardian angels who will protect us if we follow what is good.

Christ must come to the deepest depths of our inner being, deeper than our conscious thoughts, deeper than our usual feelings—to the uttermost depths. Every person who knows something of deep inner struggles has an inkling of this. Through Christ he can find courage to believe against all unbelief, even where there was never any hope for belief, and strength to hope against all hope of finding love in another person.

*From a letter:* It is understandable that you are afraid of what others think of you. But even if it is understandable, it is a sin. When we are completely dependent on God, we will have the courage to stand up to anyone who violates our own conscience or that of anyone else, or to anyone who mistreats another. It is a sin to be silent out of fear. I have committed this sin many times in my life, but I have also seen the bitter fruit it brought to myself and to the whole church.

All of us know the struggles of the human heart, yet we have to see beyond them. We have to see the struggle of the whole church against darkness. It is an enormous struggle. And ultimately, we have to see it all in relation to the much greater struggle of the whole universe, which is led by God with his armies of thousands and thousands of angels and his stars of light, music, and harmony.



We declare war against the misuse of the name of God, of Christ, and of the Holy Spirit.

We declare war against all irreverence toward the childlike spirit of Jesus as it lives in children, and we want to fight for those older children in whom the childlike spirit has been partly lost.

We declare war against all emotional or physical cruelty toward children.

We declare war against the search for power over the souls of other people, including children. We seek the atmosphere of the church and of the angels of God.

We vow to pray for the light of Jesus so that all who are in bondage or tormented by evil thoughts may be freed, and so that all those who serve darkness may be revealed and called to repentance.

We declare war against the spirit of mammon and all false love connected with mammon.

We declare war against all human greatness and all forms of vanity.

We declare war against all pride, including collective pride.

We declare war against the spirit of unforgiveness, envy, and hatred.

We vow to lay down before the cross our own power and our own "greatness."

We declare war against any degrading of others, including those who have fallen into sin.

We declare war against all cruelty to anyone, even if he has sinned.

We declare war against all forms of magic or curiosity about satanic darkness.

We ask for the courage to rejoice in suffering and persecution for the cause of right.

We ask for forgiveness of our sins, because without Jesus our hearts and our actions cannot be pure.

We pray to live for the world as Jesus expressed it in John 17: that we may all be one as Christ is one with the Father, so that the world may believe that Christ was sent by the Father. With Christ we ask not to be taken out of this world but to be protected from the power of evil.

We ask Christ to consecrate our brotherhood through his truth. Christ's Word is the truth. We ask that he may send us out to be a light in this world.







this apathy is an expression of their need. It is a sign—probably the worst sign—of how strongly Satan, the enemy of Jesus and the murderer from the beginning, still rules over people. Don't you realize how deeply it must grieve Jesus when we talk about the need of our fellowmen in such a cold and superior way?

Do you think Jesus had this attitude? Do you believe he would have died for us if he had felt this way? We cannot talk like this about the poor and oppressed—no, we are called to love our fellowmen, and especially those who are so badly off that they can no longer see the way ahead.

*From a letter:* **T**o offer a night's lodging to a homeless person has always been a fundamental principle of the Bruderhof. The police have sometimes brought us homeless people, even families with children, in the middle of the night, and we have always found a way of giving them a place to sleep.

Under Hitler's regime the German secret police forbade the Bruderhof to take in any guests. But we informed them that we would never refuse a night's lodging to anyone, even if the police disapproved of it; we would never close the door to a homeless person.

We would lose our whole witness if we were not even willing to give a night's lodging to a person in need. But the main thing is love. Paul says that even if we give all our possessions to the poor but have no love, it will be of no use.











## Mission

It is our deep longing as a brotherhood that we may reach out to other seeking people. But this does not mean that we should all drive off and talk to people about our faith. Mission has to be given by God in a burning, genuine way so that we are led to those who want to hear. We cannot just preach to people. We seek an inner, personal relationship with them—something that cannot be made by men. Only God can give us the right word at the right time for the right person.

We are not interested in making members for the Bruderhof, as people sometimes think. Our movement would collapse if that were our motive. We want to gather because Jesus tells us to gather. When my brother Hardy was studying at Tübingen University in the 1930s, my father asked him to arrange some public lectures there. Hardy had large posters put up, announcing that Dr. Eberhard Arnold would speak about the Bruderhof. But my father said, “I certainly won’t do that. I will speak about God’s cause. I won’t mention the Bruderhof.” The cause of God should be our main concern.

cf. Mt. 12:30

cf. Mt. 23:37

**W**e long to have contact with more people, but all our wishes and longings must come under one desire: that at any hour, in any place, not our will but God's will be done. We must willingly submit to this. The last few years have shown us—or should have shown us—our incapability, our sinfulness, and our powerlessness. Mission depends on whether our faith is a living faith.

**L**et us watch that we do not go out on mission in human strength. There is enough preaching in the world; so many people go out of their own accord and preach. I am all for mission, but only if it is God's will that moves us, and not our own egos.

In the early church, where true mission was alive in a special way, there were two important conditions: the believers were of one heart, mind, and soul, and they were repentant. We must find this oneness of heart, mind, and soul, and we must find the humility and repentance of Paul.

**W**e cannot escape the command of mission. For a church to remain alive, missionaries must be sent out, two by two perhaps, as in the early church or among the Anabaptists of the 16th century. The city must stand on a hill, and the light must shine out. Does the world really recognize through today's church that the

Father sent Jesus Christ into the world? Do we not have an enormous responsibility? Jesus' last words to his disciples were, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."

It is unlikely that there will be another Pentecost where thousands are baptized in one day. But we long that the seeds of Jesus might be planted in our corrupt society, even if we must leave it to God whether the seeds become plants and bear fruit. The twelve apostles accomplished much, but they were sent with the authority of Christ. Nothing like it has happened again since.

I know mission cannot be forced, but I have an enormous longing that the seed is sown, that men awaken and love Jesus and keep his words. Then he will come to them and dwell with them.

Let us pray that whenever we mention the name of the Lord and proclaim the Gospel, it is with the fire of the Holy Spirit. That is the need of our age, the need of our poor earth, which was visited by the Son of God and has not been forgotten by him.

The cross is deeply implanted into the earth. It points to heaven, but its outstretched arms express the

Jn. 12:32

hunger and thirst of Jesus for all men. Christ said, “I shall draw all men to myself when I am lifted up from the earth.”

**O**ur life seems to have a certain contradiction. On the one hand, we would like to embrace the whole of humankind. If it were possible, we would like to convince thousands and millions of people to live as brothers and sisters in Christ. We want as many as possible to come to us so we can share with them. And we long that our missionary urge might grow even stronger. On the other hand, we would rather have only two or three members who are wholly dedicated, than hundreds and hundreds of people who are not. We do not want the salt of our witness to be lost. We would rather be a group of only a few, with real love and real faith in Christ, than a mass movement where there is hatred and jealousy.

Mt. 28:19

Mk. 16:15

Lk. 24:47

Jn. 17:21

**A**ccording to the first three Gospels, the twelve apostles were sent on mission with the words, “Go out into all the world and make disciples of all nations, and baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” In the Gospel of John, Jesus speaks of another form of mission: “May they all be one, Father, as thou art in me and I in thee. May they also be one in us so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.”

This is so important for us today. Here Jesus does not put the emphasis on preaching the Gospel to win people from the world, but on unity: “May they all be one, so that the world will believe that thou hast sent me.” In this prayer, mission consists in the unity of the disciples.

Unity costs a fight; it costs church discipline and suffering; it costs renewed forgiveness, trust, and love over and over to the same people who have hurt us. If unity is strong among us, it will shine out into the world. We do not know how, but it will.

**W**e must long for more and more love to stream out from our circle so that we can send people out on mission from a united church. Until we can do this we are not yet living for love alone. When we do not have the strength for mission, it is a sign that our church is not fully dedicated to love, and this should humble us.

**W**e live in community because we want to be brothers and sisters. That is our first calling: to be brothers, also to the humblest people, so that no one is looked down upon and no one’s need is forgotten. We are here to take care of our children, our brothers and sisters, our old people, widows, and orphans. It is not our main calling to seek out people from the slums and the like; that could even destroy us. If everyone were to scatter, things would go to pieces and the Bruderhof

would become like any other organization set up to do social work.

Mt. 10:8

Mk. 16:15-18

If we look at our discipleship in the light of Jesus' words about raising the dead and casting out devils, we will see that we are a very poor church spiritually. This should make us humble, but it should not make us resigned.

In my father's last letter he wrote, "We [the Bruderhof] have not yet arrived at true mission, but it is more and more urgent to pray for it." I know he hoped for this kind of mission—raising the dead and casting out demons—to be given again in our time. It was not important to him whether it would be given to him personally or to the Bruderhof, but that it would be given *somewhere*.

Jn. 17

*From a letter:* I long for apostolic mission—to go to the roadsides and fences and invite men to the great festival of the kingdom of God. But every day lived in true unity is mission too. Read John 17, where Jesus says that by the unity and love of the disciples the world will recognize that the Father sent him. There is no greater vision than that. If only we fight our way through to this unity, God will give us the strength to carry out both forms of mission, and every member will take part.





*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

Acts 2:42-47

# **The Kingdom of God**

## The Kingdom of God

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# Jesus

Jesus was the suffering servant. His life went from birth in a lowly stable to death on a cross between two criminals for the sake of pure love alone. He was a true man, yet God; he was the Word that became flesh; he was the Son of God but also called himself the Son of Man.

Jesus Christ is the redeemer who comes to us weak and sinful men. He frees us from sin and demonic powers. He makes us true men. He is the healer who heals for nothing. He is the true vine, the living tree. He is the same yesterday, today, and in all eternity. Jesus is the soul of compassion, the friend of man, the caller to new life. He is the true and good shepherd, the king of God's kingdom. He is called the wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting Father, and prince of peace.

Christ is the gathering power: "How often have I wanted to gather you like a hen her chicks, and you would not." His last prayer was for unity and love among his disciples. His new life overcomes separation, leads to community, and makes men of one heart and one soul. He is the revelation of God's love and kingdom.









**E**ach of us must have a personal relationship to Jesus. As a young man, I could not understand why the feeling of joy and love I had in the first weeks after my conversion did not last. I was very troubled and asked my father about it. He said, “You can’t base your Christianity on feelings. There are times when one simply has to follow without deep feelings.”

Eph. 5:22-33

Paul compares the relationship of Christ and his church to marriage, which sometimes brings joy, and sometimes sorrow. The main thing is faithfulness to the relationship; one’s feelings will not always be the same. When we are called back to the first love, it can give us a tremendous feeling of joy, which is a gift from God. This feeling will not last a lifetime. But if we are faithful, our relationship with Christ will remain even when we go through times of pain and tears, sorrow and emptiness.

Jn. 14:23

**J**esus says, “He who loves me heeds what I say, and I will come with the Father and dwell in him.” There is nothing more intimate than dwelling in another’s heart.

Jn. 6:53-56

Jesus also says, “He who does not drink my blood and eat my flesh cannot belong to me.” It is a Gospel of complete oneness; it excludes the possibility of half-heartedness. Jesus prefers the ice-cold heart to the lukewarm.

Rev. 3:15





blood. He is actually speaking about eternal community with him in the kingdom of God.

Mt. 9:12

Jn. 10:14

Jesus came as a physician for the sick and a shepherd for the lost—not only for the just and righteous. He is God's love at work on earth. If we really understand this, we will realize that following Jesus means suffering. It cannot be a comfortable way.

*From a letter:* Dedicate yourself daily to the person of Jesus. Then it will be possible to burn for him and to give up all self-concern.

Mt. 25:1-13

When Jesus lived on earth, he promised that he would come again to found the kingdom of God, a kingdom of peace and love. In the parable of the ten virgins, five of them were ready, but five had no oil—no burning love to God and men. Even though the five foolish ones had the outer form of the lamp, their inner fire was gone. Jesus said he did not know them, and they could not take part in the kingdom.

This parable speaks to our time, because it is almost two thousand years since Jesus lived on earth, and we have gotten used to waiting. The world goes on as before. But the time will come when we will wish we had oil.







Are we willing to go the same way of suffering that Jesus went on earth? Are we willing to give ourselves so completely to him that we are ready to be persecuted, beaten, or even killed for his sake?

**J**esus Christ! He must remain the center at all times. The church cannot be our center, for a body without a head is dead. We need constant renewal from within, and by that I mean that we need new encounters with God and Christ again and again. This must happen in communal worship meetings as well as in each individual heart. Rebirth means the indwelling of the Father, and it takes place through the Holy Spirit.

**The Living  
Word**

Jn. 1:1,3

**I**n the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.” The Word is the personal expression of God. He became flesh and dwelt among us as a human being who was and is Christ. God speaks with his Word to the hearts of men and judges them, and when they receive the Word and repent—when they feel great pain and remorse for their injustice and unrighteousness, their lying, murder, impurity, and darkness—then the kingdom will come.

**N**othing at all can help us—nothing except the Word of God. By the Word we do not mean the dead letters





Acts 2:41

The great event of Pentecost—the founding of a living church through the coming down of the Holy Spirit—is a challenge for us all. Through it we see that when the Spirit is poured out on a group of expectant disciples, something happens that affects the whole world. The expectation of the believers in Jerusalem was so great that three thousand others were added to their number in one day.

Today more than ever, when there are so many evil spirits at work—spirits of impurity and destruction, injustice, rebellion, and murder—we need the gift of the Holy Spirit. Whenever we are together, whether in our work, our worship, our singing, or our silence, we must await the Spirit. But we should expect it not only for ourselves—we must think in much greater terms. Let us pray for God’s spirit to break in over the godlessness of the whole earth.

Eph. 4:4

The experience of the Holy Spirit can never remain an individual experience: it leads to community. When the Holy Spirit came over the disciples in Jerusalem, they became of one heart and soul; they were so filled with love that they could no longer live for themselves. That is the greatest gift: to experience unity with Jesus Christ in community with others.

*From a letter:* There is hardly anything more wonderful than what took place at Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out over Christ’s disciples. The love

Acts 4:32

among them was so great that they were of one heart and one soul and proclaimed the Gospel of Jesus Christ even though they knew they would have to suffer for it. Let us implore the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts, too, with flames of fire, so that we may work in a suffering world for Christ's sake.

Mt. 3:16

**I**n the New Testament the Holy Spirit is compared to a dove. A dove is gentle; it will harm no one, and it will not force itself on anyone. It flees before birds of prey. Through the fall of man we are all birds of prey, and we have all driven the Holy Spirit away without knowing it. If the Spirit is resisted, he disappears. He comes only to the lowly, the broken, and those who seek him.

## The Cross

The fact that Jesus' blood was shed for the forgiveness of sins is a mystery. Many people say, "God is so great, so mighty, that he could have saved humankind without the cross." But that is not true. We should remember that God is not only one hundred percent love—which might have allowed him to forgive our sins without the cross. He is also one hundred percent justice. God's love and God's justice had to be revealed to the world of angels, because there are evil angels as well as holy angels.

To kill the Son of God was the most evil deed ever done. But it was just through that deed that God showed his greatest love and gave everyone the possibility of finding peace with him and the forgiveness of sins.

*From a letter:* **W**e constantly need the crucified Christ within us. To receive him we must become silent before God again and again. Christ wants to live in our hearts so that we are able to conquer all things. Through him everything receives its true meaning.









If we want to tread in the footsteps of Jesus, we must recognize that there is an hour of God for everything, whether it is marriage, mission, persecution, or death itself. We may no longer determine our own timing for these things, for we have surrendered ourselves in such a way that God's hour is our own hour—whether of joy, sorrow, or drinking a bitter cup to the dregs with Jesus.

For those who are dearest to me, I wish nothing more than that they be ready to drink the bitter cup to the last. It is much easier for us than it was for Jesus, because he has gone before us in the way of suffering to the end. We must be set on fire with such love to him that we can drink the cup destined for us to the last drop with joy.

Jesus went the way of the cross for our sakes. But he suffered in vain if we are not willing to die for him, to lose ourselves for him. Let us ask God that our thoughts and feelings are moved by his death on the cross, his descent into hell, his resurrection, and his ascension into heaven.

You must find the humility of the cross. You can search the whole world, but you will find forgiveness of sins nowhere except at the cross.

**W**e cannot encounter Jesus without encountering the cross. His person emanates the way of suffering. Through his sacrifice his great love for all men floods our hearts and becomes in us an urge to go out to save those who are in the grip of darkness. If we love Jesus, the desire to suffer for him will well up quite naturally. I cannot imagine how one can follow Jesus without a deep understanding for his way of suffering.

**W**e need to get past our personal struggles to experience the great thoughts of God. To experience personal salvation through the cross is important, but to remain at this stage is useless. The cross is so much greater than the personal; it embraces the whole earth and more than this earth.

**T**here are secrets that only God knows. Christ's death on the cross is one such mystery. The Bible says that through the cross not only this earth but also heaven and all the powers and principalities belonging to the angel world will be reconciled to God. Man, and perhaps even the angels, cannot know the mysteries that lie behind all this. But one thing we know: Christ overcame death, the last enemy. And through the cross something took place which had power far beyond the limits of our earth, far greater than our souls can comprehend.





Rev. 5:6

tha. But anyone who remains bound by sin cannot enter the kingdom of God, otherwise the world would continue divided and evil. We do not understand the fullness of God's love. Yet we do know that Jesus carries the sins of the whole world, and that he stands before the throne of God. His sacrifice for the redemption of the world is the central point. We should never lose sight of that.

Rev. 16

**A**s a child I always had the feeling that someday the masses—the working class—would be moved to come nearer to God. Perhaps I was influenced by the many anarchists, socialists, and religious socialists who stayed at our house. But when I was older I read in the Book of Revelation how one bowl of wrath after another would be poured over the earth, and still men would not repent. This was very hard for me. I could not accept the idea of only a very small fraction of humankind being saved. It went against my whole way of thinking. I searched the Bible—the Prophets and the New Testament—with this one question in mind.

Jn. 12:31-32

When I read the Gospel of John, I came across the place where Jesus says that judgment will come over the earth: “The prince of this world will be driven out, and I shall draw all men to myself.” I do not know how Jesus will do it, but I do believe that he will draw all men to himself, and that he did not die on the cross for just a few people. Jesus says that the way to truth is narrow and that few people will find it, that most peo-

ple walk the broad way that leads to damnation. This is undeniably true, but it would be terrible if we were to think that we ourselves had found the narrow way, and if we had no love for those who go the broad way.

Jn. 8:1-11

Jn. 8:59

Jn. 8:34-35

Jn. 8:24

Jn. 8:51

The eighth chapter of John begins with the Pharisees wanting to stone a woman caught in adultery, and it ends with their wanting to stone Jesus. Jesus angered the Jews because he spoke frankly about who he was, what his task was, and how he had come to save humankind. The chapter raises a decisive question for us and for every individual: Are we willing to believe Jesus' words, or do we doubt them? Jesus says that if we do not believe, we are slaves; we are not free even if we think we are free. He says that there is no other way to find freedom, redemption, and liberation than through faith in him.

He also says, "If you do not believe, you will die in your sins," and "Those who obey me will never see death." These words had to be said, for they are the truth, and they stand for all time. If we find faith, we will find freedom from sin, from the fear of death, and from the lovelessness of our time. But if we do not find faith, we will remain slaves to these things. The challenge to each of us is to love Jesus and accept the freedom he offers us.

Mt. 25:1-13

In the parable of the ten virgins Jesus is not speaking of the world but of Christians. All those who went to

meet the Bridegroom were virgins; that is, they were all Christians. But five of them were wise and five foolish. They all had the outward form – the vessel. But they did not all have oil. The oil of which Jesus speaks is the Holy Spirit, the life that comes from God, and only five of them had that.

Mt. 5-7

In the Beatitudes we see the marks of those who have the Holy Spirit. They are poor in spirit, they mourn, they are meek, they hunger and thirst for righteousness, they are merciful and pure of heart, they are peacemakers, and they are persecuted for righteousness' sake. In fact, the whole Sermon on the Mount tells us how we should live: we should never come to prayer without forgiving our brother; we should love our enemies and bless those who curse us; we should not collect money or treasures on earth; we should put our whole trust in the Father; and we should use no force.

It is a sharp judgment that the foolish virgins are not allowed into the kingdom of heaven, and this is a two-fold call to us. The one is to watch and wait for the Holy Spirit so that he may change our soul and our being, and so that we may be reborn – so that we are touched daily by Jesus. The other is to live for those who are with us on the way to meet the Bridegroom, and to call them to have oil in their lamps. The outer form is not enough; it is not enough to live in community or to follow the outer forms of Christianity even to the last. Discipleship must spring from a living heart.

Lk. 1:15

It may be that God pre-ordains certain people to be his own. It is clear that John the Baptist was chosen before his birth, and I can also imagine that the Apostle Paul was meant to be what he was a long time before he was born. But if there is such a thing as certain people being ordained by God to be his, even before they are born, then how is it with all the rest? In the Old Testament we read, “‘Have I any desire,’ says the Lord God, ‘for the death of a wicked man? Would I not rather that he should mend his ways and live?’” And in the New Testament we read, “It is not God’s will for any soul to be lost, but for all to come to repentance.” So the Bible makes it clear that God wants all men to be saved.

Ezek. 18:23

2 Pet. 3:9

Lk. 22:31-32

Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Behold, Satan demands to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren.” I think Satan demands to sift us too, and we must ask Jesus to pray for us that our faith may not fail, also for the sake of our brothers.

Lk. 22:54-62

Whenever I fail, I keenly feel the words: “The Lord turned and looked.” I am sure that Jesus has turned and looked at us many times—very sadly. When Jesus said that Peter would deny him, he was not just stating a predestined fact that left him untouched. It pained him even though he knew beforehand that it would happen. It was the same with Judas. When Jesus shud-

Jn. 31:21

dered and said, “One of you will betray me,” he suffered real agony. May we all have an open heart for the look Jesus gives us. He wants to protect his followers, but even after they are chosen by him they are still in danger of being lost.

**W**oe to us if we think we will get to heaven because we live at the Bruderhof. If we believe this, we don’t love Christ enough.

Rom. 2:28

**P**aul writes in his letter to the Romans that Jesus came not only for the Jews but for all men. He goes on to say, “The true Jew is not he who is such in externals; nor is the true circumcision the external mark in the flesh. The true Jew is he who is such inwardly.” In the same way, the true Christian is not recognizable outwardly—even if he is baptized. To pour water over a person or immerse him in water is in itself no help toward salvation. “True circumcision is of the heart, directed not by written precepts but by the Spirit; such a man receives his commendation not from men but from God.” This is an important point: faith is not made up of written precepts. Paul was referring to the Law of Moses, but today too, we can be enslaved by written laws—this is one of our dilemmas at the Bruderhof. We must never give up the freedom of the Spirit, in which alone we can find peace in God.

Rom. 2:29

Even if we do not completely understand the thoughts of Paul regarding salvation, the heart and

Rom. 3:28

the sense of his words are very easy to understand: the Pharisees kept the Law but were still proud hypocrites, whereas “our argument is that a man is justified by faith, quite apart from his success in keeping the law.”

1 Cor. 15:28

**Y**ou may wonder about the millennium, the resurrection of the just, and the future of God’s kingdom. Simply leave it all to God. We face many mysteries regarding the future; we do not know the reason for this, that, or the other. The main thing is that in the end God is all in all. He will triumph over all evil and over all that is hostile to him. That should be our greatest expectation.

## The Kingdom of God

It is quite clear that the kingdom of God cannot exist where bombs are being dropped on people, whether guilty or innocent, where there is racial hatred among men, where there is such poor distribution of food that some people starve while others have surplus food, or where people cannot find work because of automation.

If we really see the injustice of the world for what it is, we will long for the kingdom of God. Only when the hearts of men are moved toward love and peace will his righteousness break in. Those who remain unmoved, however, cannot take part in the kingdom. Therefore John the Baptist said, “Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand.” And Jesus said, “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and everything else will be yours as well.”

Mt. 3:2

Mt. 6:33

Jesus came to prepare all men for the kingdom of God, which has not yet come, as we know only too well. He told us that the kingdom will be among us when we love God with our whole heart and soul, and when we love our neighbor as ourselves. If only we would do this, not just in words but in deed!

Mt. 19:21

Jesus came not as a great king or president but as a humble baby. That is what people have not understood. He proclaimed the coming kingdom of God. There has perhaps never been a time when this is more urgently needed than the present. Men have more power than ever, and the power of their weapons is frightening. The relationships of people, races, and nations, are unsolved, and those who have money rule. Jesus says we should become poor. If we obey him and give up worldly privileges and power over people, our hearts will be freed for the kingdom of God. Oh, if we could only glimpse what this kingdom means: repentance, glowing love, and God's rulership above everything!

Nations are building their freedom and security on the most dangerous weapons that have ever existed. Yet we are called to build our security on something else—that which is of God. And we long that something of God might be given to all nations. It is not enough to lead even the most perfect life of peace in church community. Our longing will be satisfied only when the whole earth comes under the rulership of God, not the rulership of force.

Jn. 6:11

When Jesus fed five thousand people with five loaves and two fishes, a remarkable thing happened: the







other in Christ. All separation brought about by death will be overcome, and love will rule.

**T**he commission we are given by Jesus as a church is to work for his kingdom and his future reign. There is nothing greater on earth than to work for this. Let us live intensely and use our time for the kingdom! Let us love one another!

**G**od needs a place on earth where he can break in. Such a place was there in Mary, whose willingness made it possible for Christ to be born in Bethlehem. If God can enter in even one place, whether in Bethlehem, China, Russia, Vietnam—in a human heart anywhere—it is like the opening of a door. If the door to a room is opened even a little, light can come in. And if God's light enters and moves the hearts of just two or three people on earth, it will affect all the rest. It will even affect presidents, prime ministers, generals, and soldiers. I cannot believe that humans are so isolated from one another that it has no effect.

Rom. 5:12-19

Just as through Adam the whole of humankind fell, so through Jesus—the “second Adam,” the true man, and God himself—the whole of humankind can find freedom, healing, and redemption.

**L**et us call upon God and ask him that we may fight for his kingdom. The more deeply we enter this fight,



wine of God's wrath. We don't know when this will happen, or when the breaking in of God's kingdom will come, but we must raise our children so that they are ready to stand firm when it does. Our children must be courageous enough to stand for the truth.

**H**ow does the kingdom of God relate to the last judgment? How will the kingdom come, and what will it be like? Much is shown us through the sayings of Jesus himself, through the writings of the early church, and through the working of the Spirit in the individual heart. Yet Jesus said that the hour of the coming kingdom was known to the Father alone and that even he, the Son of God, did not know when it would come. We can approach these questions only with greatest awe, reverence, and caution. At the same time, though, we see how very concerned the early Christians were with the coming of the kingdom. All the words of the apostles point to it.

Mt. 24:36

**W**e do not know how near or far we are from the kingdom of God in terms of time. But we know we can be very near or very far from it in spirit, and that is the decisive question. Jesus said that we can expect signs of the coming kingdom, and some of these signs are evident today. Yet he also said that the last day would come like a thief in the night; that is, at a moment when no one expects it or is thinking about it.

Lk. 21:9-11

Lk. 12:39-40







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