

The Amish Papers

Encouragement on the Journey from Amish to Ahamish

By David Servant

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Introduction

My wife and I live in the midst of Pennsylvania's third-largest Amish community, near Smicksburg, Pennsylvania. We relocated there in early 2021 after three local Amish carpenters remodeled an 1890 barn I inherited which has now become our year-round residence as well as a retreat center and meeting place.

We grew to love and appreciate those Amish carpenters and their families, but it eventually dawned on us that none of them had experienced what all their Anabaptist ancestors four centuries ago cherished as the centerpiece of their faith. That is, none of them had been born again and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. They were moral to some degree, and they kept all the Amish rules of their community (at least when in public), but they were, to borrow a New Testament-based phrase, "spiritually dead." They had no desire to discuss spiritual matters or the Bible. They had no desire to share their faith because they really had no faith worth sharing...no gospel to spread. They had no assurance of salvation, but only hoped to be good enough to be accepted by God and permitted into heaven.

So, naturally, my wife and I tried to bring some light into their darkness. We consequently initiated spiritual conversations...that always went nowhere. We frequently talked about our faith and what God was doing in and through us. They listened politely, but our efforts never sparked a meaningful conversation. I even went so far as to offer to pay them their same hourly wage to have a weekly

one-hour Bible study during their work hours at my barn, at which we would all share our thoughts about some of Jesus' parables. They flatly turned me down.

I eventually discovered that one of them was an Amish bishop, and he had been for decades. When I asked him if I could visit his church gathering some Sunday to hear him preach, he became very angry and accused me of harassing him and trying to "infiltrate" his church! I was soon told by my Amish friends that they would no longer work for me. I could only think of the "hard soil" about which Jesus warned us in His Parable of the Sower and the Soils.

Having since interfaced with hundreds of similarly- hardened Amish hearts, I realize that my three Amish carpenter friends represented tens of thousands of other Amish people across North America who are living in spiritual darkness, blinded by centuries of tradition and social pressure. How our hearts break for them!

Yet I've also discovered that some Amish hearts are opening. The blinders are falling from their hearts and minds. It is for them that I've compiled the chapters in this book, to help them on their spiritual journey from being Amish to becoming "Ahamish."

What does it mean to become "Ahamish"? That is a word I coined to describe the Amish person who discovers the biblical truths that were universally believed by the early Anabaptists, all of which can be found in the 1632 Dordrecht Confession. At that discovery, the darkness lifts, the Holy Spirit arrives, and the born-again Amish person says, "Aha!" From that point onward, he views his life as "before Christ" and "after Christ." He has become a "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17), just like any other person, Amish or non-Amish, who is born again (see John 3:1-16).

Thankfully, God has connected my wife and I to some Ahamish folks who live in a different Amish community about 30 minutes from where we live. When we first met them, they consisted of about six adults. Now, less than a year later, they consist of about 30 adults, plus all their children. They have subsequently been excommunicated from their Amish community for "adopting a new faith." The truth, however, is that they have embraced an old faith—that of their Anabaptist ancestors four centuries ago, and that of the New Testament apostles as well as the Lord Jesus Christ. They have been born again and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. And their faith is now reaching out across North

America and even to other places around the world.

All of the chapters in this book were written at different times over the past few years that I have been interfacing with Amish people. I have placed those chapters in the chronological order in which they were written, and I have added a little background information at the beginning of each chapter. Together, I hope they will not only provide encouragement for those on the journey from Amish to Ahamish, but also help equip those who are trying to spread biblical light into the darkness of the Amish world, perhaps even among their Amish relatives and friends. One thing is certain: No Amish person will believe what they have never had a chance to believe. It is up to those of us who have some connection to the Amish world to give them that opportunity. As you spread the truth, may God lead you to some receptive hearts!

David Servant

March 2023

One

An Honest Look at the 1632 Dordrecht Confession of Faith

I wrote this article in April of 2019 in order to give it to the three Amish carpenters who were remodeling our 1890 barn into our current residence. I thought it would help them see quite plainly how far the Amish faith had drifted from its roots, as revealed by the 1632 Dordrecht Confession, to which all Amish people subscribe.

I gave my article to the head carpenter, and I will never forget the day he called me after he began reading it. It was a very uncomfortable and confrontational conversation. He wanted to know what my intentions were, and he made it clear that if I was going to try to influence them regarding the Bible, they would not continue to work for me. It caught me off guard.

That was my first real dose of Amish resistance to truth. Their belief regarding the assurance of salvation directly contradicted what was repeatedly written in the doctrinal statement they all claimed to believe, and that was actually believed by all their born-again ancestors! But the facts didn't matter. Tradition trumped truth.

That was the first foreshadowing of many other disappointments and frustrations we endured trying to bring light into the darkness that covers the Amish in Smicksburg. I tried giving my article to another Amish man who was helping with the electrical and plumbing in my remodel project, but he refused, telling me that he had been warned by the other Amish man I had given it to.

In September of 2019, this article was published by Mission to Amish People (MAP) in their bi-monthly publication, The Amish Voice under the title, "A Message for Today from the Past." My wife, Becky, and I paid to subscribe all 550 Amish households in Smicksburg to The Amish Voice for several years in hopes some might be

reached with the gospel. For this article, I used the pseudonym "David Miller," and I included a P.O. Box to which anyone could reply. No one from Smicksburg did.

The Dordrecht Confession of Faith was composed by 17th-century Dutch Anabaptist leaders and adopted on April 21, 1632 at a Mennonite Conference held at Dordrecht, Holland. Twenty-eight years later, in 1660, It was formally adopted by Swiss Brethren ministers and elders in Ohnenheim, France. Jakob Ammann, born in 1644, was a member of the Swiss Brethren, having converted from the state church sometime between 1671 and 1680.

The Amish movement began among the Swiss Brethren in 1693, thirty-three years after they had adopted the Dordrecht Confession. Jakob Ammann and others among the Swiss Brethren felt that their churches had drifted and were compromising what was written in the Dordrecht Confession, specifically regarding the severity of shunning, the practice of foot washing, and the idea that Anabaptist sympathizers ("the true-hearted") should be considered to be saved people even though they would not submit to re-baptism and follow Christ. Thus was born the Amish schism from the Swiss Brethren.

There is little doubt that Jakob Ammann and the original Amish Christians believed everything in the Dordrecht Confession. And of course, all Old Order Amish today subscribe to it.

Below are Articles 2-8, including each article's scripture references. I agree whole-heartedly with everything in all of these articles as they are entirely biblical. The complete Dordrecht Confession of Faith can be found in copies of *The Martyrs' Mirror*, a classic book found in every Amish household.

I have underlined the many statements contained within in The Dordrecht Confession that stand in contrast to the contemporary Amish idea that all we can do is hope to get to heaven, and we can't know if we were "good enough" until we stand before God. Those are ideas that Jakob Ammann and all original Amish believers would have whole-heartedly rejected.

Articles 2-8 of the Dordrecht Confession of Faith

II. Of the Fall of Man

We believe and confess, according to the holy Scriptures, that these our first parents, Adam and Eve, did not continue long in this glorious state in which they were created, but that they, seduced by the subtlety and deceit of the serpent, and the envy of the devil, transgressed the high commandment of God and became disobedient to their Creator; through which disobedience sin has come into the world, and death by sin, which has thus passed upon all men, for that all have sinned, and, hence, brought upon themselves the wrath of God, and condemnation; for which reason they were of God driven out of Paradise, or the pleasure garden, to till the earth, in sorrow to eat of it, and to eat their bread in the sweat of their face, till they should return to the earth, from which they were taken; and that they, therefore, through this one sin, became so ruined, separated, and estranged from God, that they, **neither through themselves, nor through any of their descendants**, nor through angels, nor men, nor any other creature in heaven or on earth, **could be raised up, redeemed, or reconciled to God**, but would have had to be eternally lost, had not God, in compassion for His creatures, made provision for it, and interposed with His love and mercy. Genesis 3:6; 4 Esdras 3:7; Romans 5:12, 18; Genesis 3:23; Psalms 49:8; Revelation 5:9; John 3:16

III. Of the Restoration of Man Through the Promise of the Coming Christ

Concerning the restoration of the first man and his posterity we confess and believe, that God, notwithstanding their fall, transgression, and sin, and their utter inability, was nevertheless not willing to cast them off entirely, or to let them be forever lost; but that He called them again to Him, comforted them, and showed them that with Him **there was yet a means for their reconciliation, namely, the immaculate Lamb, the Son of God**, who had been foreordained thereto before the foundation of the world, and was promised them while they were yet in Paradise, **for consolation, redemption, and salvation**, for themselves as well as for their posterity; yea, who **through faith**, had, from that time on, been given them as their own; for whom all the pious patriarchs, unto whom this promise was frequently renewed, longed and inquired, and to whom, through faith, they looked forward from afar, waiting for the fulfillment, that He by His coming, would redeem, liberate, and raise the fallen race of man from their sin, guilt; and unrighteousness. John 1:29; 1 Peter 1:19; Genesis 3:15; 1 John 3:8; 2:1; Hebrews 11:13, 39; Galatians 4:4.

IV. The Advent of Christ into This World, and the Reason of His Coming

We believe and confess further, that when the time of the promise, for which all the pious forefathers had so much longed and waited, had come and was fulfilled, this previously promised Messiah, Redeemer, and Savior, proceeded from God, was sent, and, according to the prediction of the prophets, and the testimony of the evangelists, came into the world, yea, into the flesh, was made manifest, and the Word, Himself became flesh and man; that He was conceived in the virgin Mary, who was espoused to a man named Joseph, of the house of David; and that she brought Him forth as her first-born son, at Bethlehem, wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger. John 4:25; 16:28; 1 Timothy 3:16; John 1:14; Matthew 1:23; Luke 2:7.

We confess and believe also, that this is the same whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting, without beginning of days, or end of life; of whom it is testified that He Himself is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, the first and the last; that He is the same, and no other, who was foreordained, promised, sent, and came into the world; who is God's only, first and own Son; who was before John the Baptist, before Abraham, before the world; yea, who was David's Lord, and the God of the whole world, the first-born of every creature; who was brought into the world, and for whom a body was prepared, which He yielded up as a sacrifice and offering, for a sweet savor unto God, yea, for the consolation, redemption, and salvation of all mankind. John 3:16; Hebrews 1:6; Romans 8:32; John 1:30; Matthew 22:43; Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 10:5

But as to how and in what manner this precious body was prepared, and how the Word became flesh, and He Himself man, in regard to this we content ourselves with the statement pertaining to this matter which the worthy evangelists have left us in their accounts, according to which we confess with all the saints, that He is the Son of the living God, in whom alone consist all our hope, consolation, redemption, and salvation, which we neither may nor must seek in any other. Luke 1:31, 32; John 20:31; Matthew 16:16.

We furthermore believe and confess with the Scriptures, that, when He had finished His course, and accomplished the work for which He was sent and came into the world, He was, according to the providence of God, delivered into the hands of the unrighteous; suffered under the judge, Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead, was buried, and on the third day, rose from the dead, and ascended to heaven; and that He sits on the right hand of God the Majesty on high, whence He will come again to judge the quick and the dead. Luke 22:53; Luke 23:1; Luke 24:6, 7, 51.

And that thus the Son of God died, and tasted death and shed His precious blood for all men; and that He thereby bruised the serpent's head, destroyed the works of the devil, annulled the handwriting and **obtained forgiveness of sins for all mankind; thus becoming the cause of eternal salvation for all those who, from Adam unto the end of the world, each in his time, believe in, and obey Him.** Genesis 3:15; 1 John 3:8; Colossians 2:14; Romans 5:18.

V. The Law of Christ, i.e., the Holy Gospel or the New Testament

We also believe and confess that before His ascension He instituted His New Testament, and, since it was to be and remain an eternal Testament, that He confirmed and sealed the same with His precious blood, and gave and left it to His disciples, yea, charged them so highly with it, that neither angel nor man may alter it, nor add to it nor take away from it; and that He caused the same, as containing the whole counsel and will of His heavenly Father, as far as is necessary for salvation to be proclaimed in His name by His beloved apostles, messengers, and ministers -- whom He called, chose, and sent into all the world for that purpose -- among all peoples, nations, and tongues; and **repentance and remission of sins to be preached and testified of;** and that He accordingly has therein declared **all men without distinction, who through faith, as obedient children, heed, follow, and practice what the same contains,** to be His children and lawful heirs; **thus excluding no one from the precious inheritance of eternal salvation, except the unbelieving and disobedient, the stiff-necked and obdurate, who despise it, and incur this through their own sins, thus making themselves unworthy of eternal life.** Jeremiah 31:31; Hebrews 9:15-17; Matthew 26:28; Galatians 1:8; 1 Timothy 6:3; John 15:15; Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47; Romans 8:17; Acts 13:46.

VI. Of Repentance and Reformation of Life

We believe and confess, that, since the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth, and, therefore, prone to all unrighteousness, sin, and wickedness, **the first lesson of the precious New Testament of the Son of God is repentance and reformation of life, and that, therefore, those who have ears to hear, and hearts to understand, must bring forth genuine fruits of repentance, reform their lives, believe the Gospel, eschew evil and do good, desist from unrighteousness, forsake sin, put off the old man with his deeds, and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness: for, neither baptism, supper, church, nor any other outward ceremony, can without faith, regeneration, change or renewing of life, avail anything to**

please God or to obtain of Him any consolation or promise of salvation; but we must go to God with an upright heart, and in perfect faith, and believe in Jesus Christ, as the Scripture says, and testifies of Him; through which faith we obtain forgiveness of sins, are sanctified, justified, and made children of God, yea, partake of His mind, nature, and image, as being born again of God from above, through incorruptible seed. Genesis 8:21; Mark 1:15; Ezekiel 12:2; Colossians 3:9, 10; Ephesians 4:22, 24; Hebrews 10:22, 23; John 7:38.

VII. Of Holy Baptism

Concerning baptism we confess that all penitent believers, who, through faith, regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, are made one with God, and are written in heaven, must, upon such Scriptural confession of faith, and renewing of life, be baptized with water, in the most worthy name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, according to the command of Christ, and the teaching, example, and practice of the apostles, to the burying of their sins, and thus be incorporated into the communion of the saints; henceforth to learn to observe all things which the Son of God has taught, left, and commanded His disciples. Acts 2:38; Matthew 28:19, 20; Romans 6:4; Mark 16:16; Matthew 3:15; Acts 8:16; Acts 9:18; Acts 10:47; Acts 16:33; Colossians 2:11, 12.

VIII. Of the Church of Christ

We believe in, and confess a visible church of God, namely, those who, as has been said before, truly repent and believe, and are rightly baptized; who are one with God in heaven, and rightly incorporated into the communion of the saints here on earth. These we confess to be the chosen generation, the royal priesthood, the holy nation, who are declared to be the bride and wife of Christ, yea, children and heirs of everlasting life, a tent, tabernacle, and habitation of God in the Spirit, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, of which Jesus Christ Himself is declared to be the cornerstone (upon which His church is built). This church of the living God, which He has acquired, purchased, and redeemed with His own precious blood; with which, according to His promise, He will be and remain always, even unto the end of the world, for consolation and protection, yea, will dwell and walk among them, and preserve them, so that no floods or tempests, nay, not even the gates of hell, shall move or prevail against them-this church, we say, may be known by their Scriptural faith, doctrine, love, and godly conversation, as, also, by the fruitful observance, practice, and maintenance of the true ordinances of Christ, which He so highly enjoined upon His disciples. 1 Corinthians 12; 1 Peter 2:9; John 3:29; Revelation 19:7; Titus

3:6, 7; Ephesians 2:19-21; Matthew 16:18; 1 Peter 1:18, 19; Matthew 28:20; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Matthew 7:25.

And so, according to Anabaptist doctrine believed by Jakob Ammann and all the early Amish believers:

- 1.) One sin estranged Adam and Eve from God, and there was nothing that they, or their descendants, or any other person could do could reconcile them to God, a clear declaration that no works can save anyone.
- 2.) God provided a solitary means for man's reconciliation and salvation: The Son of God, Jesus Christ.
- 3.) In Christ *alone* is salvation and "we neither may nor must seek salvation in any other."
- 4.) Jesus "obtained forgiveness of sins for all mankind" and became "the cause of eternal salvation for all those who believe in, and obey *His* commandments."
- 5.) God sent messengers to all the world to preach "repentance and remission of sins." Those who repent have their sins *remitted*. God has declared that those who "through faith, as obedient children, heed, follow, and practice" His Word to be "His children and lawful heirs." No one is excluded "from the precious inheritance of eternal salvation" other than those who are unbelieving and thus disobedient. They are "stiff-necked and obdurate" and "despise" God's offer of forgiveness."
- 6.) Neither baptism, taking the Lord's Supper, attending church, or any outward ceremony can do anything to please God or obtain salvation apart from faith in Christ. One must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, be regenerated (that is, "born again of God from above") to be saved. Those who do believe in Jesus "obtain forgiveness of sins, are sanctified, justified, and made children God," and they "partake of God's mind, nature and image."
- 7.) Through their faith, penitent believers are regenerated, renewed by the Holy Spirit, made "one with God," and "written in heaven." They become "the chosen generation, the royal priesthood, the holy nation, the bride of Christ, children and heirs of everlasting life" and "a temple of God in the Spirit."

It is very easy to see that someone who has (1) truly repented and believed in Christ, (2) who believes that Jesus is the **only** source of salvation, (3) who has been forgiven of his sins, (4) who has been spiritually born again, (5) who has become God's child and His heir, (6) who possesses eternal salvation, (7) who has been sanctified and justified, (8) who has partaken of God's mind, nature and image, (9) who is one with God, (10) whose name is written in heaven, (11) who is part of the chosen generation, the royal priesthood, the holy nation, and the bride of Christ, and (12) who is a habitation of the Holy Spirit... that same person would not confess that he does not know if God will accept him into heaven when he dies because he is not sure that he has been good enough to earn his place there. Such a view is completely contrary to what Anabaptists and the Amish believed from their beginnings, as revealed in the Dordrecht Confession of Faith.

If Jakob Ammann and the original Amish were alive to day, they would be excommunicated and shunned by the Amish for believing that their names are written in heaven!

It is not prideful to claim that one is certain that one is going to heaven; rather, it is one of the many evidences of true repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Having assurance of salvation is the normal true Christian experience, as John wrote, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13). Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life" (John 5:24). If one believes Jesus' words in John 5:24, could he possibly be only hoping that he will be saved in the end if he is good enough?

If one professes to believe in Jesus but is uncertain if he is going to heaven, it is an indication that he has not actually put his trust in Jesus, but rather he is putting his trust (actually, his hope) in his own feeble works, a grave error condemned throughout the New Testament, and especially in Paul's letters to the Galatians and Romans.

Although it is not prideful to be confident in Jesus' promises of salvation to those who believe, it is prideful to even *hope* that one is good enough to merit heaven, which is why Paul declared, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; *not as a result of works*, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). If our works earn our salvation or even

contribute to earning our salvation in some small way, we could boast. God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6; Luke 18:10-14).

To attempt to merit eternal salvation could be the highest form of idolatry, because it sets up self as savior and usurps what only belongs to Christ. It is to point one's finger at Jesus as He hangs dying on the cross and to say to Him: "What you are doing is not enough! I must add my own goodness!"

And this is why this subject is so important. The New Testament repeatedly warns that those who attempt to earn their way to heaven will, in the end, be disappointed, because they are attempting to do what is impossible. And they will tragically receive exactly what they deserve. People who try to earn their way to heaven go to hell, because they attempt to establish their own righteousness, which falls infinitely short of God's standard of perfection, which is the entire reason that Jesus died for our sins and the reason salvation can be gained only by grace through faith. As Paul wrote of the Jews of his day who were attempting to be saved by their own works:

Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation. For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes (Romans 10:1-4).

Of course, true believers obey Christ for at least three reasons: First, because they believe in Him. Faith without works is dead and cannot save (James 2:14-26). Second, because they love Him. Jesus said that if we love Him, we will keep His commandments (John 14:15, 21). And third, because He lives in them (Galatians 2:20; Colossians 1:27). That is why Jesus said that His yoke is easy, and His burden is light (Matthew 11:28-30). His power in true believers makes it possible for them to obey Him. That is why the apostle John said that Jesus' commandments are not burdensome (1 John 5:3).

But obeying Jesus because you believe in Him, love Him, and have Him living inside of you is entirely different than trying to be good enough to attain salvation. The former person is a Christian. The latter person is a "legalist."

The *original* Amish (and Anabaptist) equation of salvation, as revealed in the Dordrecht Confession, is this:

Repentance + Faith in Jesus Christ = Immediate Forgiveness + Immediate Name Written in Heaven + Immediate Spiritual Rebirth + Immediate New Heart + Immediate Indwelling of the Holy Spirit + Immediate and Continually-Increasing Obedience to Christ

The modern Amish equation of salvation seems to be something like this:

Baptism + Amish Vows + Partial Obedience to Jesus + Submission to Parents, Church Authorities and Hundreds of Manmade Rules = Hopeful Eventual Salvation (Maybe)

I wrote “partial obedience” in that equation because some of Jesus’ commandments are completely ignored in most Amish circles, such as Jesus’ commandment to preach the gospel and make disciples of all the nations, which is the foremost way to love one’s non-believing neighbor as oneself and to love one’s enemies. Jesus commanded His disciples to make disciples, teaching their disciples to obey all that He had commanded them, which of course included His commandment to make disciples (Matthew 28:19-20). So all of Jesus’ disciples—generation after generation—are commanded to make disciples.

The modern Amish “gospel” is not a promise of salvation to everyone who believes, but a threat of hell if one does not follow hundreds of manmade rules and regulations, which makes it a “gospel of works.” Amish people today live their lives in fear of breaking the smallest requirement of the *Ordnung*, which could result in excommunication, shunning by their Amish community, and ultimately an eternity in hell. (Perhaps this is one reason that so many Amish move from their home communities to smaller Amish communities where there is less scrutiny by Amish neighbors and a more lenient *Ordnung*.)

The original Amish, like all the original Swiss Brethren and Mennonites, were evangelistic. They called their unbelieving neighbors to repentance and faith in Jesus, hoping that their neighbors would respond, be born again, and have their names written in heaven. Most, just like Jakob

Ammann, were not *born* Anabaptist, but converted from the state Protestant or Catholic churches—after hearing someone preach the gospel. If the original Anabaptists had been like the modern Amish, Jakob Ammann would have never converted to Christ, because he would have never heard the gospel. (So, if the original Anabaptists had been like the modern Amish, there would be no Amish today.)

The “gospel of works” has been thoroughly condemned in the New Testament, particularly by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Galatian Christians. They were being seduced into thinking that they were required to be circumcised and keep all of the 613 rules and regulations found in the Law of Moses in order to be saved. Paul solemnly warned them:

I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you, and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed.... nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified (Galatians 1:6-9; 2:16).

Below are some of the scripture verses cited within the Dordrecht Confession that were used to support the doctrinal claims made in each of the articles. All would be worthwhile for any contemporary Amish person to ponder.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

John 20:31 but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

Col. 2:14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

Gal. 1:8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!

Matt. 28:19-20 “Go therefore and make disciples of call the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Luke 24:47 and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

Rom. 8:17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.

Heb. 10:22 let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

John 7:38 “He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’”

Acts 2:38 Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

1Pet. 2:9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

Titus 3:4-7 But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by

the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Eph. 2:19-21 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord.

2 Cor. 6:16 Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

TWO

What Does It Really Mean to be Born Again?

Because of the encouragement of Paul Miller, then editor of The Amish Voice, I wrote some additional articles to submit to him for consideration for publication. Paul liked the article below, but he told me it was too lengthy, so he divided it and published it as a two-part series in two consecutive editions of The Amish Voice in 2020. Both of those editions were mailed to every Amish household in the Smicksburg community, but I received no responses from any of them. I did receive some positive feedback from Amish and ex-Amish readers in other places. This article is also one that we sent to those who responded to our June, 2022 mailing to over 60,000 mostly-Amish households, who asked for more information about the new birth.

One of the most tragic statements I've ever heard was spoken from the mouth of a woman who had encountered some people whom she considered odd—folks who had identified themselves as “born-again Christians.” She rolled her eyeballs as she mocked them, saying to some family members, “Watch out for those ‘born-again’ Christians! They’re out to convert you!”

What made her warning so tragic is that she attended a Methodist church every Sunday. Not only was the founder of her denomination—John Wesley—fully persuaded almost 300 years ago of the necessity of being born again¹, but even more persuaded was the founder of all of Christianity—

¹ See John Wesley's Sermon #45, titled *The New Birth*, which begins with the words, “If any doctrines within the whole compass of Christianity may be properly termed fundamental, they are doubtless these two—the doctrine of justification, and that of the new birth.”

Jesus Christ—about 2,000 years ago! Jesus once said to a very religious man, a highly-respected teacher and Pharisee named Nicodemus:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3).

Take note that that solemn declaration, spoken by the King of God’s kingdom, begins with the words, “truly, truly.” Jesus didn’t want Nicodemus—or anyone else—to take His words lightly. *It was a declaration of unassailable truth uttered by the very Son of God: Unless one is born again, he absolutely cannot see the kingdom of God. There are no exceptions. For that reason, everyone, and especially those who profess to be Christians, should ask themselves this very important question: Have I been born again? (And if you answered “yes,” a second important question is: “Have I REALLY been born again?”)*

One who has not been born again is comparable to a baby who has not yet been born. She is blind to the world outside her mother’s womb. She may hear muffled sounds and perhaps even perceive a dim light that penetrates the darkness of the womb, but she is completely shut off to that world and cannot see it. Similarly, those who are not born again may sense some hints of the kingdom of God “out there.” They may, like Nicodemus or the mocking woman I first mentioned, be steeped in religion and therefore think they already have some connection to God. But still, until they are born again, they cannot see His kingdom. They live in isolation, blind to a wonderful realm that potentially awaits them.

Conversely, one who has been born again is comparable to a baby who has escaped the womb and now entered into a brand-new world he previously could not see. The born-again believer has his eyes opened to see God’s kingdom. He realizes there is (of course) a great king—Jesus Himself—who rules over that kingdom. He understands that Jesus’ kingdom includes not only himself, but everyone who truly believes in Him and has thus submitted to His loving rule. For his “fellow kingdom citizens,” he feels a special affinity, a supernatural love. He soon realizes that Jesus’ kingdom extends all over the world, and that it will one day be the *only* kingdom on earth—when Jesus finally banishes all those who did not heed His solemn words: “Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

The Conversation Begins

Not understanding Jesus' declaration regarding the necessity of a second birth, Nicodemus replied, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" (John 3:4).

Nicodemus apparently thought Jesus was referring to a physical rebirth. So Jesus repeated what He had already said, but altered it slightly to help Nicodemus realize He was referring to a spiritual rebirth: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5).

First, notice Jesus again began His second declaration with the words, "Truly, truly." Of course, Jesus never lied. So we should believe everything He said. How much more when He prefaces His words with "Truly, truly"!

Second, it is from this elaboration we realize that, not only can one not *see* God's kingdom unless he is born again, neither can one *enter* God's kingdom. Jesus' solemn declaration has become even more solemn. *No one* can enter God's kingdom unless they are born again. There are no exceptions. This teaches us that all *true* Christians are born again. If you are not born again, you are not a true Christian.

If you think you are a Christian, but you have not been born again, you put your own opinion above the solemn words of Jesus. You exalt yourself above God! (Which probably isn't a good strategy for getting into heaven...)

Third, it is from this declaration by Jesus we realize that, to be born again, one does not need to re-enter his mother's womb. Rather, he needs to be born "of water and the Spirit." What does that mean?

Some think the phrase being "born of water" refers to a physical birth, which is often preceded by a rush of water-like fluid from the breaking of a mother's amniotic sac. If this is the correct interpretation, Jesus was simply telling Nicodemus that one must experience both a physical and a

spiritual birth in order to see and enter God's kingdom. Jesus seems to also draw this contrast in His very next sentence: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6).

Other interpreters, however, wonder why Jesus would affirm to Nicodemus something that is so obvious, namely, that one must be physically born to ultimately enter God's kingdom. For that reason, some think Jesus was referring to water baptism, or to something else that the word *water* might symbolically represent, such as the word of God, spiritual purification, or the Holy Spirit (see Ezek. 36:25; John 7:38-39; Titus 3:5; Eph. 5:26; 1 Cor. 6:11). I don't see a great need to be dogmatic about any single interpretation, as all of them contain some biblical truth. Every new believer should be baptized in water. And one must respond in faith to God's word as revealed in the gospel, be spiritually cleansed, and be indwelt and transformed by the Holy Spirit to enter God's kingdom. According to the New Testament, all those things occur when one is born again. So let us focus on what it means to be "born of the Spirit."

Being Born of the Spirit

Jesus said, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6). So it is the *spirit* of a person that needs to be reborn if that person is to enter God's kingdom.

Scripture teaches that all of us are tripartite in nature—spirit, soul and body:

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thes. 5:23).

My body, of course, is my physical, material self—my flesh, bones, blood and so on.

My soul is my mind, emotions and intellect.

My spirit is revealed in the Bible as being the "true person," who lives on even after my body dies:

For *just as the body without the spirit is dead*, so also faith without works is dead (Jas. 2:26, emphasis added).

The human spirit is referred to in the Bible as the “hidden person of the heart” (see I Pet. 3:4). The human spirit is a *person*. People who have temporarily died during hospital surgery sometimes say, “I came out of my body and ascended to the ceiling, and I was looking down at the doctors who were trying to revive me.” They refer to their spirit as “I” and “me.” Your spirit is the “real you.” And your spirit must be born again by the direct action of God’s Holy Spirit if you are to see or enter God’s kingdom.

Why is being born again essential? Because the Bible teaches that prior to being born again, our spirits possess a sinful nature, and we are “spiritually dead.” Consider Paul’s words in his Ephesian letter:

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) (Eph. 2:1-6).

Paul told the Ephesian Christians they were formerly dead in their “trespasses and sins.” Obviously, they were not formerly *physically* dead, so he must have been saying they were spiritually dead. Their sins made them dead to God. They lived like everyone else, indulging in sin every day, not even realizing that the spirit of the devil, whom Paul called “the prince of the power of the air,” was “working in” them. They were “by nature children of wrath.” That is, they sinned because they were sinners *by nature*.

This state of spiritual death is the same state in which Adam and Eve found themselves after they sinned. God had told them they would die on the day they ate the forbidden fruit, but Scripture tells us that Adam lived hundreds of years after he sinned. So he must have died *spiritually* that day. He

found himself cast out of Eden, alienated from God. That is the state of every spiritually dead person. It is not only their sin that separates them from God, but their sinful nature.

And all of this explains why no one can enter God's kingdom unless they are born again. *People who are spiritually dead, whose very nature is sinful, who have Satan's spirit working in them, cannot enter God's kingdom unless they are somehow radically transformed.* They must be born again!

Thankfully, the Christians in Ephesus had all experienced that wonderful spiritual regeneration. As we just read in Paul's letter to them, God, in His great mercy and love, changed them from being dead to being alive, spiritually. That is just another way to describe being born again. Both Jesus and the apostle John referred to the spiritual rebirth as "passing from death to life":

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life (John 5:24; see also 1 John 3:14).

Obviously, in light of Scripture's very descriptive words related to this subject, one who has been truly born again has experienced a *profound* spiritual change. To be born again is not a human effort of reformation; it is a divine work of resurrection! It is not "turning over a new leaf," but "receiving a new life"!

This is not to say that true Christians have no struggle with sin. Although they possess spirits that have been transformed, they possess souls/minds that are *being* transformed, and bodies that are awaiting *future* transformation. Their transformed spirits find themselves at war with their non-transformed "flesh" (see Gal. 5:19-23), but they are no longer slaves to sin as they were prior to their rebirth.

Religious Blindness

Tragically, those who are often the most blind to their dead spiritual state are those who are the most religious. As they keep their traditions, manmade rules, and even some of God's commandments, they wrongly assume that they have no need to be spiritually reborn.

Such folks are somewhat comparable to pigs that have been bathed and sprinkled with perfume. They may look clean and smell nice, but they are still pigs. And if you put them close to mud, they will gravitate towards it. That is their nature.

The only way to keep pigs from returning to the mud is to build a fence that prevents them from doing what they want to do. And it is the same way for religious people who have not been born again. Their leaders, ancient or modern, build fences to keep them away from sin. In Jesus' day, this is exactly what religious leaders like Nicodemus did. They built fences around God's laws, hoping to keep people from even getting close to sinning. But those "pigs" always found some way to slip under or around the fence, because pigs love to wallow in the mud! And when they found their way under and around those fences and into the mud, they often discovered that their fence-building leaders were already wallowing in the mud themselves!

God, however, takes pigs and transforms them into sheep, the "sheep of His pasture"! (Ps. 79:13). That is why Paul wrote, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come" (2 Cor. 5:17).

The Difference

People who are born again are radically different than they were before they were born again. From the moment of their spiritual rebirth, they immediately see themselves and others differently. They know that every person is either born again or not born again, a new creation or not a new creation. And the first thing that enters their minds when they see or meet a new person is, "Are they born again or not?" They want everyone to experience the same rebirth they've experienced.

When religious people experience a spiritual rebirth, they no longer look at the world as consisting of everyone who is in their religious group and everyone who is not. Again, they realize that there are only two categories of people in God's eyes—those who have been born again and those who have not been born again. When religious people are born again, they are immediately concerned about everyone who is not born again, especially those within their religious group. And they can't keep quiet about it, any more than they could keep quiet if they saw their neighbor's house on fire.

Because people who are not born again are on the road to hell—unless Jesus was lying when He said, “Unless you are born again, you cannot enter God’s kingdom.”

Spiritual rebirth is just one of numerous *immediate* blessings God pours out upon those who believe in His Son. God forgives their sins, makes them His children, gives them the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit, and promises them eternal life. These blessings are like birthday gifts, but gifts that are given at birth!

How Can I Be Born Again?

Babies in the womb can’t birth themselves. They are birthed by the action of their mothers. Similarly, no person can cause himself to be born again. Spiritual rebirth is the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. This is why the New Testament refers to those who have been born again as people who are “born of the Spirit” (John 3:6, 8) and “born of God” (1 John 3:9; 4:7; 5:1). Being born again is a divine miracle that no one can fully understand or explain.

The Holy Spirit, however, doesn’t regenerate people’s spirits arbitrarily. He regenerates the spirits of those who believe in Jesus. John wrote, “Whoever *believes that Jesus is the Christ* [Messiah] is born of God” (1 John 5:1, emphasis added).

John also wrote, “For whatever is *born of God* overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith (1 John 5:4). Faith is the key that opens the door to being “born of God” and “overcoming the world” (that is, not living like the people of the world who are not born again).

Similarly, and just a few seconds after telling Nicodemus that he must be born again, Jesus told him:

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that *whoever believes in Him* shall not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:16; emphasis added).

It is simply by believing in Jesus that eternal life, and spiritual rebirth, is gained. If we had lived sinless lives of perfection, we would not need to be born again, and we would have earned eternal

life. But sinners (like all of us) need forgiveness and transformation. The New Testament repeatedly reveals that these things are graciously granted to those who believe in Jesus.

How Can I Be Sure I've Been Born Again?

Of course, *claiming* to believe that Jesus is the Christ is not proof that one actually does believe. I know that, because I publicly claimed I believed in Jesus when I was confirmed as a church member at age 12. Looking back, I realize that I really didn't believe what I claimed to believe. If I would have truly believed in Jesus, I would have been spiritually reborn and become a new creature—just as Jesus promised—and *I would have started acting like it*. The New Testament teaches that there are two primary marks that identify those who are genuinely born again:

(1) If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is *born of Him*.... No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is *born of God* (1 John 2:29; 3:9, emphasis added).

(2) Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is *born of God* and knows God (1 John 4:7, emphasis added).

The first identifying mark of those who are born of God is that they practice righteousness and do not practice sin (1 John 2:29; 3:9). That is, they consistently do what is right. They are not perfect, and they may sometimes stumble (see James 3:2), but their lives are characterized by righteousness and holiness. Those whose lives are characterized by sin and unrighteousness are not born again. As Paul warned in his letter to the Corinthians:

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

Take note that Paul credited the transformed lives of the Corinthian Christians, not to human efforts to reform, not to fence laws, nor to church membership. Rather, he credited God’s Spirit. The Corinthian believers had been “washed,” “sanctified” (set apart for holy use) and “justified” (declared righteous) by the work of God, not by the work of man. They had been born again!

The second identifying mark of those who are born of God is that they love others who are born again (1 John 4:7)—those who are fellow members of their spiritual family and who have the same Heavenly Father. If they mock, resist or don’t want to associate with those who are born again, it proves they are not born again. As John also wrote:

We know that we have *passed out of death into life*, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death.... If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen (1 John 3:14; 4:20, emphasis added).

How tragic it is when people who profess to be Christians shun or disassociate themselves from family members who are born again. By their actions, they demonstrate that they are not Christians, but just religious.

The love that born-again people have for their spiritual family also motivates them to make sacrifices for members facing hardships. Jesus’ foretelling of the future judgment of the sheep and goats makes that ever so clear (see Matt. 25:31-46). To not care for the “least of these” among Christ’s brethren is to not care for Jesus. As John echoed:

We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? (1 John 3:16-17).

The Assurance of Salvation

Notice that so many of the passages I've quoted from the Bible are from the apostle John's first letter. John wrote that letter to help his readers ascertain, by self-examination, if they were truly born again and genuinely possessed eternal life. Near the end of that letter he wrote:

These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life (1 John 5:13).

It is not only possible to know that you have eternal life and are born again, it is the normal experience of every true Christian. To say that we can't know if we have eternal life or if we are born again is to take sides against the Bible.

Moreover, to claim that people are born again simply because they are water baptized, even though they continue to live sinful lives or don't love born-again people, is also to contradict the Bible. Baptism is a *symbolic picture* of being born again, not a *means* to be born again. New believers should be baptized, yes, and they should be told that their baptism represents their death, burial and cleansing resurrection to a new life—as spiritually reborn children of God. But those who are baptized without genuine faith in Jesus are like dry pigs who temporarily become wet pigs! They are still pigs!

A Gradual Rebirth?

Occasionally, I've encountered religious people who tell me their church teaches that Christians are gradually born again over their lifetimes. This, too, is an idea that you will never find in the Bible. Consider the many Scripture passages I've already cited that make some reference to being “born again,” “born of God,” “born of the Spirit,” “passing from death to life,” and so on. Most of them make it abundantly clear that the new birth, like the physical birth of a child, is an event that takes place in a relatively short amount of time. The apostles wrote to the early Christians as if they had already been born again at some point in the past, not as if they were gradually being born again throughout their span of their lives.

For example, Peter wrote:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy *has caused us to be born again* [past tense] to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Pet. 1:3, emphasis added).

For you *have been born again* [past tense] not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God (1 Pet. 1:23, emphasis added).

If you encountered an adult who said, “I can’t say that I’ve been born yet, but I believe I’m gradually being born over the course of my life,” you’d have to conclude that person doesn’t understand the plain meaning of the word “born.” Similarly, the person who claims he is gradually being born again over the course of his life does violence to the simple word “born.” Moreover, he clearly has not investigated what the Bible says on the topic of the new birth and has no idea what it actually means to be born again.

What About You?

Have you experienced a life-changing spiritual rebirth so significant that you view the span of your life so far as “pre-born-again” and “post-born-again”? Has your inward nature changed so that, more than anything else, you want to please God? Do you look at God as your Heavenly Father rather than as “the Man Upstairs” or the distant God whom you sing about on Sunday mornings? Have your eyes been opened to see God’s kingdom, and do you consider all of those who have been born again to be your spiritual brothers and sisters? Are you sure that when you die, you will enter God’s kingdom?

If you cannot answer “yes” to all of those questions, then there is one thing you must do: You must believe in Jesus:

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:16).

If you believe in Him as He has revealed Himself in the Bible—as the Son of God, the Creator of the Universe, the Future Judge before whom everyone will stand and give an account—He will become your Lord. Your life, and eternity, will dramatically change.

Don't wait until you are in hell to finally take Jesus' solemn words—"You must be born again"—as serious as He intended for you to take them. Don't wait another second! Fall on your knees and pray to the God who created you, loves you, and who will re-create you!

THREE

Unless You Become Like a Child

This was the third article I wrote for possible publication in The Amish Voice, and it was ultimately published in January of 2021. It was another attempt to help Amish people consider some very well-known words of Jesus regarding the necessity of becoming like children in order to enter the kingdom of heaven, and provoke them to think about the application of those words to their lives. I again received some positive feedback from readers, but none from anyone in the Smicksburg Amish community.

Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 18:3).

These words, spoken by the eternal Son of God, the Creator of the universe, the One who holds the keys to God's Kingdom as well as to death and Hades, and before whom everyone must one day stand in judgment to give an account, would seem worthy of our consideration (Mark 1:1; Col. 1:16; Matt. 6:19; Rev. 1:8; 2 Cor. 5:10; Acts 10:42). *The only people who will enter heaven are those who were converted, and in their conversion, became like children (in some way).*

It is these words found in Matthew 18:3—and similar words found in other places Scripture—that lead us to believe that children who die enter the kingdom of heaven (see, for example, 2 Sam.

12:23; Matt. 18:10; 19:14). If we must become like children in order to enter heaven (Matt. 18:3), and if the kingdom of heaven belongs to children (Matt. 19:14), it stands to reason that any and all children who die enter heaven. If you've ever lost a child or suffered a miscarriage, you've got a child in heaven.

It is also from Jesus' words in Matthew 18:3 that we deduce that there must be a time when children reach an age when God no longer considers them to be children, but rather to be adults, at which time they must—if they hope to enter heaven—be converted and become, in some way, like the children whom they previously were. Theologians refer to that age of passage from childhood to adulthood as the “age of accountability,” a phrase that acknowledges the fact that children are sinful, but that they are not held accountable for their sin by God until they reach adulthood.

Scripture does not reveal an exact age when that transition takes place, and it seems reasonable to think that it could be different for every child. Some like to point to the ages of 12 and 13, when Jewish girls and boys celebrate their bat and bar mitzvahs. Personally, however, I would not want to stake my theology on Jewish tradition.

In any case, a most important question we should all ask ourselves is this: *Have I been genuinely converted?* Tragically, multitudes of people around the world who identify on some level as being Christians have never experienced *authentic* Christian conversion.

Authentic conversion is so dramatic that Scripture describes it as a resurrection. Unconverted people are characterized in the Bible as being dead. When they are converted, however, they become alive. That is one reason converted people are expected to immediately be baptized. When done biblically, baptism is done by total immersion, representing the new convert's death, burial and resurrection. That is a picture of authentic Christian conversion. So every professing Christian should ask himself or herself: *Have I been resurrected? Or am I just religious?*

The Religious Chain

Although it is right and proper to spiritually train our children, there is an inherent danger in it: Our children might carry on our spiritual practices and traditions but never actually be converted. And

their children and grandchildren might follow the same path, creating a chain of religious, but unconverted, descendants.

The human links in such chains never experience conversion simply because they don't see their need to convert. They are convinced that their veneer of Christianity is proof they are Christians. They have some knowledge of the Bible, but Jesus is not their Lord, which explains why they ignore His core commandments, like His commandment to (1) make disciples of all the nations or to (2) love their neighbors as themselves.

Regarding Jesus' commandment to make *disciples* (that is, obedient followers) of all the nations, religious people never attempt to make disciples, near them or abroad, because they are not themselves His disciples. As the famous Baptist preacher, Charles Spurgeon, once said:

Every Christian is either a missionary or an impostor. Recollect that you are either trying to spread abroad the kingdom of Christ, or else you do not love Him at all. It cannot be that there is a high appreciation of Jesus, and a totally silent tongue about him.

Regarding Jesus' commandment to love their neighbors as themselves, religious people do, of course, love those who love them, but that is something Jesus said even tax collectors and Gentiles do (Matt. 5:46-47). The love of unconverted people extends no further than their own family, friends and religious group. They could care less about the multitudes in their town and around the world who are on the road to hell (which they imagine they are not on themselves).

Unconverted, religious people outwardly conform to the standards of their group, whether they be strict or lax, but their public and private lives are full of contradictions. They vocally and/or silently condemn others for sins of which they themselves are often guilty, but on a lesser scale or in some different form. Their secret thoughts and hidden deeds reveal that they actually don't believe that Jesus is the Son of God. If they truly did believe in Him, He would have the preeminent place in their hearts, and obeying Him would consume their lives. Any practice or tradition among their religious group that would usurp Christ's rightful place or obscure or pervert His clear teaching would result in a holy uproar within their hearts that would manifest itself in concern, grief and action.

Any “loss” suffered as a result of conversion, whether it be financial, friends or even family, would be counted as being of no comparison to what has been gained. As the apostle Paul, who before his *conversion* was a very zealous religious person with a very religious pedigree, wrote:

If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the Church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.

But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead (Phil. 3:5-11).

These words are not only the testimony of a former Pharisee whom most everyone would have assumed was on the road to heaven even before his dramatic conversion (most everyone except God, that is), but the testimony of everyone who has been genuinely converted and who truly believes in Jesus Christ. They have found the “treasure in the field” that is worth giving up everything to gain (see Matt. 13:34). Christ has become their life (Phil. 1:21). Nothing compares to Him.

Man-Pleaser or God-Pleaser?

If the true convert is forced to decide between pleasing family or Christ, he chooses Christ. This is what Jesus undeniably taught:

Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be the members of his household.

He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me (Matt. 10:34-37).

If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple (Luke 14:26).

Regardless of how much we might soften the hyperbole in these passages, Jesus' message remains crystal clear. True converts/believers/disciples love Jesus supremely, and they desire to please Him above all others.

And this is basic Christianity. An authentic conversion is not a socially-imposed conformity founded in the fear of man, but a change of belief and behavior that is rooted in the fear and love of God.

Of whom do I write? I suspect some readers will be silently saying "Amen" as they think of certain groups, churches and denominations. The truth, however, is that you can probably pick any group, church or denomination under the banner of Christendom. Every one of them includes men-pleasing, tradition- and heritage-lovers who think they are Christians but who have actually never been converted.

In many groups, those kinds of folks are the large majority. Generally speaking, the longer a group has been established, the larger the percentage of its members resemble unconverted Pharisees—religious but not resurrected. If you talk to them about Jesus, they will be uncomfortable and resistant. They may even persecute you to some degree, all the while convinced, like the Pharisees, that they are on the right path. It is indeed tragic.

So I again ask this all-important question: *Have you been converted? Or are you only a link in a religious chain?*

In What Way Must We Become Like Children?

A sure sign that one has been converted, according to Jesus, is that the convert becomes like a child.

Jesus did not specify precisely in what way we must become like children if we hope to enter heaven, but it seems doubtful that He was referring to any of the negative characteristics associated with children. We all know, for example, that children can be very selfish, and they must be trained for years to become considerate of others. In light of everything else that Jesus taught, it would seem safe to conclude He was not saying selfishness is what marks true converts who will one day enter heaven!

Considering the positive characteristics of children, some point out that children are generally more trusting than adults. Thus, some associate Jesus' words about our need to become like children with the truth that salvation is possessed by faith (Eph. 2:8). We need to have faith like children, they say, trusting in Jesus in order to enter heaven.

Others note that children understand their dependency, particularly upon their parents. In fact, one characteristic that differentiates children from adults is dependency and independency. So some say we must, like children, have no thought of independence or self-sufficiency, and we must acknowledge that apart from Christ—who atoned for our sins, forgave us, and is empowering us to obey God—we have no hope of salvation.

Others emphasize the fact that children naturally love and respect their parents, and generally tend to obey them. So they say we must similarly obey God.

And still others point out that children are usually considered to be innocent. No one looks at a little child and wonders if she is hiding a “deep, dark past.” Although such innocence is lost to adults, it can be regained through the forgiveness and transformation offered by God through Jesus Christ. So some claim that children's innocence is what Jesus had in mind when He said we must become like children to enter heaven.

I think there is truth to all of those views. Yet I think they should be incorporated into a larger view that not only takes what Jesus said at face value, but also considers the context of the entire New Testament. Jesus did not specify any single characteristic of children that we should imitate. Rather, He said we must be *converted* and *become like children*.

Is it possible that children—to whom, according to Jesus, the kingdom of heaven belongs—possess a spiritual nature that is lost to adults, but that adults can regain by experiencing an authentic, spiritual conversion? Is it possible that babies and children are in some sense “spiritually alive,” but they “spiritually die” when they chose the wrong path upon reaching the “age of accountability,” after which time they must be “spiritually reborn” to become, once again, “spiritually alive” if they hope to enter heaven?

Personally, I am persuaded that this could very well be what Jesus had in mind when He said we must “become like children” to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Although it seems indisputable that babies are born with—and all children possess—a sinful nature, I am not so certain that such traits preclude the idea that babies and children are “spiritually alive.” According to the Bible, all authentic Christians are “spiritually alive,” yet Scripture also states that all of them still possess sinful natures, what Paul refers to as “the flesh” that “sets its desire against the Spirit” (see Gal. 5:17). So, if spiritually alive adults can simultaneously possess sinful natures, why should anyone claim that children, because they have sinful natures, can’t be spiritually alive?

Paul: Alive, Dead, Alive Again

An interesting verse in Paul’s letter to the Romans seems to support this understanding:

I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died; and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me (Rom. 7:9-11).

Although Paul's words may not be as clear as we'd wish, it is obvious that he was not referring to being *physically* alive or dead. He could only have been referring to being *spiritually* alive and dead. Scripture teaches that all human beings are tri-part in nature: spirit, soul and body (2 Thes. 5:23; Jas. 2:16). It also teaches that unconverted adults, although possessing bodies that are alive, have spirits that are dead (Eph. 2:1).

Note that in the above passage, Paul referred to a time when he once was alive, but that he died "when the commandment came." The Law of Moses, of course, had been given by God hundreds of years before Paul was born, so when Paul referred to the time when "the commandment came," it seems reasonable to think he was speaking of the time when he heard God's commandment, was held accountable by God to obey it, but decided to disobey it, at which point he died, spiritually.

All of this leads me to think Paul believed there was a time in his life, prior to his conversion, when he was spiritually alive. But, when he reached an age of accountability, he sinned, and he became spiritually dead. And all of that seems to support the idea that babies and children are not spiritually dead, but rather, are spiritually alive, which is perhaps *the* reason or yet another reason Jesus said that we must become like children to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Even More "Like Children"

In addition to all of this, the New Testament repeatedly tells us that truly converted people actually become "children of God":

See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are.... Beloved, now we are children of God (1 John 3:1a, 2a; see also John 1:12; Rom. 8:14, 16; Gal. 3:26; Phil 2:15; 1 John 3:1-2).

Other New Testament scriptures reveal that true believers in Christ are not only "adopted" by God into His family—which by itself might lead them to think they are only very fortunate orphans—but that they are actually also "born of God" (1 John 5:1). That makes them God's *actual* children. They are "born of His Spirit" (John 3:6) and indwelt by His Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). So they possess His nature. If they could take a "spiritual DNA test," it would reveal "divine spiritual genetics"!

Of course, being supernaturally recreated into God's actual children and bearing His nature, true believers increasingly *act* like God's children, trusting Him, acknowledging their dependence upon Him, and obeying Him (all those characteristics of children often associated with various interpretations of Matthew 18:3). As Paul wrote, "Prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, *children of God* above reproach, and "be imitators of God, as *beloved children*;" (Phil. 2:15; Eph. 5:1; emphasis added). Or, as John wrote, "No one who is born of God *practices* sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God" (1 John 3:9, emphasis added).

This, too, is basic Christianity. This is what it means to be a "new creation in Christ," in which "the old things passed away" and "new things have come (1 Cor. 5:17). This is what it actually means to be "born again," another prerequisite Jesus mentioned to entering heaven (John 3:3; see also 1 Pet. 1:3, 23). To enter heaven, we must be converted and be spiritually reborn to become like children, *children of God.*

Surrounded by Sermons

It is interesting to think that the many children with whom we interact throughout our lives serve as divinely-placed examples to us of what we must become to enter heaven. Had God desired, He could have created us to reproduce, not babies, but mature adults. But He designed humans so that we would be surrounded—all of our lives—by children, little teachers whose silent sermons hold the key to eternal life. Let us open our ears and eyes to the divine message they continually broadcast!

In conclusion, here are the all-important questions each one of us should ask ourselves:

1.) Have I experienced a conversion, a change of mind and heart that was so dramatic that it can be described as a "resurrection," and one that has resulted in a relationship with God that supersedes all other relationships, as evidenced by my obedience to Christ's commandments? Or am I just a link in a religious chain following some manmade traditions behind a veneer of Christian culture?

2.) Have I become "like a child" through a spiritual rebirth? Can I point to a time in my life when I was spiritually dead but became spiritually alive? Am I indwelt by God's Spirit so that I can say

with Paul and every authentic Christian since Paul, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20)?

Those who can answer the above questions affirmatively are the most blessed people on the earth!
Are you among them?

FOUR

From the Peace Barn: Born Again and Amish

My wife and I moved into our remodeled barn in January of 2021. Four months later, our son and his wife purchased a house about 30 minutes from us from a young Amish couple named Ervin and Lovina who were members of the Johnsonburg Amish community. We learned from our daughter-in-law that Lavina was born again and living an Amish lifestyle (although the Johnsonburg Amish were more liberal than the Smicksburg Amish). So we excitedly made arrangements to meet Lavina, and when we did, it was obvious that she was indeed born again. Lavina told us that one of her sisters named Elisabeth and her husband, Mervin, were also born again, and so we eventually were able to meet and interview them. Then, Elisabeth told us that one of her brothers, named Jonas, was either born again or very close to it, and he was a minister in their church! So we started making plans to meet Jonas and his wife, Ida.

I had also received some very positive feedback from some born again Amish readers of The Amish Voice regarding my previous articles. So I was happy to be realizing that there were some Amish people who are born again. That inspired me to write the following article that was published in The Amish Voice in January of 2022. I wanted Amish readers to know that they could be born again and remain Amish.

When this article was published in The Amish Voice, it was read by one of the Johnsonburg Amish ministers (who was not born again), who made copies of it to hand out to a small meeting of Johnsonburg Amish leaders. I suspect

what concerned him was that I revealed that I had been in contact with some born-again Amish people in Johnsonburg, his Amish community. One of the two Johnsonburg bishops, named Levi, was at that meeting. He had been born again several years earlier just from reading an English Bible, and as a new bishop, he was trying to figure out how to share his new faith with his Amish flock. Reading my article created a desire in him to meet me, and he learned shortly thereafter that I was scheduled to have dinner with his cousin, Jonas, and Jonas' wife Ida, the next day! So he asked Jonas if he could ask my wife and I if we would stop by at his house to meet him after our dinner.

That day, January 31, 2022, is a day I will always remember as very providential, as that was the day God connected us to minister Jonas and Ida, as well as bishop Levi and Fannie. It was at that meeting at Levi and Fannie's home that we all agreed to start a secret Bible study, to which they would invite Amish friends and family members whom they thought would be interested, and who would also keep the Bible study secret (since such things are forbidden in most Amish communities). The article that follows was a catalyst to what we eventually referred to as the "Johnsonburg Awakening."

In 1880, George Washington Hazlett purchased 109 wooded acres near Smicksburg, Pennsylvania, which he began clearing, with the hopes of one day operating a farm. In the process, he felled many old oaks, and he hand-hewed their trunks into long posts and beams for a future 50-foot square bank barn. Some of the hemlocks he harvested were sawn at a local mill into rough-cut planks for barn siding. By 1890, George had assembled everything he needed to build his barn, including quarried foundation stones, and with the help of friends, he erected a structure that still stands today, more than 130 years later.

In the 1940s and 50s, my great Uncle Clyde, George Hazlett's grandson, built two rustic living quarters in either side of that barn, complete with a kitchen, living room, bedrooms, plumbing and gaslights in every room. Uncle Clyde spent most of his summers at his converted barn, which I enjoyed visiting many times as a child. My siblings and I loved to hike the trails Uncle Clyde had cleared in his wooded acres, and swimming and fishing in the Little Mahoning Creek that bordered his property was always a special treat.

I would have never imagined it as a child, but my wife and I now reside at that barn, which we remodeled over the last few years into a lovely home that still features George Hazlett's skill in the many exposed hand-hewn posts and beams. We've named it "The Peace Barn" because of the

peaceful ambiance. The Peace Barn also highlights the skill of many local Smicksburg Amish carpenters and craftsman, who have done 95% of all the remodeling work, and who have become friends in the process.

It was in the early 1960s that a few Amish families moved from Ohio to the Smicksburg area, and today there are over 550 households that share about 20 surnames. The Smicksburg community is the 3rd largest Amish settlement in Pennsylvania and the 11th largest in the U.S., consisting of almost 3,000 souls.

We've come to know quite a few of our Amish neighbors, and we're thankful to be living among them. They are friendly, considerate, hardworking, honest and sincere. As Christians, my wife and I share many of the same values held by our Amish neighbors that stem from their Anabaptist heritage. I've jokingly told a number of my Amish friends that my wife and I are "half Amish," as we raised our children without a TV, never sent them to public schools but rather schooled them ourselves, have been involved in churches that met in homes rather than church buildings, prefer rural living, and try, with God's help, to obey Jesus' commandments. And on a few occasions, I've even told some of my Amish friends that I'm actually more Amish than they are, because I actually believe the 1632 Dordrecht Confession!

Concerning that last point, having studied the history, beliefs and practices of early Anabaptism when it began in the early 1500s, and having also read the 1632 Dordrecht Confession, I'm so sorry to say that the large majority of my Amish friends do not enjoy the wonderful spiritual blessings of the original Anabaptists. More than anything else, the original Anabaptists believed the Bible, and they consequently rejected anything that was taught either by the Roman Catholic Church or the Protestant Reformers that couldn't be found in the Word of God. They expressly rejected all human, religious tradition that contradicted the Bible's teaching.

One of those church traditions that early Anabaptists rejected—practiced by both Catholics and Protestants—was infant baptism, as they saw what anyone who honestly reads the New Testament easily sees, that the New Testament church, led by the apostles whom Jesus chose, never baptized infants, but rather, adults only. And they did so only after such adults repented of their sins and believed in the Lord Jesus. It was the persecutors of the early Anabaptists who consequently labeled

them “Re-baptizers,” because they baptized adults who had previously been baptized as infants in the Roman Catholic or Protestant churches.

Another church tradition that early Anabaptists rejected (as did all the Protestants) was the (primarily Catholic) idea that one could earn one’s way to heaven by one’s own works. They read in the Bible that “by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9). The early Anabaptists held to the biblical truth that “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23), so no one is good enough to be saved by their own merits. Grace from God is essential for salvation of sinners. And the early Anabaptists believed that God extended His grace through His Son Jesus Christ, who died for their sins and made salvation available for all who would repent and become His followers.

Yet another church tradition that early Anabaptists rejected was the (primarily Protestant) idea that one could genuinely believe in Jesus but not obey Him. They read in the Bible that “faith without works is dead” (James 2:20) and that faith without works cannot save anyone (James 2:14).

The early Anabaptists also believed that anyone who repents of their sins and believes in Jesus experiences a spiritual rebirth that transforms him into a “born again” (1 Pet. 1:23) “new creature” (2 Cor. 5:17). They believed Jesus’ plain words, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). They believed that a spiritual rebirth was essential for salvation. It was the starting place for a true relationship with God. And they believed that the new birth was not just a theological concept, but a living, experiential reality. People who experienced the new birth were genuinely transformed. They understood what the New Testament meant when it described true conversion as “passing from death to life” (1 John 3:4). It is a dramatic, inward change that affects everything in a person’s life.

The early Anabaptists also believed that the good works that are done by believers do not stem purely from human effort or outward conformity to an imposed and enforced Christian culture, but from the Holy Spirit, who literally indwells all those who truly believe in Jesus. They read and believed Paul’s words to the Galatian Christians about “the fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22), and his words to the Ephesian Christians: “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).

All of these plain, biblical truths are found in Article 6 of the Dordrecht Confession, the 1632 Mennonite doctrinal statement to which all Amish people subscribe. It reads:

We believe and confess, that, since the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth, and, therefore, prone to all unrighteousness, sin, and wickedness, the first lesson of the precious New Testament of the Son of God is *repentance and reformation of life*, and that, therefore, those who have ears to hear, and hearts to understand, *must bring forth genuine fruits of repentance, reform their lives, believe the Gospel, eschew evil and do good, desist from unrighteousness, forsake sin, put off the old man with his deeds, and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness*: for, neither baptism, supper, church, nor any other outward ceremony, can without *faith, regeneration, change or renewing of life*, avail anything to please God or to obtain of Him any consolation or promise of salvation; but we must go to God with an upright heart, and in perfect faith, and believe in Jesus Christ, as the Scripture says, and testifies of Him; through which faith we obtain *forgiveness of sins, are sanctified, justified, and made children of God*, yea, partake of His mind, nature, and image, as being *born again of God* from above, through incorruptible seed. Genesis 8:21; Mark 1:15; Ezekiel 12:2; Colossians 3:9, 10; Ephesians 4:22, 24; Hebrews 10:22, 23; John 7:38 (italics added).

In contrast to what is believed by so many Amish today—the idea that a person cannot be certain of his salvation, and if one is certain, it is an indication of pride—the original Anabaptists universally believed that those who repent and believe in the Lord Jesus have their sins forgiven and become born-again children of God, as we just read from Article 6 of the Dordrecht Confession.

How could someone who is spiritually reborn, has his sins forgiven, and has become a child of God, rightly say, “I don’t know if I will be accepted by God to enter heaven, because I am not certain I am good enough?” Such a belief contradicts not only the Dordrecht Confession, but the entire message of the New Testament.

It is not prideful for people whom God has forgiven of their sins and made into His children to believe their sins are forgiven and they are God’s children. Rather, it is an expression of faith, rather than of unbelief, in what God has said.

The truth is, it is prideful to even *hope* that one can be good enough to gain heaven, because God has declared that no one is good enough for that, which is why Jesus died for our sins. Hoping to be good enough to gain heaven is one sin, among others, that people need to repent of to be born again.

All these simple biblical truths are also affirmed in Articles 7 and 8 of the Dordrecht Confession:

Concerning baptism we confess that *all penitent believers, who, through faith, regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, are made one with God, and are written in heaven*, must, upon such Scriptural confession of faith, and renewing of life, be baptized with water. . . .

We believe in, and confess a visible church of God, namely, those who, as has been said before, truly repent and believe, and are rightly baptized; who are *one with God in heaven*, and rightly incorporated into the communion of the saints here on earth. These we confess to be *the chosen generation, the royal priesthood, the holy nation, who are declared to be the bride and wife of Christ, yea, children and heirs of everlasting life*, a tent, tabernacle, and habitation of God in the Spirit.

All of these truths in the Dordrecht Confession are straight from the New Testament. How could someone who is regenerated by the Holy Ghost, made one with God, has his name written in heaven, is chosen of God, has become a royal priest as well as the bride and wife of Christ ever rightly say, “I don’t know if I will make heaven, because I’m not sure I’m good enough?” What would you think of a child who said to his father, “I don’t know if I am your child, or if I have the right to live in this house with you”?

As I said earlier, this is the heart-breaking tragedy that I’ve witnessed among my Smicksburg Amish friends. And how terrible it is for them to miss out on the greatest blessing that was enjoyed not only by all their Anabaptist forefathers among the Swiss Brethren, but also Jakob Ammann (from whom the Amish derive their name), all the early Amish believers, and not to mention all the first Christians we read about in the book of Acts, plus all true believers around the world since then, which include myself, my family, and many of my friends. I’ve personally met thousands of born-again followers of Jesus all over the world in more than 40 nations to which I’ve traveled. There is nothing better on earth than being born again by God’s Holy Spirit. It can happen to you!

Sadly, I've found that most of my Amish friends do not want to talk about these things. They seem to be afraid of being led astray and the consequent excommunication and shunning they would suffer. Their fear is even more tragic, as there is no reason why one can't be born again and continue to live a traditional Amish lifestyle. Worse, the New Testament teaches that those who persecute born-again people prove that they themselves are serving Satan!

Through readers' responses to some of my previous articles in the *Amish Voice*, I've been blessed to hear from a number of born-again Amish believers across the country who are enjoying the wonderful blessings of being indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and who know they are "new creatures" and children of God whose sins have been forgiven. And while they continue to live within traditional Amish culture, they've found new joy in the assurance of salvation and a relationship with the Lord they never dreamed of. Like all truly born-again believers in Jesus, they wish everyone was born again. They are the true "Old Order," having now joined the "Original Order," which is the *oldest* Order!

I have also learned that in 1971 another nearby Amish community was birthed from the Smicksburg community, nine years after its founding in 1962. The Troutville community has since grown to be almost as large as the Smicksburg community, consisting of more than 2,500 people. The Troutville *Ordnung* is definitely more liberal than the Smicksburg *Ordnung*. From the Troutville community, another community was birthed in 2005, which now consists of over 500 people. The Johnsonburg *Ordnung* is even more liberal than the Troutville *Ordnung*.

Of course, many members of the Smicksburg, Troutville and Johnsonburg communities are related to each other, which causes some strain among them due to the differences in each community's *Ordnung*. But I have to confess that I have been pleasantly surprised to meet some members of the Johnsonburg community who are born again and who aren't ashamed to say so. They love to talk about their personal relationships with the Lord, and it is evident that the Holy Spirit indwells them and is living through them. They sometimes gather for Bible studies. They are full of joy, and no wonder, because they are certain that they are going to heaven as long as they don't fall away from their faith. I'm looking forward to getting to know them better. They understand, just like the original Anabaptists, that holiness is not outward conformity to a list of manmade rules, but that

true holiness stems from a born-again heart, and it is the Holy Spirit within them who instructs and empowers them to do what is right and please God.

I'll close by sharing a contrast I've observed between the Smicksburg and Johnsonburg Amish.

One day when three of my Smicksburg Amish friends were installing a floor in our barn, I showed them some video on my large-screen TV that was filmed from the International Space Station, which circles the earth 16 times every day. It is fascinating film footage, as you can see the curvature of the earth, as well as the oceans, land masses of continents, mountain ranges and cloud formations from a vantage point of 254 miles above it all. In the nighttime video footage, you can see the lights of large cities and small villages. My Amish friends really enjoyed seeing what they had never seen before.

I asked one of them, who is a local bishop, if it would be wrong of me to invite local Amish families to our house to watch an amazing documentary on my TV about how penguins live in Antarctica. (Many local Amish families take their children to the Pittsburgh Zoo, and it is considered to be an acceptable, educational and recreational activity.) He said that was a "gray area," and expressed hesitation because "it could lead to other things." That is, watching something harmless on TV could lead to watching something on TV that is not harmless. And he was correct. If you don't watch anything on TV, there is no chance you might watch something bad. However, there is also no chance you might watch something good! (Eliminating all TV is somewhat akin to eliminating all sex in order to avoid fornication.)

I own a TV, and I don't watch anything that any Amish person would consider sinful. On the contrary, most Amish people would consider everything I watch on my TV to be morally uplifting. For example, my wife and I have recently been watching a dramatization about the life of Jesus called *The Chosen*. It is being viewed around the world by millions of people, many of whom previously knew nothing about Jesus. That is a good thing!

A television is not a dangerous thing to someone who is born again and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. If I was to begin viewing something on my TV that was not pleasing to the Lord, He would immediately convict me, because He lives in me by His Holy Spirit! Beyond that, I have no desire to

view what displeases Him, because He has changed me when I was born again. So I don't need a set of rules to regulate my behavior. As the apostle Paul wrote, "But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law" (Gal. 5:18).

My son and his wife, who live among the Johnsonburg Amish, recently had a local Amish family at their house who wanted to watch an episode of *The Chosen*. So, together they watched an episode that was all about Jesus' miracle of changing water into wine at the wedding feast at Cana of Galilee. It is an uplifting dramatization that reminded all of them of Jesus' power and compassion. No harm was done! Rather, God was glorified. And because my son, his wife, and the Amish couple are all born again, there is no danger that the next time they get together they will be viewing an ungodly, worldly, sinful movie! None of them have any such desire.

And that is the primary difference between being born again and not being born again but trying to conform to a set of rules to try to please God. Until you are inwardly transformed by the Holy Spirit, you may limitedly achieve an outward appearance of holiness that is imposed on you by Amish culture. But on the inside, there is still impurity, and that impurity has a way of coming to the surface.

In future articles in the *Amish Voice*, I hope to introduce you to some born-again Amish Christians who are still living within Amish culture. If you are one of them, I would love to talk with you or meet you in order to hear and share your story with readers who are not yet born again. Your story might help open eyes and hearts to the greatest blessing made possible by Jesus' death—eternal life, which is something the Bible teaches Christians can know they've possessed:

These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God (1 John 5:13).

It's time for spiritually-hungry Amish folks to recover their spiritual heritage and become members of the Oldest, Original Order, the one found in the New Testament! And it's time for born-again Amish folks to take the necessary risks to truly love their fellow Amish who are not yet born again by sharing with them how they, too, can experience the blessing of the new birth!

FIVE

From the Peace Barn: Amish or Ahamish?

In May of 2022, this article, my fifth, was published in The Amish Voice. I came up with the term “Ahamish” to describe born-again Amish people. I imagined that when their eyes had been opened to true salvation and faith in the Lord Jesus that they cried out “Aha!” So, that put all Amish people into one of two categories, either Amish or Ahamish. This article was one more attempt to provoke Amish people to ask themselves if they were born again.

By this time in 2022, the secret Bible study in Johnsonburg had grown and multiplied, and after just a few months, two-dozen Johnsonburg adults had been born again. Eventually word reached the senior bishop who set in motion the excommunication of them all. So they formed their own Sunday morning gathering while continuing the weekday Bible studies.

Although my wife and I stopped attending any of the gatherings so as not to hinder Levi and Jonas from rising to their full leadership potential, our youngest daughter and her husband became very involved in one of the Bible studies, and they kept encouraging the new believers to not only persevere, but to reach out in ministry, which they enthusiastically did. We started referring to the entire thing as “the Johnsonburg Awakening.” By May of 2022, it was in full swing!

After the publication of my article in January's *Amish Voice* ("From the Peace Barn: Amish and Born Again"), I received phone calls from readers in North Carolina, Indiana, Virginia and Wyoming. I enjoyed every conversation. Some were with Amish folks and some were with *Abamish* folks. I'll explain the difference later, but I first want to continue from my previous article explaining a few more reasons I admire the Amish people whom I know.

My wife and I live in the heart of Pennsylvania's third-largest Amish community in a remodeled 1890 barn that became our home about a year ago. Most all of the remodeling work was done by skilled local Amish craftsman who have all become our friends.

I should tell you that our Amish community is one of the more conservative ones. Many things are forbidden that are permitted in other Amish communities, such as personal phones (community pay phones are permitted). Nevertheless, as seems to be the case in every Amish group, our Amish neighbors are hard-working, honest and considerate. For example, I noticed several years ago—when we first began remodeling our old barn—that whenever I walked into a room where my Amish carpenters were working, they would immediately switch from speaking Pennsylvania Dutch to English so that I could understand their ongoing conversation. I never had to worry that they were secretly talking negatively about me in a language I don't understand!

I also admire Amish families I've met. They often have lots of children, and those children are well-behaved. From a young age they are involved in family chores. The elderly are respected, and infirm parents are cared for in the homes of their adult children. These are all good things.

There are other admirable Amish traits I could list, but I will save them for a future article. Although I'm sure Amish families and communities face many of the normal struggles of human relationships, they seem to maintain a decent degree of harmony. If everyone in the world were Amish, no doubt our planet would be a much better place.

Among those who phoned me in response to my previous article in *The Amish Voice* were (1) current Amish, (2) Amish who are considering becoming Mennonite, and (3) former Amish who are striving to serve God. All had a different story to tell.

One who was formerly Amish told me that he didn't want to ever leave the Amish, but he was excommunicated because he became interested in learning more about the Bible, so he participated in Bible study and was subsequently born again (something Jesus said one must experience in order to enter the kingdom of heaven).

One who is considering becoming Mennonite has been having trouble with his local ministers because of his perception of their unequal application of their *Ordnung* among church members. His adult children left long ago and joined a Mennonite church.

One who is still Amish is greatly burdened for his Amish neighbors and community because he has been born again and is concerned that most of them are not.

All three of the people I've just described are among the "Ahamish." That term, of course, is one I invented. So, who are the Ahamish?

You are probably familiar with the expression, "Aha!" When someone suddenly discovers something they hadn't previously realized, they often say, "Aha!" Ahamish people are Amish folks who have done just that. They've discovered something they previously didn't realize.

In every case, Ahamish people previously didn't realize their need to be born again. They knew they had been born into Amish culture and were expected to conform in every detail. They knew about the Bible and they were familiar with many of its stories. They had been baptized as teenagers when they made their vows. They attended church gatherings every other week all their lives.

In every case, however, they ultimately came to a realization that they were life-long sinners who deserved punishment, and that there was no hope of them earning salvation and eternal life. They discovered that God loved them so much that He gave His only Son to die for their sins on the cross. They came to believe Jesus' promise that, "whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). And when they *truly* believed in Him, not just *said* they believed in Him as they did when they made their vows to the church, but truly believed that He is God's Son

and the Lord, they repented of their sins and experienced a spiritual rebirth that transformed their lives.

What changed? They immediately experienced a joy and peace they had never known before. They knew all their sins had been forgiven and that God's Holy Spirit had come to live inside them to empower them to live pure and holy lives. They knew they were children of God and that He had become their spiritual father. They knew they had eternal life. And they wanted others to enjoy the same wonderful blessings, so they started telling their Amish family members and friends about what had happened to them, because born-again people cannot keep quiet about the miracle they've experienced. And that is when some started getting into trouble. Some were eventually excommunicated.

Please understand that a person can be Amish but not be born again. However, please also understand that one can be Amish and also be born again if their particular Amish community allows it.

Beyond that, according to the Dordrecht Confession (to which all Amish groups subscribe), one is actually not *truly* Amish unless one is born again. Here's the sixth article of the Dordrecht Confession:

We believe and confess, that, since the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth, and, therefore, prone to all unrighteousness, sin, and wickedness, the first lesson of the precious New Testament of the Son of God is repentance and reformation of life, and that, therefore, those who have ears to hear, and hearts to understand, must bring forth genuine fruits of repentance, reform their lives, believe the Gospel, eschew evil and do good, desist from unrighteousness, forsake sin, put off the old man with his deeds, and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness: for, neither baptism, supper, church [membership], nor any other outward ceremony, can without faith, *regeneration*, change or renewing of life, avail anything to please God or to obtain of Him any consolation or promise of salvation; but we must go to God with an upright heart, and in perfect faith, and believe in Jesus Christ, as the Scripture says, and testifies of Him; through which faith we obtain forgiveness of sins, are sanctified,

justified, and made children of God, yea, partake of His mind, nature, and image, *as being born again of God from above*, through incorruptible seed.

The Confession's sixth article mentions both "being born again" and "regeneration." Regeneration is another word for being born again. Yet one of the Ahamish folks who phoned me explained that many of the Amish people whom he knows become very troubled when he tells them about being born again. I asked him why they would be troubled about something that is clearly mentioned as a necessity by Jesus in John 3:1-8, by the apostle Peter in 1 Peter 1:3, and in Article 6 of the Dordrecht Confession. He said that they are tragically ignorant of those facts. I could not help but wonder why.

Another way of describing the difference between being Amish and Ahamish is that one can be Amish simply by an outward conformity to Amish culture. Being Ahamish, however, is not external, but internal. An Ahamish person may appear, on the outside, to be just like every other Amish person, but on the inside, he or she has become "a new creature in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:17).

Everyone needs an internal change of the heart to be accepted by God. Remember, God said, "Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). God also said, "I, the Lord, search the heart" (Jer. 17:10). What does God see when He looks at and searches a heart that has not been born again? He said through Jeremiah, "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jer. 17:9).

When God asked "*who* can understand it?" regarding people's "deceitful" and "desperately sick" hearts, He obviously wasn't questioning His own understanding. He knows *every* heart, which is why He declared that human hearts are deceitful and desperately sick. Those who *don't* know that are those who are *deceived* by their desperately sick hearts.

And although I wrote in both my last article and this one about the many good qualities I've observed in Amish communities, I write now with tears in my eyes that I've also seen another side—but only to a small degree that God has seen it. I'm talking about *some* Amish hearts. When Amish people persecute, shun, and excommunicate other Amish people *because they've been born again*, they show that their hearts are deceived and desperately sick. They show that *they* are not born again. They are acting just like the Catholics and Protestants hundreds of years ago who hated the original

Anabaptists because all of them were born again! What a tragedy that the formerly persecuted Anabaptists have now, in some cases, become the persecutors!

Yet through His great mercy offered through the sacrificial death of His spotless Son, God offers to anyone a new, pure heart, a heart that *wants* to obey Him:

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. (Ezek. 36:26-27).

The apostle Paul was one who certainly received a new heart from God, and Amish people can all identify with him. Paul was initially a very religious Jew who persecuted the early Christians, all of whom were of Jewish origin, just like him. *He persecuted his own people* because he thought he was right and they were wrong. But then God opened his eyes to his own deceitful and sick heart. He then realized it was the exact opposite of what he had thought! The people he thought were wrong were actually right, and he, who previously thought he was right, was actually wrong! Those whom he was persecuting were righteous, and he was unrighteous!

After Paul's conversion, religious Jews started persecuting him. He tried to help them see that true Jews (just like true Amish people) are those who, like him, had been born again:

For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God (Rom. 2:28-29).

For the most part, the Jews in Paul's day were outwardly religious and outwardly circumcised. The apostle John wrote about them, "They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God" (John 12:42). That is, they lived their daily lives for the approval of their fellow Jews, just as so many Amish people are so focused on maintaining the approval of other Amish people.

Notice, however, that Paul believed that "true Jews" have "circumcised hearts," a phrase that refers to being born again by the work of the Holy Spirit and the subsequent inward transformation. *True*

Jews, as Paul wrote, are not seeking the praise of people, but the praise of God. And it is no different for true Amish people. And that is why true Amish people—the Ahamish people as I've been calling them—are willing to forsake the approval of other Amish people if necessary. What matters to them is the approval of God, and they strive to keep *His* laws rather than manmade rules that can't be found anywhere in the Bible.

You can take a pig, scrub it clean, tie a pretty bow around its neck, and sprinkle it with perfume. But it will still be a pig! And that is the picture of the religious person—whether Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, or Amish—who has not been born again. Externally, they look good. But internally, they have the same old nature.

All religious people who have not been born again—if they will be honest in their hearts—know that they stand condemned before the God who searches and knows everyone's heart, because they know their inward thoughts that they hide from everyone else. They also know—if they are honest with their hearts—that they are putting on a show for all the other religious people in their group whose approval they seek. Again, this is true of all religious people, whether they are Jewish, Protestant, Catholic or Amish. If they aren't aware of what I've just described, it is one more proof of what God said through Jeremiah about how deceitful and desperately sick human hearts are. Pride is often what blinds them.

But don't think that I am pointing a finger because I don't have personal experience of that very thing myself. I was once a religious church-attender who had fooled myself that I was a pretty good person. When I was confirmed in my church as a teenager, I even confessed publicly that I believed in Jesus Christ. Looking back now, however, I realized that I was just saying words as I attempted to please my parents and the other people at my church. I didn't really believe in Jesus, and the reason I'm sure of it now is because He was not my Lord. I was striving to please others, not Him.

One day, however, God opened my eyes, and I finally saw myself as God saw me—as a proud, self-deceived hypocrite with a desperately wicked heart. What a glorious day that was! I realized I had nothing good in myself to offer God. And so I feebly responded to His call to repent of my sins and truly believe in Jesus. When I did, my life was dramatically changed. I had no idea at the time that I

had been born again because I had never heard that phrase or read it in the Bible. But I knew I was a different person.

Like all people who are born again, I now look at my life in two sections: before I was born again and after I was born again. I started reading the Bible and I slowly learned what had happened to me. I eventually realized that I had been born again and that God's Holy Spirit was living in me. And I started telling other people, because I could not keep quiet. As the apostle Paul wrote, "But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, 'I believe, therefor I spoke,' we also believe, therefore we also speak" (2 Cor. 4:13). That is one test of an authentic new birth. Born-again people are concerned about other people who are not born again, because being born again is a requirement for heaven according to Jesus. If you are not concerned about other people being born again, that is a sure sign you are not born again yourself.

What about you? Have you been born again? Are you religious or righteous? Do you truly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, as evidenced by your desire to please Him, even if you must forfeit the approval of others? Are you a cleaned-up pig or a "new creation in Christ"? Are you Amish or Ahamish?

The good news is that you can be born again today. You could start by praying for God to help you see your heart as He sees it. Once He does, you will be ready to cast yourself onto the Lord Jesus Christ completely for forgiveness, salvation and a new life. The Lord is full of mercy! He will not turn you away!

SIX

From the Peace Barn: Why Even *Good* Amish People, and Not Just *Bad* Amish People, Need to Repent and be Born Again

Although my sixth article was never published in The Amish Voice, it was published on our website (DavidServant.com). I felt (and still feel) that a major roadblock that keeps Amish people from being born again is self-righteousness. So this article was an attempt to help Amish readers realize that, no matter how good they might be in comparison to others, they are still sinners who need to be born again and forgiven by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This teaching, based on the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, was penned in early 2022.

I've begun each of my two previous articles in *The Amish Voice* enumerating things I admire about the Amish—among whom I have many friends, particularly within the Pennsylvania communities of Smicksburg and Johnsonburg. The Smicksburg community is very conservative, whereas the Johnsonburg community has a more liberal *Ordnung*. I love both groups, however, and there are so many good things to say about them both, as there are about all Amish groups.

When you compare any Amish community to the general non-Amish population, their moral virtue shines brightly. I am, of course, speaking in a generalization, because there are certainly plenty of virtuous people outside of Amish culture, and moral failings certainly surface in Amish communities at times. From my observation, however, Amish communities are generally comparable to an island in a cesspool, and I am very familiar with non-Amish culture. I am also probably more familiar with Amish culture than most non-Amish people.

Amish people generally have a good standard of ethics, and most non-Amish folks admire them for that. There is, for example, very little divorce among them. They are also generally modest, humble, and good neighbors. They resist greed. They won't accept government handouts. They are hard-working, honest, family-focused, and care for the needs of each other. There are many more praiseworthy attributes I could add to this list, but I will save them for a future article. And this is not to say that I am ignorant of examples of moral compromise that do exist in Amish communities, compromise which every Amish adult is very aware. Still, I maintain that the average Amish person is more virtuous than the average non-Amish person.

And this brings me to my first point that has application to all Amish folks who view themselves as being morally better-than-average. (If you see yourself as less-than-average, then this point, and this entire article, does not apply to you.)

There is one temptation that is uniquely shared by *all* good people, Amish and non-Amish. That is the temptation to think you are good enough for God. When you compare yourself with others around you, and you are as good as the average Amish person is, it is quite easy to think of yourself as morally superior. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 representing the most morally-depraved person who has ever lived and 10 representing the most morally virtuous person who ever lived, most Amish people seem to be 7s, and some even 8s! (Amish women who have had 14 children might even be 9s!)

Naturally, because they are 7s and 8s on the moral scale, average Amish folks could be tempted to become proud of their moral superiority. Most Amish people, however, do their best to resist that temptation. The fact still remains, however, that most Amish people *are* indeed morally superior to the world around them. *I'm* saying it, even though most, if not all, Amish people would never say it.

But I suspect they *think* it, even if not consciously, at least subconsciously.

But that is where the problem can start. When good people compare themselves to others, it can lead them to believe that they must be OK with God. Allow me to elaborate.

Jesus once told a story about this very thing that you are probably familiar with. It is the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector:

Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: “God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.” But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, “God, be merciful to me, the sinner!” I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 18:10-14).

Tax collectors in Jesus’ time were notorious sinners. Not only did they betray their own people, the Jews, by collecting taxes for the occupying Roman government, but they over-taxed their fellow citizens, charging them even more than the Roman government required, and they became rich by their extortion.

In contrast, the Pharisees were a very strict Jewish sect. Their members not only strived to keep the Law of Moses, but also numerous additional manmade laws which were based on their religious traditions. In many ways, they were morally superior to the general population of Jews. The Pharisee in Jesus’ parable is a good example. He was not an unjust extortioner (like the Jewish tax collector); nor was he an adulterer. He fasted twice a week and paid tithes on all his gains. He prayed to God. All those things are virtuous and praiseworthy. His error, however, was that, as he compared himself to others, he assumed God did the same, and he wrongly concluded that God accepted him. Clearly, however—according to Jesus—God *did not* accept him, even though he had some virtuous qualities.

One loud-and-clear lesson from the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector is that *self-appraisal can be very dangerous for good people*. The reason is because they can, like the Pharisee, mistakenly assume

God approves of them when He actually doesn't. Jesus said that the Pharisee, unlike the tax collector, left the temple "unjustified" in the eyes of God. Another translation for "unjustified" is "unrighteous." Stated simply, the Pharisee was not right before God. If he eventually died in that "unjustified" state, he went to hell.

And why was he not right before God? Jesus revealed the reason in His parable. It was because the Pharisee *exalted* himself.

How did he exalt himself? He compared himself to others and assumed he was accepted by God. Remember how his prayer began: "God, I thank You that I am not like other people."

Luke's commentary right before this parable reveals its important moral: "[Jesus] also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt" (Luke 18:9). So "trusting in yourself that you are righteous" is spiritually deadly, as well as the sin that often accompanies it, that of "viewing others with contempt." Both are examples of exalting yourself.

Notice again the very important phrase that described the Pharisee. He "trusted in *himself that he was righteous.*" That is, the Pharisee thought that what *he* did made him righteous in God's eyes. Because he focused only on his virtues, he was blind to his sins, one of which was his pride. Pride always blinds its possessors. The Pharisee (unlike the tax collector) saw no need for God's mercy, because he believed he was good enough in God's eyes. So when he left the temple that day, he remained on the road to hell, whereas the tax collector left the temple "justified," or right in the eyes of God, because he recognized his sinfulness and prayed for mercy. Had the Pharisee humbled himself like the tax collector, he would have been exalted like the tax collector. That is, he too would have been forgiven and accepted by God.

So I hope you can see the great danger that exists for good Amish people. Like the tax collector, they can easily fall into the trap of self-righteousness.

Think about these two important questions: (1) If you were born into a good Amish family, why was that? Why were you not born into a non-Amish family with parents who were criminals, drug

addicts, adulterers or liars? (2) How would you have turned out if you had been born to non-Amish, evil parents? Chances are you would be just like your sinful parents. You certainly would not be Amish! But the reason you were born into an Amish family is because God decided you would be born into an Amish family. So the reason you are as virtuous as you are is primarily because of *God*. I realize that your own will has something to do with your goodness. But what *you* have contributed to your virtue compared to what *God* has contributed is of no comparison.

So there is absolutely no room for self-righteousness (or despising others). The virtue you possess is mostly because of God. And those whom you might be tempted to despise would probably be just like you if they had been born into a virtuous Amish family. And you would probably be just like them if you had *not* been born into an Amish family. Think about that!

And this is how the gospel of Jesus Christ destroys our pride. It declares that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). “All” means all, including all good Amish people. It declares, “There is none righteous, not even one” (Rom. 3:10). “None” means none, including all good Amish people. Amish people may be some of the best people in the world, but they are still sinners who need God’s mercy. And just like the world’s worst sinners, Amish people needed Jesus to die for their sins in order to be forgiven and be saved in the end. Apart from Jesus and the mercy of God, they deserve to be cast into hell just like everyone else. They may not deserve hell *as much* as some, but they still deserve it.

So the way of salvation for Amish people is identical to the way of salvation for thieves, murderers, adulterers, and dishonest, greedy tax-collectors. It is only through God’s mercy. And that mercy is appropriated by: (1) acknowledging that they are sinners who have no hope of being good enough to save themselves, (2) turning from the sins of which they are conscious, and (3) believing in Jesus, the Son of God, who died for your sins and before whom you must one day stand to give an account. God promises that anyone who will repent and believe in Jesus—from the greatest sinner to the least sinner—will be forgiven of their sins, be born again, and become His own child.

Remember, forgiveness is never something that is earned; it stems from mercy. Being born again is not something you can do for yourself. Only God can do it. Becoming God’s child cannot be

achieved by human effort. Only God can adopt someone into His family. This is why Scripture declares:

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them (Eph. 2:8-10, emphasis added).

For the wages of sin is death, but the *free gift of God* is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 6:23, emphasis added).

No Amish person, when they stand before Jesus, is going to hear Him say, “By keeping My commandments as well as hundreds of other rules stipulated by your Amish community, you have earned your place in My kingdom.” Rather, any Amish person whom Jesus welcomes into His kingdom will know that it is all because of God’s mercy, made possible by Jesus’ sacrificial death for their sins. And it will be the same for every other person who is welcomed into His kingdom.

Are you being convicted, dear Amish reader who is morally above average? If “yes,” that is good. If “no,” that is tragic. You must see yourself as a hell-deserving sinner if you are to repent, truly believe in the Lord Jesus, and be born again. So allow me to try a little more to persuade you.

When you see non-Amish people, do you sometimes inwardly despise them? Do you try not to associate with them too much, lest you become morally polluted by them? Would they never be welcome inside your pure home?

If “yes,” then can you see that you are no different than the Pharisee in Jesus’ parable? People who despise others whom they view as morally inferior are self-righteous. If they viewed *themselves* rightly—as blessed and graced by God—they would feel pity for those who are morally inferior, and they would not only associate with them, but they would actively reach out to them to tell them how they can receive God’s mercy through Jesus and be transformed by His Holy Spirit to become virtuous people.

Recall that Jesus, who was certainly the most righteous and virtuous person who ever walked on the earth, reached out in compassion to tax collectors, adulteresses, prostitutes, divorcees, the greedy, and others. Because of it, he was criticized as being “a friend of tax collectors and sinners” (Matt. 11:19), and the self-righteous Pharisees grumbled about Him, saying, “Why do You eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” (Luke 5:30). Jesus replied, “It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:31-32). Although He was morally perfect, Jesus associated with sinners—unlike the self-righteous Pharisees.

And do you recall the story of the woman caught in the act of adultery who was brought before Jesus by men who wanted to stone her? Think of how unrighteous those men were!

First, I’m sure you realize that it takes two people to commit adultery, but they only brought the woman. Where was the man? Their’s was a very unjust application of the Law of Moses.

Second, none of them had any right to condemn the adulterous woman. When Jesus said to them, “He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her” (John 8:7), the Bible says that they were “convicted by their own conscience” (John 8:9, KJV), and they started walking away, beginning with the oldest men, until every one of them was gone. They had exposed the sin of the adulterous woman, but before long, their own sin was exposed. They were hypocrites who were pretending to be righteous. How many of them had never lusted after a woman, something Jesus said was equivalent to “adultery of the heart” (see Matt. 5:28)? They were all adulterers who intended to stone an adulteress! They exalted themselves, pretending to be being better than her, but in the end, they were all humbled (just as Jesus promised).

How so many of us are just like those adulterous men who wanted to stone that adulteress! How many people have you voted to shun or excommunicate knowing that you also deserved to be shunned or excommunicated? How many people have you condemned for doing what you have done, or desired to do? As the apostle Paul wrote:

Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things (Rom. 2:1).

Let's just be honest: Every Amish reader has transgressed their community's *Ordnung* to a greater or lesser degree, and they have not publicly confessed. And God has seen every Amish person in your community break, not only the manmade laws of the *Ordnung*, but also some of *His* laws. He has also seen them vote "yes" to shun or excommunicate those who have been caught in their transgression. How are they any different than the hypocritical men who intended to stone the adulterous woman?

Are you being convicted by your conscience dear Amish reader who is morally above average? If "yes," that is good. There is hope that you, like the tax collector in Jesus' story, will soon experience being "justified" in the eyes of God, as you humble yourself and cry out for His mercy. But if "no," that is tragic. Allow me to try a little harder to persuade you.

Are you perhaps hypocritical in other ways? Do you, for example, inwardly condemn those who own automobiles, including former-Amish people? But do you ever ride in automobiles yourself? Do you even pay money to ride in them? If driving a car is a sin, then you are participating in the sin of car owners by paying them to drive you in their cars. That is hypocritical.

Do you condemn people who own a TV because TVs are "worldly"? Think about this: a TV is just an electronic object that is neither moral or immoral. It can communicate sinful things, but it can also communicate godly things. I have a TV, but my wife and I don't watch what glorifies sin. We watch many things that glorify Jesus Christ. And I also teach God's Word to thousands of people through their TVs. Would God condemn me for that? Am I "worldly" because of it?

Similarly, do you own a gun, rifle or knife? Those are all things that people "of the world" own. Surely you know that guns, rifles and knives are sometimes used to murder people. They can, however, also be used for good, for example to help feed your family with deer meat. How hypocritical it is to condemn someone for owning a TV when you own a rifle, gun or knife!

As good as some Amish people are, they are still sinners like the rest of us. What about all the division among the Amish communities? Churches have excommunicated other churches, and not because of disagreements over the commandments of Christ, but over disagreements about small

differences in manmade *Ordnungs!* Each side thinks their side is right, and each side thinks they are morally superior and despises the other side, at least to some degree. How are they all not like the Pharisee who prayed, “God, I thank You that I am not like other people”?

Think of how many relationships have been destroyed by divisions over manmade laws! God has seen it all. Yet Jesus prayed that His people would be one (see John 17:11, 20-21).

Please understand. I do not enjoy attempting to convict Amish people of their sins who are 7s and 8s on the moral scale. But we all need to realize that God’s scale ranges not from 1 to 10, but from 1 to 100. Even those who attain an 8 on the human scale are near the very bottom of God’s scale...along with everyone else. We’re *all* wretches. And that is why we all need God’s forgiveness and to be born again. Once we are, we can truly sing from our hearts, “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me!”

Again, you must be convinced you are a sinner who can’t save himself or herself before you can truly understand your need for a Savior. That is why I’m trying to persuade you of how God sees you. Only the tax collector, after he repented and cried out for mercy, was justified in God’s eyes. Tragically, the Pharisee was blind to his sin and his need of God’s mercy. As good as he was, if he never humbled himself and repented after he left the Temple that day, he remained “unjustified” in the eyes of God, and he was cast into hell after his death and judgment.

Who would you rather be in Jesus’ parable, the Pharisee or the tax collector? I’m sure you will say, “the tax collector,” because only he left the temple righteous in God’s eyes. If you are to be forgiven of your sins and be born again, like the tax collector you must humble yourself, acknowledge you are a sinner who deserves God’s wrath, and cry out for His mercy. He will not ignore you! Rather, He will have mercy on you, forgive you, cause you to be spiritually reborn, adopt you as His own child, and put His Holy Spirit in you. You will become a “new creature” in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). It is the most wonderful thing that can happen to anyone! And that is your Anabaptist heritage.

If you are Amish and have been born again, either at some point in the past, recently, or just a few moments ago, I would love to hear from you.

More and more Amish people are recovering their spiritual heritage, being born again, and are sharing the good news with their Amish friends and families. What are you waiting for?

“The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy” (Psa. 103:8).

SEVEN

To Everyone Who is Hoping to be Good Enough to Get into Heaven

Here is another article written in early 2022 that was published on our website (DavidServant.com). It explores a number of important theological issues all centered around holiness, forgiveness for sins we commit as believers, penance, public confession of sin, the discipline of the Lord, the loss of salvation, the assurance of salvation, and the marks of a genuine new birth. It could be helpful for any believer who has questions regarding these issues.

It is not only Amish people who are hoping they are good enough to get into heaven. Probably the majority of people on Planet Earth—at least those who believe in an afterlife—are hoping they are good enough to graduate at death to something better. It is a hope shared by billions of people, most of whom are persuaded that one's state after death is determined by how one lives his or her life.

Although I've never been Amish, I know quite a few Amish people, as I live in the middle of Pennsylvania's third-largest Amish community. As I've talked with them about their beliefs, I've learned that they've been taught all of their lives that you can't know until you die if you will make it

into heaven. The reason is because they believe that heaven hinges on their holiness, and no one will know until they die if they've been holy enough. Until then, they can only hope for the best.

The standard for holiness in Amish communities—as all Amish and Amish-background readers already know—is not just the Ten Commandments or the Golden Rule. It is also their local *Ordnung*, which legislates almost every detail of Amish life and culture. If you are not Amish, you may not know that every Amish adult is expected to affirm his or her agreement with the local *Ordnung* twice annually. Unrepentant infractions are grounds for excommunication.

Of course, because good Amish people can only hope they will be considered worthy for heaven, excommunicated Amish people have no hope at all. Rather, they are told that they will go to hell. That fear is a big part of what has perpetuated Amish culture for hundreds of years. If you believe that driving a car is a sure ticket to hell, that has a way of motivating you to keep driving a horse and buggy.

In Amish thinking, anyone who says he is certain of attaining heaven is prideful. Only proud people, they believe, would ever think they are good enough for heaven. And I couldn't agree more. Looking at my own life, I tend to think I'm more deserving of hell than heaven.

It may surprise you, however, to hear me also say that I'm certain—if I died right now—that I would be going to heaven and not to hell. Obviously, my reason for being certain of my salvation is not because I think I'm good enough for heaven. On the contrary, I'm 100% certain I'm *not* good enough.

I was not good enough before I became a believer in Jesus about 46 years ago, and since I became a believer in Him, although my behavior is much more in line with God's will, I'm still not good enough. The only way a person could be good enough to earn a place in heaven would be to be perfect his or her entire life, never sinning once. It is certainly too late for me to employ that strategy, and I'd be willing to bet it is too late for you as well! So, if any of us folks who have sinned—either a little or a lot—are going to get into heaven, it is going to require some mercy from God. The only way for sinners to get into heaven is through God's mercy.

All Amish folks would agree with me on that point. They are, generally speaking, very much aware that they are sinners who need mercy from God. Amish belief, however, places a limit on God's mercy, which then necessitates an unknown degree of personal obedience to make up for the mercy God does not extend. So Amish people believe they are saved by a combination of God's mercy and personal obedience. And that obedience involves not only obedience to the "law of Christ" (which includes every commandment that Jesus gave to His followers) but also to the hundreds of unwritten requirements contained within their local *Ordnung*. So, of course it is impossible for them to know for certain if they will attain heaven. All they can do is hope for the best—for themselves and their loved ones who have died before them.

It may surprise you to learn, however, that none of the early Anabaptists believed like modern Amish people believe. Neither did any of the early Christians. Nor did Paul, Peter, John, James or Jude. Neither did Jesus.

Mercy and Grace

Any person who reads the Bible will repeatedly encounter two of the most wonderful words in the English language, which are *mercy* and *grace*. Both are expressions of love, and you know that if anyone has ever extended either to you. Both mercy and grace are *undeserved* blessings. To receive mercy or grace from a fellow human being is lovely. To receive mercy or grace from God, well, there are no words to describe how wonderful that is!

Although similar, mercy is sometimes defined as "*not receiving* a penalty you *do* deserve," whereas grace is often defined as "*receiving* a blessing you *do not* deserve." Whether those contrasting definitions are entirely accurate is not that important. Mercy and grace are both forms of undeserved favor. Every person who has ever lived has received both from God, but those who have believed in Jesus have received—by far and away—the most mercy and grace, and they are destined to receive even more of both in the future.

Let's consider some of the mercy and grace God has showered upon those who believe in Jesus.

Scripture tells us that believers in Jesus "will not perish":

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

Do you believe in Jesus? If “yes,” then you will not perish according to Jesus’ own promise in John 3:16. Of course, we all deserve to perish because of our sin, and to perish in hell. But because of His great mercy towards us, the Bible promises believers:

God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us (1 Thes. 5:9).

Do you believe that promise? If you do, it should also fill you with confidence that your eternal future is bright. God has not destined you for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ!

Notice that Paul did not credit any good things believers have done as being the reason they are not destined for wrath. Rather, Paul credited Jesus and His death, because Jesus’ death paid the penalty for our sins. And not just for *some* of our sins, but for *all* of our sins. That includes even the sins we might yet commit in the future. That is why the apostle John, writing to Christians, said:

If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world (1 John 1:8–2:2).

A Closer Look at 1 John 1:8-2:2

To begin to paraphrase John, he wrote that if we claim to be sinless, we are self-deceived. We are *all* sinners. As sinners, we're going to need forgiveness, which is why Jesus instructed His followers to pray for forgiveness of their sins in their daily prayers:

Give us *this day* our *daily* bread. And *forgive us our debts*, as we also have forgiven our debtors (Matt. 6:11-12).

This is not to say that believers in Jesus sin *just as much* or *to the same degree* that nonbelievers do. Although believers are certainly *capable* of committing every sin that unbelievers commit, they have God-given incentives not to sin, as well as power over sin, that generally produce a much higher degree of holiness than what is observed in unbelievers. Later in this article, I will discuss some of those incentives and power in more detail, but I only want to establish now that Christians still sometimes sin. And that is why John wrote to Christians regarding what they should do if and when they do sin. Specifically, they should confess their sin to God. John declared that if we, as Christians, confess our sins to God, "He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Do you believe that promise? If you, as a believer in Jesus, confess your sin, God will mercifully do two things for you: (1) He will forgive you. And (2) He will also "cleanse you from *all* unrighteousness." That means you are *instantly perfectly clean* in God's eyes as soon as you confess. If you think you need to do something beyond confessing your sin to God, you are mistaken. Contained within your confession, of course, is your remorse, as well as your desire to not repeat the same sin. (And I think we all know that those good desires do not guarantee we never will repeat the same sin.)

Although John did not mention it in the passage we're considering, if your sin has harmed another person, of course you should also confess your sin to that person and seek his or her forgiveness. But John is referring to what needs to be done to be forgiven by *God*.

John also wrote that Jesus is our "Advocate with the Father." That is, Jesus is our lawyer who defends us against the condemnation we deserve for our sin. Jesus, of course, would never lie and argue that we didn't commit the sins of which we are guilty. Rather, He declares that the penalty for

our sin has been paid. John wrote in the same passage that Jesus is “the *propitiation* for our sins.” (Note that John is definitely including the sins committed by Christians.)

The dictionary definition of the verb *propitiate* is “to win or regain the favor of someone by doing something that pleases them.” The New Testament Greek word, *hilasmos*, which is often translated *propitiation* in English translations carries the meaning of “making appeasement by a sacrifice” or “atonement.” Jesus made atonement on the cross, where He suffered and died for all of our sins. He appeased the wrath of God that we deserved. Therefore, to think that what Jesus did was insufficient, or that we must add some additional atonement, is at best an unscriptural idea, and at worst, a degradation of what Jesus accomplished on the cross. To “do penance” as a means of atoning for our sins is to say that Jesus’ sufferings and death were not enough!

It is interesting that in Amish culture, those who sin are expected to confess their sin to the entire church and then endure a time of being excommunicated or shunned, a form of “doing penance.” Tragically, most Amish folks don’t realize that some of their Anabaptist forefathers gave their lives standing against the idea of “penance” as it was practiced then and still today within the Roman Catholic Church. When Roman Catholics “go to confession” where they privately confess their sins to a priest, penance is often prescribed. All of the Protestant Reformers and early Anabaptists considered such a practice to be heretical. Even if it is claimed that penance only validates the sincerity of one’s repentance, it can easily be perceived by the one doing penance that he or she is “making up for their sin,” which is a form of atonement beyond Christ’s atonement.

There is one more important part of John’s words in 1 John 1:8-2:2 that I want to emphasize. Take note John wrote that, if we confess our sins, God is “*faithful and righteous* to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Although we might have thought the basis of God’s forgiveness is His mercy and grace, John says it is God’s *faithfulness and righteousness*. That is, it is *right* for God to forgive us. How can that be? The reason it is *right* for God to forgive us is because Jesus paid the penalty for our sin. Yes, Jesus’ death was a manifestation of God’s mercy toward us in that His death provided the means for our forgiveness by God, but that forgiveness is a manifestation of God’s faithfulness to do what is right because of what Jesus did on the cross! If God didn’t forgive us when we acknowledge our sin, it would be *wrong* of Him—in light of Jesus’ payment!

So, I hope you can see how silly it would be to think that we need to rely on anything other than Jesus' sufferings and death to atone for our sins. Imagine someone paying off your long-overdue million-dollar debt and all the overdue interest, so that you were completely debt-free. Then imagine giving your former creditor ten cents to show him how sorry you were for not paying him when the money was due. That is *somewhat* akin to any "penance" we might do before God.

Public Confession of Sin

But what about the apostle James' admonition to "confess your sins to one another"? (Jas. 5:16).

Clearly, James was not prescribing a practice that required *all* Christians at *all* times to confess *all* their sins to the *entire* church. Rather, he was addressing a specific group of Christians, and that specific group becomes obvious when we read the context of James' words:

Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much (Jas. 5:14-16).

The specific Christians whom James was addressing were sick Christians. They should call for the church elders to pray over them with faith and anoint them with oil in Jesus' name. James said that such folks will not only be healed but also be forgiven, *if* they have committed sins. The implication is that, if their sickness was the result of God's discipline for their sin, God would both heal them and forgive them of the sins that opened the door to their sickness. Paul wrote of such a possibility in his first letter to the Corinthian believers:

For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world (1 Cor. 11:30-32).

It would be unsafe to conclude that *all* sickness (and premature death) that Christians suffer is a manifestation of God's discipline for sin, but it would be equally unsafe to conclude that *no* sickness Christians suffer is a manifestation of God's discipline for sin. It is every Christian's responsibility to "judge himself," as Paul wrote, and if we will, we can avoid God's discipline/judgment.

The kind of sins of which James wrote that Christians should confess to one another are most likely sins they have committed *against* each other, as that interpretation fits best within the whole context of the book of James and the entire Bible. If we read the entire book of James, we see that James was writing to people who were very familiar with strife among themselves (see Jas. 4:1-2, 11-12). Broken relationships are only restored through confession. So James admonished them to reconcile by making confession and extending forgiveness, evidenced by prayers for healing.

Christians are commanded by God to love one another. To disobey that commandment is to potentially open the door to the Lord's discipline. For that reason, to sin against a fellow believer is to potentially open the door to sickness, or even premature death. But that door can be closed by going to the person who has been sinned against and by asking for his or her forgiveness.

Of course, offended Christians are commanded to forgive those who confess their sins against them. If they don't, they will get in trouble with God (see Matt. 18:23-35). If they have *truly* forgiven a sick believer who is requesting their forgiveness, they will have no trouble praying for that person's healing. That is more of what James was talking about. There is no scripture in the New Testament that requires all Christians to confess all their sins in front of the entire church, much less any scripture that requires some form of penance from believers who have sinned.

The Initial and Latter Cleansings

When someone first repents of their sins and believes in Jesus, all of their past sins are forgiven and cleansed:

"Of Him [Jesus] all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins" (Acts 10:43).

For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Col. 1:13-14)

I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake (1 John 2:12).

Not only that, but new believers become “new creations in Christ” (2 Cor. 5:17), the Holy Spirit comes to live inside them (1 Cor. 6:19), and they are given a new inward nature that motivates and empowers them for holiness (Eph. 4:24). Still, those new creations have a residue of the old, sinful nature, so they are faced with a daily battle between flesh and spirit (see Gal. 5:16-24). As the apostle James wrote to believers in his day: “We all stumble in many ways” (Jas. 3:2). No Christian, of course, *wants* to sin. But sometimes we *stumble*. The word “stumble” implies falling unintentionally. So, although all true Christians have experienced a very significant initial cleansing, they occasionally need a subsequent, minor cleansing. Can you relate? I certainly can.

You may recall the time when Peter resisted Jesus' intention to wash his feet. Jesus said to Peter, “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me” (John 13:8). Peter replied, “Lord, then wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head” (John 13:9). Jesus said to him, “He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you” (John 13:10).

That conversation between Jesus and Peter is an excellent illustration of the initial and subsequent cleansings within the normal Christian life. As new believers, we are washed clean of our sin in a monumental way. Every sinful thought, word and deed is erased from our record when we believe in Jesus. God looks at us as if we had never sinned. That is what the New Testament means when it says that we have been “made righteous” or are “justified.” It is *just-as-if-I'd* never sinned!

But in our daily lives in the world, as we face all the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, we still sometimes get some dust on our feet. We need Jesus, the one who formerly cleansed our entire bodies, to then wash our feet, reminding us again of His humble service and great mercy. Once He does wash our feet, we are just as clean as we were when He first cleansed us. *His mercy is more than sufficient.*

What if a Believer Dies with Unconfessed Sin?

Since God expects us to confess our sins in order for us to be forgiven, what if we die with unconfessed sin?

We have already read a scripture passage that addresses that very issue in 1 Corinthians:

For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world (1 Cor. 11:30-32).

Obviously, those Corinthian Christians who had died prematurely due to God's judgement/discipline died with unconfessed sins. If they would have "judged themselves" Paul said they would have avoided God's judgment. So did they go to hell? No, Paul wrote that they were "disciplined by the Lord so that [they would] *not be condemned along with the world.*" So they obviously did not go to hell.

And because Scripture teaches that we must all one day stand before God in judgment (Rom. 14:10-12; 2 Cor. 5:9-10), we can be sure that any unconfessed sins will be addressed at our judgement. Obviously, if God can forgive us when we confess our sin on earth, He can also forgive us if we confess our sin in heaven.

This is not to say that there won't be eternal consequences for our disobedience as believers. Scripture teaches that some believers will suffer loss of heavenly rewards they could have enjoyed had they been obedient. Concerning himself, an apostle, and concerning Apollos, a teacher, Paul wrote:

What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.

According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire (1 Cor. 3:5-15).

According to Paul, it is possible—even for Christian leaders like himself and Apollos—to build Jesus' church using figuratively-flammable materials that will one day perish in the flames of judgment. Those Christian leaders who build with “wood, hay and straw,” as compared to “gold, silver and precious stones,” will tragically witness their ministry works turn to ashes. But will such ministers be condemned to hell for building Jesus' church using means and methods that proved to be of no real value? No, Paul wrote that, although their works will be “burned up” and they “will suffer loss,” they themselves “will be saved, yet so as through fire” (1 Cor. 3:15). The fire that burned their worthless works will also erase those works from their ministerial record.

Born-again Amish bishops, ministers and deacons would be wise to ask themselves what kind of materials they are using to build Jesus' church. Will the various manmade *Ordnungs* which can be found nowhere in the New Testament fall under the category of wood, hay and straw, or gold, silver and precious stones? Of course, there is no need for Amish bishops, ministers and deacons who are *not* born again to ask such questions, because they will never see or enter God's kingdom according to Jesus (see John 3:3,5). They will be cast into hell along with all the people whom they misled into believing that heaven is attained by keeping hundreds of manmade rules, an idea that contradicts the gospel and denigrates Jesus' sacrificial death.

But is it Not Possible to Forfeit Salvation?

Some claim that no Christian can possess assurance of salvation because no Christian knows if he or she will “endure to the end,” because Jesus said, “the one who endures to the end, he will be saved” (Matt. 10:22; 24:13).

Indeed, because it is by believing in Jesus we have the guarantee that we “will not perish but will have eternal life” (John 3:16), we must of course *continue* to believe in order to obtain ultimate salvation and heaven. We have been saved “by grace through faith” (Eph. 2:8), but not by a momentary instance of faith, but by a faith that continues and endures.

Similarly, Paul wrote that Jesus “has now reconciled us in His fleshly body through death, in order to present us before God holy and blameless and beyond reproach—*if indeed we continue in the faith* firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that we have heard” (Col. 1:22-23). To ultimately be saved in the end, we must “continue in the faith.”

So, the New Testament teaches that (1) faith is not necessarily permanent or perpetual, and (2) those who currently believe *could* abandon their faith at any time in the future (see Luke 8:13). Therefore, none of us can be 100% certain that our faith will endure to the end. Those of us, however, who have believed steadfastly for decades, and through many trials, have good reason to think that we will never stop believing. Still, we always remain cautiously alert, lest within us ever arises “an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God” (Heb.3:12).

Those facts, however, do not prove that it is impossible for us to possess assurance of eternal life right now. If I were to die right now believing in Jesus, then I “will not perish, but will have eternal life” (John 3:16). Therefore, I possess current assurance of my salvation even though the possibility exists that I could fall away from faith at some future point. The apostle John certainly believed that it was possible for a believer to forfeit his salvation (see 1 John 2:28; 5:16, yet he still wrote, “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life (1 John 5:13). According to John, knowing that you currently have eternal life is the normal Christian experience.

What About Faith Without Works?

Is it not true, however, as James wrote, that “faith without works is dead”? (Jas. 2:26).

Yes, it is certainly true. Faith without works cannot save anyone (see Jas. 2:14). Then how could anyone be certain that he has sufficient works to validate the authenticity of saving faith?

Take note that James did *not* write, “Faith without perfect holiness is dead and cannot save you.” Rather, he only wrote what everyone knows is true: If someone believes something, you can tell they believe it by their actions.

People who believe there is a scorpion hiding in their boot do not put their foot in that boot.

People who believe that their adult children and grandchildren are coming for a visit prepare for that visit.

People who believe that Jesus is the Son of God who died for their sins and before whom they will stand one day strive to obey Him. That is how we know that many people—including even Amish people who say they believe in Jesus—don’t actually believe in Him. Keeping the *Ordnung* is more important to them than keeping Jesus’ commandments. They are more concerned about what other Amish people think about them than what God thinks about them. They are religious but not righteous. They have no *genuine* faith in Jesus, so they have never had their sins forgiven, they have never been born again, and they will not enter God’s kingdom—unless they repent and believe. Once they do believe in Jesus, their lives will change, and they will be characterized by daily striving to obey Him. But will they achieve perfection? No, as James also said, “we all stumble in many ways” (Jas. 3:2). So, “faith without works is dead” but “we all stumble in many ways.”

The Marks of the New Birth

If you have truly been born again, you are a different person than you were before you were born again. The Holy Spirit has come to live inside you, and He has transformed your spirit, the “inward person.” According to the apostle John, that transformation manifests itself in the lives of believers in at least three ways:

First, that transformation shows up in their confession of faith:

Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God (1 John 4:15).

John was not writing about a one-time confession when someone is baptized, a confession that is often *not* made from true faith, but from a desire to please one's family. The Greek word translated "confesses" implies an ongoing confession. Born again people *often* confess their faith in Jesus as the Son of God, and not just when they are reading a prayer or repeating words in church. They are not ashamed to confess their faith before others, and they often do. As Jesus said, "Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 10:32-33).

Second, the transformation shows up in their love for their fellow believers in Christ:

We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren (1 John 3:14).

This is how we know that many Amish people have never been truly born again. When someone is actually born again by God's Spirit, Amish people often excommunicate him. I know of Amish people who have been excommunicated because they started studying the Bible with others! That is a sure sign that those who are doing the excommunication are not born again. Born again people love other born-again people! They don't excommunicate them for being born again! And born-again people also love God's Word! So they naturally want to talk about what God has said with other believers.

Third, the transformation shows up in their obedience to Jesus' commandments:

By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments (1 John 2:3).

As I have already said, this is how we know that many Amish people have not been born again. They aren't keeping Jesus' commandments. Some are drunkards. Some are liars, or gossips or

slanderers. Some are fornicators and adulterers. Some, believe it or not, sexually abuse children. Some are always engaged in hatred and strife even while claiming to be “people of peace.” Some are lovers of money. Some are full of pride like Pharisees. And many are trying to earn their way to heaven by keeping hundreds of manmade laws, in by doing, are ignoring the gospel of Jesus Christ and His work on the cross. Paul warned:

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10).

But all those things change when people are born again. Paul continues:

Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6:11).

Notice that the three scriptures I cited regarding the three ways that believers are transformed are all from John’s first epistle (1 John 2:3; 3:14; 4:15). John repeatedly mentioned those three ways of transformation: People who are truly born again continually confess that Jesus is the Son of God, they love other believers, and they obey Jesus’ commandments. And then John concludes his letter by saying, “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:13). That is, John repeatedly mentioned the three proofs of transformation so that his readers could be certain that God’s grace had indeed transformed them.

What about you? Is the reason that you don’t have assurance of eternal life is because you have never truly been born again? Is it because you are hoping that you are good enough, but you are not certain that you are? Is it because you think that heaven is earned by a combination of keeping Jesus’ commandments as well as hundreds of manmade commandments?

If you answered “yes” to any of those questions, then I have very good news for you. You can have assurance of eternal life by abandoning all hope that you can be saved by your conduct and then by

believing that Jesus is the Son of God who died for your sins. He will forgive and cleanse you. He will cause you to be born again. He will put His Holy Spirit inside of you. And you will know that you can never be good enough to merit heaven or eternal life, but that you have been saved by grace through faith. What are you waiting for?

EIGHT

A Tale of Two Ordnungs

As Amish folks know, Amish life and culture is totally regulated by the Ordnung. For outsiders who don't know that the Ordnung is, it is an unwritten list of dos and don'ts that vary from one Amish community to another. All community members must publicly affirm their agreement with the Ordnung twice a year. Unfortunately, in many Amish communities, the Ordnung sometimes seems to take precedence over the Bible, particularly when keeping the Ordnung is viewed as a requirement to gain to heaven.

The article that follows, published as my monthly "e-teaching" in May of 2022, explores why the early church had no Ordnung but the commandments of Christ, and why the early Christians rejected an additional Ordnung that some attempted to introduce.

Before I moved to Smicksburg, Pennsylvania, I always assumed that Amish communities across the nation were all the same. Like most "English" Americans, I thought that the people who drove horse-drawn buggies all followed a uniform way of life. Once I relocated, however, into the heart of Pennsylvania's third-largest Amish community, and in proximity to several other Amish communities, I began to realize there were differences that make just about every Amish community unique in some way. I learned that there was something called the "Ordnung," that governed every

aspect of Amish life, and that every community's *Ordnung* is different. So there are actually hundreds of different *Ordnungs* among the Amish. Some are more conservative and some are more liberal.

As an example, I learned that it is OK for Smicksburg Amish, among whom I live, to ride in cars and even pay English drivers to drive them, but they are not permitted to own or drive cars. The Johnsonburg Amish, however, just 30 minutes away, are permitted to own vehicles, but they are not allowed to drive them. So they also hire English drivers.

I've heard some Amish folks say that the *Ordnung* is a guide, like road signs that help us navigate to a destination. Others compare it to a fence that keeps us from crossing into forbidden or dangerous territory. We all know, of course, that road signs and fences are good things, and who would argue against anything that keeps us from sinning?

That being said, I'd like to take a look at the first two *Ordnungs* that were introduced to the early church—the church founded by Jesus and His apostles that we read about in the New Testament. You may be interested to know that one of those *Ordnungs* was fully embraced by the early church, while the other one was completely rejected. Let's first consider the *Ordnung* that was embraced.

The First Ordnung

The early church focused on, and strove to obey, the commandments Jesus gave them, because that is exactly what He commanded them to do. After His resurrection, He commissioned them:

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:18-20).

So, Jesus commanded His eleven apostles to make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe everything He had commanded them. And that is just what they did. The commandments He gave them came to be known as "the Law of Christ," as they are called by Paul in Galatians 6:2 and 1

Corinthians 9:21. In fact, in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he contrasted the "Law of Moses" with "the Law of Christ" (see 1 Cor. 9:19-23). Just as the Law of Moses consisted of all the laws that God gave Israel through Moses, so the Law of Christ consists of everything Jesus commanded His disciples. That would include, for example, everything Jesus commanded in His Sermon on the Mount (see Matthew 5-7). It would also include His "Great Commission" that I just quoted from Matthew 28:18-20.

Some folks claim that the "Great Commission" was only given to Jesus' eleven apostles. That idea, however, is disproven right within Jesus' Great Commission, because in it, He told the Eleven to teach people of every nation to observe *everything* He had commanded them. Of course, everything He commanded them included the Great Commission. So Jesus' original apostles taught their disciples to also, "Go...and make disciples of all the nations...teaching them to observe" all He had commanded. The Great Commission is a never-ending commandment that is binding upon every Christian generation.

In any case, the first and only Ordnung that the early church embraced was the Law of Christ. There is no evidence that the apostles added hundreds, or thousands, of additional laws or rules to the Law of Christ as guidelines or fences for the early Christians. In fact, during the subsequent centuries that followed, for at least 1,500 years, no true Christians ever saw a need to add hundreds or thousands of additional rules to the Ordnung that Christ gave the church—His commandments. And for good reason that we will soon see.

Beyond this, there is a lot of biblical evidence that the apostles *strongly opposed* adding any additional laws or rules to the Law of Christ, as indicated by how they reacted to some Jewish Christians in the early church who attempted to add the Law of Moses to the Law of Christ. Another way of describing what happened is that some teachers introduced a second Ordnung to Christ's Ordnung.

The Second Ordnung, and the Apostle's Reaction

Here are the details: Some Jewish professing Christians began teaching that if Gentiles (non-Jews) wanted to be saved, they had to be circumcised as required in the Law of Moses, as well as keep the Mosaic Law's many other regulations (see Acts 15:1-5). They tragically did not understand that God

gave the Mosaic Law to only one group of people—the descendants of Israel—and that He gave it to them only temporarily, until their Messiah would come and inaugurate the new covenant. They also did not understand that God was saving Gentiles the same way He was saving Jews—by grace through faith, and not by their works (see Ephesians 2:8-9).

Their false teaching caused such a stir in the early church that a convention was called in Jerusalem that included the most preeminent apostles, including Paul, Peter and James. The entire story is recorded in Acts 15, and you can read it for yourself. At that convention, some Pharisees who had believed in Jesus stood up and, concerning the new believers among the Gentiles, said, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses” (Acts 15:5).

There was much discussion. Peter eventually spoke:

Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are” (Acts 15:7-11).

I so appreciate Peter’s honesty. He declared what everyone at that convention knew was true, that none of them, or their forefathers, had kept the Law of Moses. How hypocritical it would have been for them to expect Gentile believers to obey laws that none of them had consistently kept!

And that reminds me of what I’ve observed among some of my local Amish friends. Although phones are forbidden in the very-conservative Smicksburg community, those “in the know” have told me that there are hundreds of secret phones among them. Home electricity is forbidden within the Ordnung of the more liberal Johnsonburg community, but many Amish there have it. That rule is not enforced. Can you imagine them telling other Amish who were considering relocating to their community, “If you move here, you should know that home electricity is forbidden!?”

Did you also notice that Peter reminded everyone at the convention how God used him to first proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles? You can read all about that in Acts 10. Peter was divinely directed to visit the household of a Gentile man named Cornelius. As Peter told Cornelius' household about Jesus, he proclaimed:

“And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead. Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.”

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered, “Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?” And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 10:42-48).

Clearly, God accepted and forgave the Gentiles who believed Peter's message—as evidenced by the miracle of them speaking in other tongues, just as had occurred on the day of Pentecost to Peter and more than 100 other Jewish Christians (see Acts 2:1-4). God's forgiveness was obviously not dependent upon them being circumcised or keeping the Mosaic Law. They were saved by grace through faith (see Ephesians 2:8-9).

After Peter was done speaking at the convention, Paul and Barnabas then stood to recount many of the miracles God had done through them to get the attention of Gentiles, and they reported how God had transformed Gentiles without any requirement of circumcision or their adopting the regulations of the Mosaic Law.

Finally, the apostle James stood up and quoted an Old Testament passage that foretold how God would one day save Gentiles. He then recommended that the convention attendees send a letter to all the new Gentile believers in order to inform them there was no need for them to be circumcised and start keeping the Law of Moses. James did recommend, however, that the new Gentile believers avoid a few practices that were particularly offensive to Jews, but not as a requirement for salvation.

So the early church soundly rejected the second Ordnung that was introduced, an Ordnung that would have added hundreds of additional laws to the Law of Christ. Perhaps even more significant is that the rejected Ordnung was one that actually had divine origins. God Himself had given it through Moses. But the early apostles understood that it was never intended to be binding upon Gentiles, and most of them eventually understood that it was not binding on Jewish believers in Jesus either.

Now read slowly: *If the early church rejected an ancient, divinely-given Ordnung that would have misled many into thinking salvation was not due to God's grace, but that salvation depended on people keeping a set of laws that no one had ever fully kept, should we not pause and think before we embrace any Ordnung of human origin that similarly adds hundreds, or even thousands, of laws and regulations to the Law of Christ, especially if those laws and regulations mislead people into thinking their salvation is not due to God's grace, but depends on keeping those laws—and especially when no one actually keeps them all?*

It is an irrefutable fact that the early church, led by the original apostles, taught their disciples to obey all that *Jesus* had commanded them, and they did not add any fence laws or manmade rules to the Law of Christ. They, in fact, universally rejected a second potential Ordnung that some false teachers attempted to introduce.

Interestingly, the original Anabaptists of the 16th-century—from which most modern Amish people are descended—all rejected the Ordnung that the Roman Catholic Church had added to the Law of Christ. They rejected every manmade church doctrine and law that could not be found in the New Testament. How odd it is that modern Amish churches, in contrast with the original Anabaptists and the apostles of Jesus Christ, have adopted second Ordnungen that contain hundreds, and sometimes thousands, of additional rules that can't be found in the Law of Christ, and a vow to obey those rules is required for church membership. Church members who unrepentantly break any Ordnung rule are excommunicated and told that they will go to hell.

By what authority do Amish church leaders have to make such claims? Have they forgotten that Jesus is the Head of His church? They invent and endorse rules that cannot be found in the Bible

and tell people their eternal salvation hinges on keeping those rules! The original apostles, and original Anabaptists, would have been horrified by even the suggestion of such an idea!

Paul's Letter Against "Legalism" (Salvation by Works)

This important topic is not only found in the Acts 15 story of the Jerusalem apostolic council. The apostle Paul actually wrote an entire letter on this subject, namely, his letter to the Galatians. The Galatian church had come under the same influence of Jewish Christians who were teaching that Gentiles needed to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses in order to be accepted by God. In his Galatian letter, Paul mentioned circumcision by name at least fifteen times. Below are four of those passages in which he mentioned circumcision a total of nine times:

Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive *circumcision*, Christ will be of no benefit to you. And I testify again to every man who receives *circumcision*, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law (Gal. 5:2-3).

For in Christ Jesus neither *circumcision* nor *uncircumcision* means anything, but faith working through love (Gal. 5:6).

Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be *circumcised*, simply so that they will not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. For those who are *circumcised* do not even keep the Law themselves, but they desire to have you *circumcised* so that they may boast in your flesh (Gal. 6:12-13).

For neither is *circumcision* anything, nor *uncircumcision*, but a new creation (Gal. 6:15).

I'm sure you noticed Paul's solemn warning to the Gentile Galatians that, if they "received circumcision," Christ would be of no benefit to them. Paul could only have meant that Christ's sacrificial death and the salvation He provided through it would be of no benefit to them. What could be more tragic than that?

Being a circumcised Jew himself (see Phil. 3:5), Paul certainly was not saying that the state of being circumcised automatically nullified all the benefits provided by Christ. He obviously believed that he, as a circumcised Christian, was benefitting from Christ. His concern regarding the Gentile Galatian believers was, of course, their *basis* of salvation. They were in danger of transferring their faith in Christ for salvation to faith in circumcision for salvation.

This concept is underscored again in two of the other above-quoted verses. In one of the final sentences that brings his Galatian letter to a conclusion, Paul wrote, “For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation” (Gal. 6:15). That is, it doesn’t make a bit of difference if a person is circumcised or not circumcised. All that matters is if a person is a “new creation,” that is, one who has been spiritually reborn through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Just a few sentences earlier, Paul similarly wrote, “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6). Again, circumcision has no part in salvation. Salvation is by faith, and the proof of genuine faith is love. When people believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, God’s love is poured out within their hearts through the Holy Spirit who comes to live inside them (see Romans 5:5). The first fruit of the indwelling Spirit is love, something Paul tells us in the same chapter of Galatians (see Galatians 5:22). So “faith working through love” is what matters, not circumcision.

The Application to Us

Obviously, it would be safe to conclude that Paul would say the same thing about *anything* that *anyone* might claim is essential for salvation other than faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, faith that results in a new creation who manifests love. If someone, for example, made the claim that to be saved, one must become a member of a certain church denomination, be baptized using a certain formula, cut their hair or trim their beard in a certain way, wear a certain uniform every day, never own a phone, never drive a car, and so on, Paul would solemnly warn them, “If you do those things in order to be saved, Christ will be of no benefit to you.”

This is an irrefutable conclusion. If you agree with Paul that making circumcision a requirement for salvation nullifies the benefits of Christ, you must agree that making anything a salvation

requirement—other than faith in the Lord Jesus Christ—also nullifies the benefits of Christ.

“But,” some will say, “the Bible says that faith without works is dead and cannot save anyone.” Yes, that is true. True faith always produces works. Genuine faith in the Lord Jesus Christ always results in obedience to *His* commandments. If I believe that *He* is Lord, I will strive to obey *Him*.

Adherence to manmade rules and traditions, however, is not an indication of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ any more than adherence to Chinese laws is an indication of United States citizenship.

Manmade laws are by definition *not* God’s laws. When professing Christians subscribe to manmade laws thinking that they must adhere to them to be saved, they reveal that their faith is not in Christ for salvation. Rather, their faith is in their own works, and worse, works that aren’t even prescribed by God and that do not have the indwelling Spirit as their source. Just as Paul told the Galatians, he would tell such folks that Christ is of no benefit to them.

Salvation is a gift granted to us by God’s grace and received through faith in Christ. It is not something we earn through our own works. And along with forgiveness of our sins, God also grants us the gift of His indwelling Spirit who motivates and empowers us to live righteously. As Paul wrote to the Ephesian Christians:

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them (Ephesians 2:8-10).

That passage, I think, should be memorized by every Christian, because it is so important and concise. Salvation is a gift. By definition, gifts are not earned. So salvation is not the result of our works, just as Paul said. Salvation does, however, *result in our doing good works*.

The “equation of salvation” is not rightly expressed by this formula: Good Works = Salvation. That is legalism. Neither is it rightly expressed by this formula: Faith + Good Works = Salvation. That is semi-legalism. Rather, it is best expressed by this formula: Faith = Salvation + Good Works. True faith in the Lord Jesus Christ results in a spiritual rebirth, a salvation that is always accompanied by obedience to Christ’s commandments.

Notice also what Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:8-10 about the nature of those good works that originate from the gift of salvation. They are a result of God's "workmanship" in us. They are works that "God prepared beforehand." So naturally, they align with God's will and God's commandments. They are primarily acts of loving one's neighbor. They are certainly not works that have their origins in manmade traditions or cultural rules. Born-again, Spirit-indwelt, new creations are not inspired and empowered by God to follow manmade religious rules and traditions! They are inspired and empowered by God to follow *His* laws!

Human Traditions

So is it wrong for Christians to follow manmade traditions? Yes, *if they contradict or subvert biblical truth*. Jesus once said to some Jewish leaders: "Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?" (Matt. 15:2). He also said, "You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition" (Mark 7:9).

Again, if I keep manmade traditions because I think I must keep them to be saved, then following those manmade traditions contradicts biblical truth. On the other hand, if I keep them to express love for my neighbor, then keeping them is not wrong. In fact, keeping them is a form of doing good.

Let me offer a biblical example. Although Paul strongly warned the Gentile Galatian believers against being circumcised (as we have already read), he himself once circumcised a Gentile convert:

Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. And a disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek [a Gentile], and he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted this man to go with him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek (Acts 16:1-3).

Why did Paul circumcise Gentile Timothy? It was because he wanted Timothy to help him spread the gospel in a region where there were many Jews, and no Jew would listen to an uncircumcised

Gentile teach them about God. So, in order to remove a barrier to the gospel, Paul circumcised Timothy. But you can be sure that Paul didn't tell Timothy, "I'm doing this because you can't be saved unless you are circumcised." Absolutely not!

Paul's concern regarding the Gentile believers in Galatia was that they were "seeking to be justified by law" (Gal. 5:4), a very grave error. In fact, Paul believed it was a spiritually-deadly error:

You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace (Gal. 5:4).

People sometimes ask, "Is it possible to fall from grace?" According to Paul, the answer is "yes"—if someone who formerly was trusting Jesus for salvation begins to trust his works. It was Paul, not me, who told the Galatians that they had been "severed from Christ" and had "fallen from grace."

The Gentile Galatian believers were not only lining up to be circumcised, believing it was required for salvation, but they were also starting to observe Jewish "days and months and seasons and years" (Gal. 4:10), all because they had been duped by false teachers who taught such things were required for salvation. Paul was very worried: "I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain" (Gal. 4:11). Everything that had been gained for the gospel in Galatia was in danger of being lost!

And that is why Paul opened his letter to the Galatians by bluntly expressing his shock at what was happening among them:

I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ (Gal. 1:6-7).

Paul called the Jewish circumcision message a "different" and "distorted" gospel that was not aligned with the gospel of "the grace of Christ." He considered their false doctrine so deadly that he went on to say:

But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!

And Paul didn't stop with wishing for a curse upon the false teachers. Near the end of his letter, he wrote in exasperation: "I wish that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves" (Gal. 5:12). Other less-subtle English translations use the word "castrate" instead of "mutilate." If the Jewish teachers were so sure of the spiritual benefits of some foreskin removal, maybe they should try, on themselves, a full genital removal!

Modern Amish Ordnungs

In light of all we've considered so far, let's now return to thinking about modern Amish Ordnungs. It goes without saying that, if anyone believes they must keep the Ordnung to be saved and reach heaven, they are no different than the deceived Galatians who believed that they had to be circumcised and keep the Mosaic Law. Such Amish people are not trusting Jesus for salvation but are trusting in their works, and even worse, they are trusting works that are not grounded in God's Word. For example, there is nothing in the Bible that says it is wrong to own and drive a car, or that we must drive horse-drawn buggies. If you are driving a buggy because you think you must to get to heaven, you are trusting in your works and Christ will be of no benefit to you. And the same could be said for any other Ordnung rule if you are keeping it because you think you must to get to heaven.

If, however, you are keeping the Ordnung out of love for others and not because you think you must keep it in order to get to heaven, that is different. You could do that and still maintain faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, trusting Him alone for salvation.

That is exactly what the Apostle Paul did. He knew that keeping the Mosaic Law was not necessary for him to be saved. However, in order to not erect Jewish barriers to the gospel, he kept the Law of Moses when he was around Jews. And in order to not set up barriers to the gospel to Gentiles, he did not keep the Law of Moses when he was around them:

For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law [of Moses], as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law [Gentiles, to whom God never gave the Law of Moses], as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it (1 Cor. 9:19-23).

Clearly, Paul did not believe that he, a Jew, was required to keep the Law of Moses. Just as clear is the fact he also believed that he, as a Christian, was required to keep the Law of Christ.

So too, newly born-again people of Amish background should know that God does not require them to keep any manmade rules of their community's Ordnung, but He does expect them to obey all that Christ commanded.

Should such people, however, keep the Amish Ordnung when they are around Amish people who are not yet born again in order to not set up a barrier to the gospel, in hopes of winning them to genuine salvation by grace through faith?

That is, I believe, an individual decision. But we should keep in mind that many Amish-background believers continue to live in full view of Amish neighbors, unlike Paul who alternately traveled between the somewhat-separated worlds of Jews and Gentiles. Paul was primarily an "apostle to the Gentiles" (Rom. 11:13; 1 Tim. 2:7), so he spent limited time keeping the Mosaic Law trying to not offend Jews.

Also keep in mind that, by continuing to keep the Amish Ordnung, Amish-background believers potentially could strengthen the self-deception of Amish people who think the Ordnung must be followed in order to one day go to heaven. By not keeping the Ordnung but keeping the Law of Christ, Amish-background believers send a clear message to unregenerate (non-born-again) Amish people that they believe keeping the Ordnung is not essential for salvation.

If I was an idol-worshipper prior to being born again, I would not continue to worship idols in order to try to win my idol-worshipping friends. Rather, I would want every idol worshipper to know I was no longer worshipping idols and was now worshipping the one true God.

Beyond all of that, born-again Amish-background believers who continue to keep the Ordnung might mislead *non-Amish* unbelievers into thinking that all the Amish lifestyle rules are required by God, which would hinder them from believing the gospel.

All of this is to say, if you are an Amish-background believer who decides to continue following the Ordnung, you have a moral obligation to tell unregenerate Amish as well as unregenerate non-Amish that your keeping the Ordnung has nothing to do with salvation, just as Paul made efforts to convey to unregenerate Jews and Gentiles that keeping the rules of the Mosaic Law had nothing to do with salvation. Remember, Paul was circumcised, and he circumcised Timothy, but he certainly never let anyone think that he or Timothy believed that circumcision was essential for salvation.

Of course, any Amish person who is born again and who begins to try to lead unregenerate Amish people to a genuine faith in Jesus Christ—a *faith that includes believing the Ordnung is not essential for salvation*—may soon find himself or herself excommunicated by their Amish community. Among *regenerate* Amish communities, however, that would not be the case. Still, the question remains if regenerate Amish communities should follow any form of Amish Ordnung. By keeping their hundreds, and sometimes thousands, of lifestyle rules, they run the risk of misleading Amish and non-Amish unbelievers that they believe keeping their lifestyle rules is essential for salvation.

Amish Ordnungs, of course, are the reason why virtually no outsiders ever join *any* Amish communities, regenerate or unregenerate. All outsiders naturally realize that if they were to join any Amish community, they would be expected to conform to all the Ordnung rules. If you are a part of a regenerate or unregenerate Amish community, be honest about this! You would only allow people to join your community who agreed to conform to your Ordnung. And if they agreed to conform and you allowed them to join, but then they did *not* conform, you know they would be excommunicated. If you say, “No, we would allow them to remain,” then your unenforced Ordnung is just a list of suggestions which anyone in your community can keep or not keep! So what is the point of your Ordnung?

Common Objections Answered

— “But our regenerate Amish community has arrived at our Ordnung by consensus! It has not been forced upon us by a bishop. Our Ordnung rules represent our agreed-upon convictions!” some say.

Still, together, you’ve set up rules that are not found in the Law of Christ, and you won’t allow anyone to join your community unless they agree to keep your Ordnung. Here’s another way of saying it: In your section of Christ’s church and body, Christians who *only* follow the Law of Christ aren’t welcome to join you. They must agree with all your lifestyle rules. Are you helping or hindering the growth of God’s kingdom, the kingdom where He is the King who makes the rules? Are you working for or against the unity of the church for which Jesus prayed in John 17:21?

There were, of course, differences of conviction among believers in the early church regarding lifestyle choices that were not specifically addressed in the Law of Christ. For example, some of the early Christians were persuaded that it was wrong for them to eat meat that had been sacrificed to an idol. Others, like Paul, believed there was nothing wrong with the practice. But neither side created an Ordnung over it, dividing into separate churches. Paul admonished both sides to be considerate of each other and walk in love, and especially those whose consciences were “strong” rather than “weak” (see 1 Cor. 8:1-13).

I am certain that, even within regenerate Amish communities, there are differences of convictions. As in any and all groups, stronger personalities dominate, and the convictions of *those* folks become the rules of the Ordnung, and those who disagree either outwardly conform or leave the group.

All of this is to say, why not discard any and all manmade rules and just follow Christ and His rules? Why not just be respectful and considerate of those followers of Christ whose personal convictions differ from yours, which is an act of obedience to Christ’s commandment to love one another?

Besides all of that, the truth is, no matter how rigorous or lax any Ordnung is, whether it is contrived by regenerate or unregenerate Amish, very few folks under any Ordnung are actually keeping it in its entirety, simply because everyone has different personal convictions. So every

Ordnung makes liars out of people who declare that they will keep all the Ordnung but who in reality don't!

—"But the Ordnung rules are like fences and road signs keep us on the right path!"

Are you saying that God's commandments and His indwelling Holy Spirit are not enough to accomplish that today, as they were 2,000 years ago for the early church? Are you born again or not?

—"But everyone follows rules that are not in the Bible! For example, there are speed limits on highways! Those rules are good for everyone!"

First, there is no danger that any speed limit sign might mislead anyone into thinking they will go to hell if they don't obey it! I never saw a speed limit sign that said, "If you exceed 55 miles per hour, you will go to hell when you die!" Yet Ordnungs definitely have the potential to mislead people into thinking they must be obeyed to escape hell. In fact, in unregenerate Amish communities, that is exactly how Ordnungs are portrayed.

Second, many drivers, if not *most* drivers, regularly exceed speed limits, proof that rules really don't change behaviors. People follow their convictions. People who care about others drive safely, according to what they deem to be safe, which may include exceeding the speed limit at times.

In reality, good people don't need external laws to govern their behavior because they are internally governed by moral principle. That is why Paul wrote, "Law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious" (1Tim. 1:9). If you think you need hundreds or thousands of external laws to govern your behavior, you are admitting that you are not internally motivated to do what is right. And that is an admission that you are not born again and you do not have the Holy Spirit living in you.

The fact is, people who are born again *don't even need God's commandments* to govern their behavior, because they have the Holy Spirit living in them to guide them. That is why Paul wrote, "But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law" (Gal. 5:18). Under the new covenant, God's laws are written in our hearts (see Heb. 8:10).

So if born-again people don't even need God's commandments (externally) to govern their behavior, *how much more* do they not need any manmade rules to govern their behavior!

In summary, Amish Ordnungs, whether contrived by unregenerate or regenerate Amish communities, are not only affronts against God, as they betray a belief that His commandments and Holy Spirit are insufficient to produce behavior that pleases Him, but they are also tacit admissions that adherents are not righteous people who are self-governed by inward convictions, but unrighteous people who need external laws. Worse, those lists of rules make liars out of every Amish person, as they pledge to follow them, but don't. Even worse, those lists of rules divide unregenerate Amish people and communities into factions and, among regenerate Amish communities, divide Christ's body.

What is even more telling about Amish Ordnungs is that, among many Amish communities that are governed by thousands of rules, there is sexual immorality, including even child abuse and incest, as well as drunkenness and alcoholism, drug abuse, hatred, unforgiveness and broken relationships, dysfunctional families and marriage conflict, depression and mental disorders, and a host of other problems and sins that are clearly condemned in the Bible. Some Amish folks who are obediently driving horse-drawn buggies and wearing straw hats are sexually molesting children! There is an Amish community near me in which, over the past year, three men have gone to prison for molesting children! The reason is because, if you are not born again, you are, as the Bible says, a slave to sin (see John 8:34; Rom. 6:6-20).

It is not just Amish child molesters who are slaves to sin. All unregenerate Amish people are slaves to sin. Amish folks who aren't born again (just like "English" folks who haven't been born again) have difficulty keeping God's basic commandments, much less all the manmade rules of their Ordnung. The solution to the entire mess is the new birth through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ! People who are born again have the desire *and* power to obey Jesus' commandments, as Jesus Himself promised:

Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light (Matt. 11:28-29).

And as the apostle John echoed:

For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome (1John 5:3).

The reason Jesus' commandments are not burdensome is because He transforms those who believe in Him by His grace. In their hearts, they love Him, and they want to obey Him. And by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, they *can* obey Him! The problem in unregenerate Amish communities is hearts that have not yet been transformed by the grace of God. That's it. And it is so tragic, because the entire basis of the original Anabaptist movement of the 16th century was the new birth by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

How Far Fence Laws Can Go

Amish folks aren't the first people who've promoted the idea of fence laws. Many of the Jews in Jesus' day followed thousands of fence laws that were designed to keep them far from disobeying God's laws. For example, the Mosaic law declared, "You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk" (Ex. 34:26). This law related to an occult fertility rite practiced by the Canaanites—whom the Israelites dispossessed after their deliverance from Egypt. God didn't want His people practicing pagan superstitions. The Jews, however, ignored the spirit of that particular law and created fence laws to prevent anyone from getting anywhere close to breaking the letter of it.

For example, a person might, at the same meal, drink goat's milk and eat goat meat. There was some chance—albeit a slim one—that the milk might be from the mother of the goat that was being eaten. Once mixed in the stomach and heated there, a "boiling" of sorts would occur, and one would be guilty of boiling a goat in its mother's milk! So, a fence law was established to prevent such a "transgression" from ever occurring. That law forbade the eating of *any* meat and dairy product

together, because you never know if some goat's meat may have mixed with some beef at the slaughter house, or if some goat's milk may have been mixed with some cow's milk at the dairy!

If one ate any meat product, he must wait a specified time for it to be fully digested before consuming any dairy product, and vice versa, lest they mix in one's stomach. And all meat and dairy products must be kept in separate kitchens, lest there be any accidental mixing of the two.

Moreover, completely separate dishes must be kept for eating meat and dairy products, because there was a chance that a small particle of cheese might remain on your plate from a previous meal. If that cheese was made from goat's milk, and if you happen to eat some goat's meat on that same plate, that goat's meat might be from a goat whose mother's milk was used to make the cheese, and thus when combined in your stomach, you'd be guilty of boiling a young goat in its mother's milk! (It was because of these fence laws that I found it impossible to order a cheese pizza with pepperoni the last time I visited Israel.)

There were at least 1,500 fence laws surrounding the single commandment that forbade working on the Sabbath. Walking across a field on the Sabbath was forbidden, because you might inadvertently cause a grain of wheat to separate from its stalk, thus making you guilty of reaping on the Sabbath. Your foot might also step on a grain that had fallen on the ground, and by stepping on it, you might cause the wheat to be separated from the chaff, making you guilty of threshing on the Sabbath. It was also possible that your garment could create a breeze that would cause the chaff to blow away, making you guilty of winnowing on the Sabbath. And if a bird saw that grain and swooped down to eat it, you would be guilty of storing grain on the Sabbath!

Eventually, all those fence laws came to be considered as binding as the Mosaic Law, and they were compiled into what is called the *Mishna*. If there was disagreement between the two, the Mishna, by its own testimony, actually superseded the Mosaic Law. This Jesus condemned, citing an example of how the scribes and Pharisees invalidated the fifth commandment, and by their tradition released people from responsibility of caring for their elderly parents. Their doctrines were "precepts of men," which proved that their hearts were far from God. Tragically, the same phenomenon can be observed in Amish culture today, where traditions take precedence over God's Word. How it must grieve God. And the fence laws of the Jews couldn't save or transform anyone, just like Amish Ordnungs.

Imagine This...

If you are Amish, I want to ask you to imagine something. Imagine waking up one morning to a world without any Ordnung. I know that sounds unimaginable if you are Amish. But just try to imagine it for a moment. Imagine that all the bishops and ministers in your community met and agreed to abolish the Ordnung, so from then on, no one would be expected to obey any manmade rules, but only Christ's commandments. No one would have to worry any longer about being watched, discovered, judged, put on trial, shunned or excommunicated for anything that at one time was part of the Ordnung. What would happen in your community? Would anyone's behavior change?

I'm sure you agree that *most* Amish people's behavior, if not *all* Amish people's behavior, would change, at least to some degree. Many would start doing things that were formerly forbidden and stop doing things that were formerly expected. *And their change of behavior would reveal their former motive for their former behavior.* They did what they did, not because they *wanted* to, but because they were *expected* to. They would have *preferred* otherwise, but they did what they did out of fear of losing the approval of the group. Any Amish person who is honest will admit *that* is the reason they keep their community's Ordnung to the degree that they do. And any Amish person who is honest will also admit that is also the reason they all regularly or occasionally secretly transgress their community's Ordnung—as long as they think they likely won't be caught.

Now take this imagination one step further. Just as all Amish people obey their community's *Ordnung* out of fear of losing the approval of the group, there is also a possibility that many Amish people obey Christ's commandments *for the very same reason.* That is, they aren't obeying Christ's commandments because they love Him or because they are born again, but because they want the approval of other Amish people. Their "holiness" is just a show. If they weren't under peer pressure to act Amish, they would be disobeying both their Ordnung and Christ's commandments.

Yet I can assure you, if your Amish community abolished the Ordnung as well as any expectation that anyone keep Christ's commandments, those who are born again within the community might, with everyone else, no longer keep any of the former Ordnung's rules, *but they would not cease obeying*

Christ's commandments. The reason is because they want to keep Christ's commandments, because they are born again and indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

Here's another test: Imagine how you would act if you found yourself in a state of the U.S. where there were no other Amish people. Imagine being hundreds of miles from any Amish community, so there was no chance of anyone reporting you to your bishop for transgressions against the *Ordnung*. How would you act? If you would behave differently far away from other Amish people, that reveals your motive for how you behave now when you are around other Amish people. You are motivated by fear of losing the approval of your group. Far from other Amish eyes, there would be no chance of being rejected, so all your motivation to obey the *Ordnung* would be gone. Many Amish readers won't need any imagination for what I've just described, because they've already done what I've described on their vacations. One English driver told me that most Amish people whom she drives for any extended trip change their clothes to make themselves indistinguishable from non-Amish people. On the beach, Amish women are wearing bikinis (and no head coverings)!

If you would disobey any of Christ's commandments when far away from other Amish people, that is sure proof you have not been born again. The outstanding characteristic of a born-again person is that he or she wants to obey Jesus' commandments.

All of this is to say, not only can the *Ordnung* not save you, it also can't transform you or make you obey God. All it does is constantly condemn you—all your life. All those fences and road signs just tempt you to do the opposite of what you want to do because you are a slave to sin. The only solution to your slavery to sin is faith in Jesus, who longs to forgive you, deliver you, transform you, empower you, guide you, and one day welcome you into His eternal kingdom.

What are you waiting for? Stop hoping your works will save you! Repent of your sins and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, making Him your Lord! He will forgive you and put His Holy Spirit in you. You will be a "born-again" "new creation in Christ," with an inward love, joy, and peace that you never dreamed of!

NINE

The 2022 Johnsonburg Confession

In order to help equip the Amish-background new believers in Johnsonburg, in early 2022 I penned the following doctrinal statement, patterned to a degree after the 1632 Dordrecht Confession. I hoped it would help the new believers be able to “offer a defense for the hope within them” as they were questioned by their Amish family members and friends for “adopting a new faith.” I imagined that they might even give copies of it to their yet-unsaved Amish family members and friends.

In any case, this document could help any new believer become grounded in the basic, essential New Testament truths, but it is written particularly for Amish-background believers. It can also help prepare new believers for the persecution they will sooner or later encounter for their faith.

The Recovery of Our Spiritual Heritage: Having come to realize that we have drifted from the spiritual heritage of our forefathers—many of whom paid with their lives for their sincere faith in the Lord Jesus Christ—we now strive to regain what has been lost by returning to the plain teachings of Jesus and the New Testament apostles whom He appointed. “Like newborn babies,”

we “long for the pure milk of the word” (1 Pet. 2:2) that is undiluted and unpolluted by the traditions of men, so that “the word of Christ will richly dwell within us” (Col. 3:16).

Ours is not a “new belief” or “new teaching,” but rather an old belief and ancient teaching that was (1) held in common by all the early Christians, (2) plainly revealed in the New Testament, (3) affirmed in the Dordrecht Confession of 1632, and (4) believed by all the early Anabaptists from whom we are all descended.

Therefore...

1.) The Impossibility of Earning Our Salvation: We acknowledge that we, like all people, are guilty sinners in the eyes of God. We have repeatedly sinned in thought, word and deed, and we have disobeyed His holy commandments all of our lives. The Bible says that we are “by nature children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3) are “slaves to sin” (John 8:34, Rom. 6:20) and that “our righteousness is like filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6). Jesus said, “No one is good but God alone” (Mark 10:18). Even our hope of “being good enough” to make heaven is evidence of our sinful pride. We therefore stand rightly condemned and deserving of God’s wrath. There is no hope of our attaining heaven and eternal life by our own merit or efforts. If we are to be saved, it can only be by God’s mercy.

2.) The Exaltation of the Humble: We believe that God’s mercy is abundant towards those who humble themselves like the sinner in Jesus’ story of the Pharisee and the tax-collector. The tax-collector sincerely acknowledged his sinfulness and humbly asked for God’s mercy, whereas the Pharisee proudly compared himself to others, even listing things he did that he believed earned God’s approval. Jesus said that the contrite tax collector left the temple that day “justified,” or “right in the eyes of God,” whereas the proud Pharisee did not, because, as Jesus promised, “Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 18:14). So we, like the tax-collector, have humbled ourselves before God, acknowledging our sinfulness and the foolish pride of hoping we could be good enough in the eyes of a holy God to earn or deserve eternal life.

3.) The Opening of Our Spiritual Eyes: Having abandoned our self-righteousness and acknowledged our sinfulness, God has kept His promise to exalt those who humble themselves.

Although we are entirely undeserving, He has opened our eyes to His gracious means of forgiveness and salvation, namely, the sacrificial death of His beloved Son on the cross. We now see what was previously hidden from our understanding, and we have come to sincerely believe the most well-known verse in the Bible, which says that “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

4.) Salvation by Grace Through Faith: We now truly believe in Jesus *in our hearts*, and not just in our heads as we did when we once joined the church. We sincerely and whole-heartedly believe He is the divine Son of God. We believe that He died for our sins. We believe that He was resurrected. We believe that He ascended to heaven and is now seated at the right hand of His Father. We believe that He will return one day. We believe that He will judge every person, and that we will all stand before Him to give an account.

We believe that Jesus is Lord and Master, and that we should obey His commandments and teach others who believe in Him to obey His commandments (Matt. 5:19). We believe His well-known promise that “whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” As long as we continue to believe in Him, we are sure we will not perish, but will inherit eternal life. This agrees with the teaching of the apostle Paul, who wrote that we are “saved by grace through faith” and “not as a result of works” (Eph. 2:8-9). We have stopped hoping to be good enough to gain heaven, knowing that is impossible and prideful.

5.) The Forgiveness of Our Sin: The opening of our eyes, however, and the birth of genuine faith in our hearts has proven to be only the introduction to God’s grace that has been so abundantly poured out upon us. Through the death of Christ, the penalty for our sins has been paid in full, and we have been forgiven of all our past sins. We have been cleansed (Eph. 5:26; Heb. 9:13-14).

Jesus died for all our future sins as well, and He has become our “advocate before the Father” (1 John 2:1). If and when we sin in the future, and we know that “if we confess our sins, He is faithful to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). It is not our confession or any penance (such as being temporarily shunned or excommunicated) that earns us forgiveness when we sin. Rather, it is God’s mercy, extended to us through Jesus sacrificial death for our sins.

6.) Our Spiritual Rebirth: When we believed in Jesus, we experienced the spiritual rebirth that Jesus told Nicodemus is necessary to see and enter God's kingdom (John 3:1-22). Although we cannot fully explain it, we have been born again by the power of God's Holy Spirit. Being born again has proven not to just be something that has *supposedly* occurred to us when we joined the church and were baptized but that didn't actually change us. It has proven to be an actual, undeniable, life-changing experience.

People who are born again *know* that their lives have changed. They look at their lives as divided into two sections: before they were born again and after they were born again. It is a radical transformation. Born again people are "new creations in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:17).

7.) Our Indwelling by the Holy Spirit: Born again people are not only *transformed* by the Holy Spirit, but are also *indwelt* by the Holy Spirit (John 14:17; Rom. 8:9-11; 1 Cor.6:19). They can say with the apostle Paul, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me"—by His indwelling Holy Spirit (Gal. 2:20). Just like Paul, the persons we once were have died, and we are now new persons. Baptism is a symbol of that, which is why in the New Testament new believers were baptized. They were immersed completely under the water, symbolizing the death and burial of the old person, and then they were lifted out from under the water, symbolizing their resurrection as a new person who was washed clean! That is what has happened to us. And that is why we are filled with love, joy and peace. The Holy Spirit is working in us, and He is growing His fruit through us (Gal. 5:22-23).

8.) Our Sonship and Adoption into God's Family: But there is still more that God's amazing grace has done in our lives. Being spiritually reborn, we have been made actual children of God. The apostle John wrote: "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God" (1 John 5:1) and, "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are" (1 John 3:1). The Father of Jesus has also become our Heavenly Father (John 20:17)! Paul wrote, "Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" (Gal. 4:6). Now we have a genuine relationship with God as His own children. We love and trust Him as our Father.

9.) God's Love Shed Abroad in Our Hearts: We not only love the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but we also love one another. When the Holy Spirit came to live inside of us, He brought God's love

with Him, because God is love (1 John 4:7-8). Paul wrote, “The love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Rom. 5:5). The love that God poured out in our hearts is not just a love for those who have been born again among our fellow Amish, but for all people all over the world who have been born again, of which there are hundreds of millions. That love is another proof to us that we have been truly born again. John wrote, “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren” (1 John 3:14).

10.) The Assurance of Our Salvation: God’s merciful and gracious work in our lives fills us with assurance of our relationship and standing with Him. We are no longer afraid of death. We have learned that being assured of salvation is the normal Christian experience, and it was the universal experience of all our born-again Anabaptist ancestors as well as the early Christians. John wrote, “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:13).

11.) Our Motivation to Obey All That Christ Commanded: Because of all these amazing blessings in our lives, our greatest desire is to please our Lord Jesus Christ. We strive to obey Him, not to earn our place in heaven, but for at least five other reasons: (1) Because we love Him. Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15). (2) Because we believe in Him, and the Bible teaches faith without works is dead (Jas. 2:14-26). (3) Because He has put His Holy Spirit in us who leads us in paths of righteousness. Paul wrote, “For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (Rom. 8:14). (4) Because Jesus has delivered us from our former slavery to sin (Rom 6:5-7). And (5) because we are full of gratitude for what Jesus has done for us. We can never repay Him, but we can show Him our thankfulness through our obedience.

Once we were born again, we discovered that, although we can still commit sin, we cannot enjoy it. When we are tempted to sin, we inwardly resist it. If we yield to temptation, we feel remorse that motivates us to confess it. If we don’t confess it, our loving Heavenly Father disciplines us so that we might “share in His holiness” (Heb. 12:10). He has promised to complete the good work that He has begun in us (Phil. 1:6). Like any good Father, He is devoted to His children’s progress and maturity. He’s preparing us for His future kingdom!

12.) Jesus’ Church, His Body: As we prepare for that future kingdom, we realize that we are part

of His earthly kingdom right now. That kingdom consists of everyone who truly believes in the Lord Jesus Christ. We recognize that, although there are many doctrinal differences among those who believe in Jesus, there is “one body and one Spirit...one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:4-6). We therefore strive to be humble, gentle, patient and tolerant toward “one another in love” and be “diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:2-3). In Christ, “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female.” Rather, we “are all one in Christ” (Gal. 3:28).

We also recognize that Christ has one body that consists of many members that do not all have the same function (Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:12-26). God has graced us in different ways for different kinds of service. We are thankful for all the members of the body of Christ and their specific functions. All the members are dependent on each other and should work together in love, respect and harmony. There should be “no division in the body.” All the members should “have the same care for one another...and if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it” (1 Cor. 12:25-26).

13.) Our Divinely-Given Ordnung: Jesus commanded His disciples in Matthew 28:19-20 to teach their disciples to obey all that *He* commanded them, what Paul referred to as “the law of Christ” (1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2). Therefore, although we respect any and all convictions held by our Amish families and friends, our focus is not upon rules that are not part of Christ’s Law. Rather, our focus is upon obeying Christ’s commandments and making disciples who, like us, are striving to obey all of His commandments. Jesus is our Lord!

For this reason, we resist any temptation to participate in debates about any rules that are not found in the New Testament. Our only concern for our Amish families and friends is if they have been born again by God’s Spirit (as being born again is necessary to see and enter God’s kingdom) and if they are obeying the commandments Christ has given to us all. To whatever degree we may follow any rules of any Amish Ordnung, it is not due to any belief that God requires us to follow such rules, but due to our deep love and respect for our Amish family and friends. We strive to imitate the example of the apostle Paul who did not want to erect an obstacle to the gospel before his fellow Jews, and so he kept all the requirements of the Law of Moses when he was with them—although

he himself knew that he was not “under the Law of Moses,” but only “under the law of Christ” (1 Cor. 9:20-23). Therefore, at least until we are excommunicated for our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we will continue to abide by the rules of our community’s Ordnung that do not contradict Christ’s Law, that we might not give anyone reason not to listen to the good news of the gospel of salvation by grace through faith. Like Paul, we “become all things to all men, so that we may by all means save some” (1 Cor. 9:22).

Our faith is in Christ for our salvation, not in keeping manmade rules. We hope and pray that the day comes when all Amish people will place their faith solely in Christ, and they will consequently experience the same spiritual rebirth we have, resulting in a new desire to obey only Christ’s commandments.

14.) Our Response to Persecution: We are not surprised when we are persecuted for our faith in Christ, knowing that Jesus promised all His followers that they will suffer persecution, and also knowing that our Anabaptist forefathers were all persecuted because they, too, were born again, unlike the religious but spiritually dead people who persecuted them. We would be much more concerned if we were *not* persecuted at least to some degree, since Jesus said, “Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for their fathers used to treat the false prophets in the same way” (Luke 6:26). Like the first Christians, we consider ourselves blessed when we are counted worthy to suffer for Christ’s sake (Acts 5:41), because we remember how Jesus suffered for us, and He promised us that He will reward us for our sufferings for His sake (Matt. 5:11-12). The New Testament promises, “All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:12).

For this reason, we will always endeavor to “turn the other cheek,” “bless those who curse us,” “pray for those who persecute us” and “love our enemies” (Matt. 5:39, 43; Luke 6:27-28). If and when we are shunned or excommunicated by Amish family or friends who do not understand our spiritual rebirth, we will respond with love. We will not ignore those who ignore us. We will not shun those who shun us. We will not speak ill of those who speak ill of us. Rather, we will greet them, serve them and love them, in hopes that they will be shamed for how they are treating us, and that their eyes will be opened to the gospel so that they might escape the spiritual darkness that motivates them to persecute those who follow Jesus. We will also sincerely pray for their salvation,

that they might be born again and enjoy all of the temporal and eternal benefits that belong to the children of God.

15.) Our Gatherings: Jesus said where two or three are gathered in His name, He would be in their midst (Matt. 18:20). When we gather with other believers, we look to Jesus to speak to us, guide us, and instruct us by His Word found in the Bible and by His Holy Spirit in our midst.

Jesus is the Head of the church (Col.1:18), which is His body, and He is the One who gives spiritual gifts and ministry gifts to the church (1 Cor. 12:4-11, 27-31; Eph. 4:7-12). The New Testament instructs us to “desire earnestly spiritual gifts” (1Cor. 14:1), of which nine are listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10. They are distributed, not as we will, but as God wills (1 Cor. 12:11). As God blesses us with revelation and manifestations of His power, our love for Him grows, and He is glorified. His gifts are given to build up His church, just as Paul wrote, “When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification” (1 Cor. 14:26).

In keeping with biblical tradition, our gatherings are most often held in homes. Our gatherings are not closed, but open to all—believers, seekers and unbelievers—as we have nothing to hide and much to share! Like the first Christians, we love to “break bread from house to house and enjoy our meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart” (Acts 2:46).

16.) Various Bible Translations: We are thankful for the many different translations of the Bible, including the German version translated by Martin Luther that made the Bible readable and understandable for the first time in history to common German people during the Protestant Reformation. Because German is not our “heart-language,” however, we are also thankful for English and Pennsylvania Dutch translations. As we strive to know God’s will for our lives, we are glad that we can compare many different Bible translations, all of which have been translated by scholars who have studied the ancient languages of Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. We believe that if more Amish people would read the New Testament in one of their everyday languages, more Amish people would come to believe the gospel of grace and be born again by God’s Holy Spirit, recovering the spiritual heritage of their ancestors.

17.) Our Obligation to Non-Amish People: The New Testament teaches that God loves the *entire* world, and because of it, He gave His only Son (John 3:16). It also teaches that Jesus “is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the *whole world*” (1 John 2:2). So it is no surprise that Jesus commanded His apostles to “Go into *all the world* and preach the gospel to *all creation*” (Mark 16:15), and He also told them to “make disciples of *all the nations* (or more literally ‘all ethnic groups’),” teaching their disciples to obey all He commanded them (Matt. 28:19-20). It is therefore the responsibility of all of Christ’s disciples to strive to make disciples of all people, and not only Amish people.

Because of that, born-again Amish people face a similar dilemma as the apostle Paul, who was burdened to proclaim the gospel to Jews—who were under the Law of Moses—and to Gentiles, who were not. Not wanting to hinder his effectiveness in reaching either group, Paul kept the Mosaic Law’s requirements when he was with Jews but did not when he was with Gentiles (see 1 Cor. 9:19-23). Paul believed that he, as a Jewish believer in Christ, was not obligated before God to obey the Mosaic Law, but to only obey the law of Christ.

Similarly, since we have been born again, we realize that God does not require us to keep any of the manmade traditions of the Ordnung, but only to obey the Law of Christ. To the degree that we follow the manmade rules and traditions, it is only because of our deep love and respect for our Amish family and friends. We don’t want to offend them or hinder them from listening to the good news of the gospel of grace.

However, we also recognize that by following the Ordnung, we might hinder non-Amish unbelievers from listening to the good news that God wants us to share with them. We don’t want to mislead them into thinking they must keep the manmade traditions of our Ordnung in order to be accepted by God, because that simply is not true. Therefore, when we endeavor to influence non-Amish people who are not yet followers of Christ, we may temporarily abandon all adherence to the manmade rules of the Ordnung lest we hinder the gospel from being sown in their hearts. The same love that motivates us to keep the manmade rules of the Ordnung when we are with Amish people motivates us to abandon the manmade rules of the Ordnung when we are with non-Amish unbelievers. Like God, we desire “all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1Tim. 2:4).

18.) Our Weakness and God's Strength: Our desire is to see the gospel of the grace of Jesus Christ clearly communicated to every one of the 350,000 Amish people living in North America as quickly as possible, knowing that only those who are born again can see or enter God's kingdom. We recognize that our task is beyond our human ability, especially when we think of the 300-year-old fortress walls of tradition that stand between us and those 350,000 precious people for whom Jesus died. We will only succeed if we have God's supernatural help, and we rejoice knowing that "God's power is perfected in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9). We are weak in ourselves, but we are strong in God. Jesus told us that "all things are possible with God" (Mark 10:27), and "all things are possible to him who believes" (Matt. 9:23).

As we do what we can to expand Jesus' kingdom inside and outside Amish culture, we trust for God to do what we cannot do. We seek His wisdom. We pray along with the original Christians, "Grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus" (Acts 4:29-30). God is able to open closed hearts and minds by His power, and we continually ask and expect Him to use His power through us to that end. May He be glorified in and through us!

TEN

Does This Sound Like You?

One sure sign that people are born again is their concern for those who are not yet born again. Many of the Johnsonburg new believers demonstrated that concern, particularly for their unregenerate Amish family members and friends. And so I was not surprised when, in April of 2002, I was asked to write a one-page tract that they could use to reach out to other Amish people. There was an Amish school picnic they intended to attend, and their plan was to place tracts in the outhouse that folks could secretly read while they relieved themselves! It became known as the “Outhouse Outreach”!

This short article that follows is the text of that tract. Quite a few were taken from the outhouse that day, so we considered that to be a good sign!

Before the apostle Paul was a Christian, he was a Jew known as Saul, from the city of Tarsus. Not only was Paul formerly a Jew, he was an *extraordinary* Jew, years later describing himself as “a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless” (Philippians 3:5-6).

You probably know, however, that as Saul was on the road to Damascus to arrest and imprison Christians, God knocked him to the ground with a blinding light. Obviously, God was not pleased

with him, and Saul heard a voice from heaven ask him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” Up until that moment, Saul thought he was serving God, but he quickly realized that, by persecuting Christians, he was persecuting Jesus, the person whom all the Christians believed was God’s Son. Big mistake!

That began Saul’s spiritual journey, during which he learned many valuable lessons.

You may not realize it, but you could be just like Saul. You, too, may think you are on the right path, but God may be about to knock you to the ground, at least in a figurative sense, and set you on a very different course.

One of the first lessons Jesus taught Saul was that he was entirely wrong about the way to become accepted by God. It was not by trying to keep all of the Jewish laws written by Moses. Rather, it was by believing in Jesus. Paul later wrote about that very error in his letter to the Christians in Rome:

I know what enthusiasm they [the Jews] have for God, but it is misdirected zeal. For they don’t understand God’s way of making people right with himself. Refusing to accept God’s way, they cling to their own way of getting right with God by trying to keep the law (Romans 10:3-4).

He similarly wrote to the Christians in Philippi:

I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God’s way of making us right with himself depends on faith (Philippians 3:9).

So, perhaps you are just like Saul. Up until now, you’ve thought that the way to become right in God’s eyes is to keep many laws. If you are Amish, you probably have not only been trying to keep God’s laws, but also trying to keep many manmade laws (that can’t be found in the Bible). And like all other Amish people, you’ve been failing at keeping both!

So, God has some good news for you, just as He had for Saul: It is impossible for you to be good enough to earn a right standing before God, so God has provided another way. That way is through

faith in Jesus, the Son of God who died for all of your sins, as we just read. By dying for your sins, Jesus paid the penalty you deserve, and that makes it possible for God to completely forgive every sin you've ever committed. That is why the Bible declares that eternal life is not something to earn. Rather, it is a gift:

The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23).

But there is still more good news about God's way of making people right with Him.

When you believe in Jesus, God not only forgives all your sins, but He places His Holy Spirit in you, and His Spirit makes you into a new person, spiritually. This is something Jesus taught another Pharisee named Nicodemus. He told Nicodemus that, unless he was born again, he would never see or enter God's kingdom. Then He explained that He was not talking about a physical rebirth, but a spiritual rebirth of his heart. And He told Nicodemus how he could experience it:

“And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up [on a cross], so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life. For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:14-16).

When God puts His Holy Spirit into those who believe in Jesus, they are empowered to live a holy life that pleases God. They are “new creations in Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:17). The Holy Spirit helps all believers obey all of Jesus' commandments (but not manmade rules that aren't in the Bible). That is the second part of how God makes people right with Him.

So, perhaps you are like Paul once was, trying to mistakenly earn your way to heaven. But now, like Saul, you have been figuratively knocked over with some words from heaven. Don't wait any longer to believe, *truly* believe that is, that Jesus is God's Son. As soon as you do, all your sins will be forgiven, and you will be born again! You will be a different person!

Then, find others who've also been reborn, and start telling everyone what had happened to you!

ELEVEN

The Truth About the Johnsonburg Awakening

Because of all the good things that were happening within the growing group of Amish-background believers in Johnsonburg, and because I knew that news travels quickly among Amish people across the country due to all the family connections, I decided to attempt to tell the true story of the Johnsonburg Awakening to every Amish person in North America. So I wrote the letter that follows, raised tens of thousands of dollars from friends to print and mail 63,000 copies, borrowed a mailing list of 32,000 mostly-Amish and Amish-background households from Mission to Amish People, and mailed the letter in June of 2022.

Over the months that followed, I received over 200 responses, with about half being positive and half being negative. The positive replies were often from born-again Amish people. The negative replies usually were focused on some cherished Amish cultural practice or tradition that I mentioned in my letter, and I later regretted not “keeping the main thing the main thing.” That is, I wish I had only focused on the gospel, and not mentioned what naturally happens to Amish people once they are born again and “the light bulb comes on” regarding all their traditions.

In any case, many of those who responded positively requested, through a response card that we included with the letter, that we send them an English New Testament, or more information about being born again, or to be contacted by someone with an Amish background who had been born again and was serving the Lord. We fulfilled all their requests. One young Amish couple in Johnsonburg who received the letter were born again as a result, and they became

part of the Johnsonburg Amish-Background Church.

Within a few months, we began working on compiling a more thorough and up-to-date mailing list of North American Amish households, with the plan of sending a follow-up letter that would include some of the positive responses that we received to the June letter. That follow-up letter is the next chapter in this book.

News often travels very fast among Amish folks! So you've perhaps already heard about the "Johnsonburg Awakening" in Pennsylvania. I've been blessed to have witnessed it from the day it began, which was January 31st of this year. That was the day I met Jonas -----, an Amish minister who had been born again a few weeks earlier, and Levi -----, an Amish bishop who had been born again a few years earlier.

Both of those Amish men, of course, had been baptized when they were teenagers, and according to what many Amish people believe, that is when they were supposed to have been born again. But by the time I met them, they both had come to realize that they had *not* actually been born again when they were baptized as teenagers. When they were baptized then, they said and did what they were expected to say and do, but they did not possess a *genuine* heart-faith in Jesus Christ. It wasn't until years later that they *truly* believed in Jesus—as evidenced by their genuine repentance and subsequent heart-obedience to His commandments. That is when they were *truly* born again. When someone *truly* believes in Jesus, Jesus becomes their Lord, because that is who He is. *Jesus is Lord!* In fact, the Bible calls Him the King of kings and Lord of lords! If Jesus is not *your* Lord, you don't actually believe in Him. You may think you do, but you don't. As the apostle James wrote, faith without works is dead, useless, and *cannot save* anyone (see James 2:14-26). And as the apostle Paul wrote, "For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be *Lord* both of the dead and of the living" (Romans 14:9).

Again, when Jesus becomes someone's Lord, that is when they *actually* believe in Him, and that is when they are born again. That is the spiritual "regeneration" and "new birth" that are both mentioned in the 1632 Dordrecht Confession, an experience that was *the* centerpiece of *all* the original Anabaptists' faith. Your Anabaptist ancestors hundreds of years ago were all born again, just

like Levi and Jonas. If they could speak to you from heaven, they would tell you that what I'm writing to you is the truth.

When someone is born again, it is a spiritual rebirth that is accomplished by the Holy Spirit, as Jesus said to Nicodemus (John 3:1-16). Born-again people are “new creations in Christ” as Paul wrote (2 Corinthians 5:17). When people are born again, they start their lives over. That is why, in the New Testament, the apostles only baptized people who first confessed a genuine faith in Jesus (Acts 8:36-37). The baptisms of those believers represented their death and their resurrection. The apostles immersed them under water and then lifted them out of the water, which symbolized their death, burial, and resurrection, as well as their cleansing from sin (see Romans 6:3-4, Colossians 2:12). Being born again is like being raised from the dead! Anyone who has been truly born again knows what I'm talking about. Born-again people view their lives as divided into two sections: before they were born again, and after they were born again. It is that dramatic. Has that happened yet to you? If not, it can! It can happen today!

When I met Jonas and Levi and their wives, it was obvious to me that they were all born again. I was born again myself more than 45 years ago, and I've been in vocational ministry for more than 40 years as a pastor and an itinerant teacher. I've personally met thousands of people who have been born again, and all of them have told me of the changes—some very dramatic—that occurred in their lives when they *truly* believed in Jesus and made Him their Lord. Some were former drunkards, adulterers, liars, thieves, or homosexuals (just like in the Corinthian church; read it yourself in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11). All were sinners to some degree. But when they were born again, their lives were dramatically changed. All of them became better people. Being born again always improves people...most of them, very significantly! The only exception is when someone is raised in a godly Christian home. In their case, being born again is not so dramatic on the outside. But it certainly is dramatic on the inside!

And we should not be surprised that most born-again people are dramatically different from what they were before they were born again. The Bible also teaches that those who are born again are *indwelt* by the Holy Spirit. When someone truly believes in Jesus, the Holy Spirit, whom the Bible also refers to as God, comes to live on the inside of them (Acts 5:3-4 and 1 Corinthians 6:19). Think about that! *God* comes to live on the inside of those who truly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ! How

could such a thing happen without it dramatically changing the lives of such people? Who would ever believe that God could come to live inside someone and it would not significantly affect that person and their behavior?

So that is what happened to bishop Levi -----, his wife, minister Jonas -----, and his wife. And just like the thousands of other born-again people whom I've met over the last four decades, those four felt so blessed, and they wanted all their family members and friends to enjoy the same blessing. So we talked on the evening of January 31st about what could be done to achieve that.

We agreed to start by having a weekly Tuesday evening Bible study that would alternate between Levi's and Jonas' houses. And Jonas and Levi decided that they would try to start additional evening Bible studies to which they would invite other Amish people, where they could tell them about being born again and becoming true believers and true followers of Jesus Christ.

Before long, there were a total of five weekly Bible studies, and those who attended were also being born again. Just like their Anabaptist forefathers who read a translation of the Bible that was written in the language they used every day (German), they started reading Bibles that were written in the language they use every day: English! They were often surprised at all they learned, and what they learned further changed their lives. Just as Jesus promised them, the Holy Spirit became their teacher, leading them into the truth (John 16:13).

When those who attended one of those Bible studies *truly* believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and were born again, they of course wanted their families and friends to also be born again. So they told them what had happened to them, and soon the Bible studies increased in size as others were born again. Within two months there were about two dozen adults attending the Bible studies, plus their children, and there were already six spiritual generations of Amish people who had believed and led others to genuine faith in Jesus and the new birth. By the time you read this, there will probably be even more Johnsonburg Amish people who are born again, and there will be even more spiritual generations. The Johnsonburg Awakening is now influencing other Amish communities even in other states.

As you might imagine, the devil did not like what was happening in the Johnsonburg community. Satan does not want anyone to be born again because he wants everyone to go to hell to suffer what they deserve for their sins. Make no mistake about it: Jesus said that unless people are born again, they will never see or enter the kingdom of God (John 3:3, 5). That means, unless you are born again, you will go to hell when you die. Again, read it for yourself in John 3:3 and 5. Your eternal destiny hinges on whether or not you are born again. Only born-again people will enter heaven.

Satan knows, of course, that Jesus has made a way for everyone to have their sins forgiven through His sacrificial death, and he knows that when people truly believe in Jesus, all of their sins are forgiven and they are born again. As long as they continue in faith, they will not perish, but will inherit eternal life, as Jesus promised (John 3:16). And so the devil does all he can to keep people from knowing and believing what Jesus said about the necessity of being born again. And the devil has worked very hard in the Johnsonburg community to slander all the newly-born-again people who attend the Johnsonburg Bible studies. He knew that, unless he stopped what was happening in Johnsonburg, it would spread to other Amish communities, and potentially thousands of people who are now on their way to hell would be born again, forgiven, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit who will empower them to live *truly* holy and pure lives.

I'm happy to tell you that the devil has not succeeded. Although bishop Levi, minister Jonas, and all the newly-born-again Johnsonburg Amish have been excommunicated from their community, the gospel has continued to spread, not only in Johnsonburg, but in other Amish communities across the nation. The word "gospel" means "good news." That is what Jesus commanded His followers to proclaim to the whole world (Matthew 28:19-20 and Mark 16:15-16).

Tragically, all of those newly-born-again Amish people in Johnsonburg have been accused of "adopting a new faith." The truth, however, is that they have not adopted a new faith at all. Rather, they have recovered the *original faith* of your forefathers (the 16th-century Anabaptists), the apostles, and Jesus. *All* of those people believed that being born again is essential, and they all believed that those who are not born again will never see or enter the kingdom of God, as Jesus promised (John 3:1-16). They all believed that being born again was not something that automatically happened at baptism, but is something that occurs when people truly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and repent. They all believed that being born again is an inward transformation that results in external changes,

including sacrificial love for fellow Christians and obedience to Christ's commandments (1 John 2:3; 3:14).

If you doubt me, just read the New Testament in a language you understand, and also read the 1632 Dordrecht Confession in a language you understand. Thousands of Amish and formerly-Amish people across the country have done just that, and they have been born again and are now experiencing all the blessings that accompany being born again. They know their sins are forgiven (1 John 2:2). They know they have eternal life (1 John 5:13). They know they are God's spiritual children and that He is their heavenly Father (1 John 3:1). They know they are not destined for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:9). And they want their Amish family members and friends to experience the same blessing. So they never stop praying for them, and if they are given the chance, they try to tell them about being born again through faith in Jesus Christ.

The Current Situation

So what is the real reason that the newly-born-again Johnsonburg Amish have been excommunicated? It is because they believe what their Anabaptist forefathers gave their lives for, that is, for believing the gospel of Jesus Christ as it is repeatedly presented in the New Testament. And just as the unregenerate (non-born-again) Roman Catholics and Protestants once persecuted the early Anabaptists because those Anabaptists were truly born again, so now unregenerate (non-born-again) Amish people are persecuting Amish people who have been truly born again. And just like the early Anabaptists proved that they loved Christ above all others, so the newly-born-again Amish believers are willing to forsake their family members and friends if they must in order to follow Jesus Christ in whom they have believed (Matthew 10:37).

I do understand that none of the unregenerate Johnsonburg Amish desire *in their hearts* to excommunicate and shun their family members and friends who have recently been born again. They think, however, that they *must* do it, because they think it is what God expects them to do. They are not full of hatred like the Roman Catholics and Protestants of old who murdered the early Anabaptists. Rather, they are simply ignorant of what is plainly and repeatedly taught in the New Testament, and they have inherited old traditions that tragically stand against the gospel of Jesus

Christ. Beyond that, they are afraid of what other Amish people will think of them, and so they are caving to the peer pressure so that they, too, won't be excommunicated and shunned. But that is cowardice. (If you want to know what happens to cowards, read Revelation 21:8.)

Anyone who reads the New Testament in a language they understand will see clearly what all the newly born-again Amish people in Johnsonburg have seen. If you are uncertain, then read the New Testament for yourself. Trust no one, including me, regarding what God expects of you. Read the New Testament for yourself and pray that God will help you to understand the truth found there. He will!

Regarding the Rumors

Perhaps you've heard the rumor that bishop Levi and minister Jonas will no longer practice shunning. That is entirely untrue. They will continue to practice shunning as it is outlined in the New Testament, particularly as it is described in Matthew 18:15-17 and 1 Corinthians 5:1-12. Levi and Jonas will not, however, be practicing any shunning for reasons other than those found in the Bible. Once you are truly born again and the Holy Spirit is living in you, your primary desire is to obey God and His commandments. For that reason, when you have to choose between following God's Word or following human traditions that conflict what God has revealed in the Bible, you follow the Bible, not the traditions.

Another rumor you may have heard is that an English man named David (that would be me) has introduced a different Bible that teaches it is OK to drive cars.

It is certainly true that in our weekly Bible studies, all of us have been using various English translations of the Bible. We have not been using the German translation of the Bible for the same reason we have not been using the Spanish, French, or Chinese translation of the Bible—because none of us can read Spanish, French, or Chinese. And none of us can read German (which is not true of all Amish people).

The Bible has been translated into hundreds of different languages, and for one simple reason, so that people who speak and read those languages can understand the Bible. That is why Martin

Luther translated the Bible into German. He wanted the German people who didn't understand Latin to be able to read a Bible in their own language.

I'm sure you know that the Bible was not originally written in German. Neither Moses, any of the Prophets, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, Peter, John, James or Jude ever spoke or wrote in German. Rather, the Bible was originally written in the languages of the people who were alive when it was written, which included Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. And that is why we use English translations of the Bible at our Bible studies. We want to understand the Bible so we can understand the gospel and obey Jesus. It is just that simple.

If you are concerned that we are not using the German Bible, you should not be. What makes anyone think that the German translation of the Bible is the only accurate translation among hundreds of translations that exist in hundreds of languages? The fact is, the groups of modern linguistic scholars who have translated many English versions of the Bible have many more ancient biblical manuscripts from which they can translate that were not available to translators like Martin Luther 500 hundred years ago. That is because so many ancient biblical manuscripts have been discovered since then. Modern translations are more accurate to the original texts than translations from several hundred years ago.

Regarding the rumor that the Bible we are using teaches it is OK to drive cars, there is no translation of the Bible, including the German translation, that teaches it is wrong to drive cars. The Bible was completed 1,800 years before cars were invented, so of course the Bible has nothing to say about cars.

Regarding driving cars, I suspect that all of the Johnsonburg Amish who have recently been born again will sooner or later be driving cars, for several reasons. First, because no version or translation of the Bible forbids driving cars, as I have already stated. The newly-born-again Johnsonburg Amish follow only the Bible and obey Jesus' commandments, just as did all true Christians for the first 1,600 years of Christianity's existence. No true Christians for the first 1,600 years of church history had any Ordnung other than Christ's commandments.

Second, there is no moral principle that forbids driving cars. Every Amish person already knows that, because all of them pay others to drive them in cars. How could any Amish person honestly claim it is a sin to drive a car when all Amish people pay others to drive them in cars? If it is a sin to drive a car, then Amish people are paying others to sin on their behalf.

Imagine if I wanted to murder an enemy but I felt that murdering him would be a sin. If I paid someone else to murder my enemy, would I be guiltless? What would you think of me if I said to you, "I would never murder anyone!" when I had, in fact, just paid someone to murder my enemy?

By the same reasoning, every Amish person who has paid someone to drive him in a car is morally no different than an Amish person who has driven a car himself. Any Amish person who has paid to be driven in a car and has also condemned another Amish person for driving a car is being hypocritical.

The third reason I suspect that all of the Johnsonburg Amish who have recently been born again will eventually be driving cars is because they have been delivered from the bondage of the fear of others (which is what keeps Amish people from doing many other things that are not morally wrong) and they have replaced it with the fear of God. We read in John 12:42-43: "Many even of the rulers believed in Him [Jesus], but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; for *they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God.*"

The newly-born-again Amish people in Johnsonburg are not afraid of what others may think of them or what others may do to them. In fact, they count themselves blessed if they are persecuted for their faith, because Jesus promised His persecuted followers that they will enjoy great reward in heaven (Matthew 5:10-12). Because they know that there is nothing in the Bible that forbids driving a car, they can drive cars with a clean conscience.

Of course, driving cars or not driving cars has nothing to do with being born again or getting to heaven. Most Amish folks who realize that defend their policy regarding using taxis as a means to lessen temptation. OK, but I've owned a car for more than 40 years, and I only use my car for good! One good thing I do with my car is drive Amish people to where they want to go!

In any case, if you want to know how being born again changes people, ask people who have been born again! If you know Amish people who are born again, ask them! If you know any former Amish people who are born again, instead of shunning them, why not humbly discuss the Bible with them? In the Johnsonburg group, there are born-again young people who previously had a habit of getting drunk every weekend. But no longer. Yet they have been excommunicated and are being shunned! Should we prefer that they return to being drunkards, whom the Bible declares will not inherit God's kingdom (1 Corinthians 6:9-10)? One of them is a bishop's grandson!

But should not all Amish people honor their parents? Yes, of course they should! That is a commandment from the Bible. But Jesus requires His followers to love Him more than they love their parents (Matt. 10:37 and Luke 14:26). If followers of Jesus are forced to choose between honoring their parents or honoring God, they will choose God. When a man whom Jesus called to follow Him requested that he first bury his father (which would have been honoring his father), Jesus said, "Follow Me, and allow the dead to bury their own dead" (Matt. 8:22). Had that man honored his father in the way he desired, he would have sinned. Jesus expects us to honor our parents as long as honoring our parents doesn't get in the way of obeying Him.

Jesus declared that He will build His church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18). No one, especially the devil, can stop the gospel from spreading. Any who are standing against the recently born-again Amish people in Johnsonburg, or anywhere else, are fighting against God. Those among the Amish deacons, ministers and bishops who excommunicate those who are born again are even more accountable to God as leaders, because "to whom much is given, much is required" (Luke 12:48). They should be leading their flocks into genuine faith in Jesus Christ and the new birth. They, like Levi and Jonas, should be leading Bible studies to help their flocks learn and obey the commandments of Jesus. Jesus warned the Pharisees of His day, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in" (Matthew 23:13).

Those who excommunicate and shun people because they are born again reveal that they themselves are not born again. One of the signs of being born again is love for others who are born again (1 John 3:14-15). If you are shunning others because they are born again, you are shunning God's people who have had their sins forgiven and in whom God's Holy Spirit dwells! So, you are

effectively shunning God! That is why, when Amish people are born again, one of the first things they do is ask for the forgiveness of those whom they have been shunning because they were born again.

If you can read German, wonderful. If you can't, I strongly encourage you to read an English Translation of the New Testament. There are many English translations, such as the New American Standard Version, King James Version, New Living Version and so on. If anyone tells you that it is dangerous for you to read the Bible because it might lead you astray, you can be sure that is the devil speaking through that person. Only the devil would tell you not to read God's Word. If you don't have any access to an English New Testament, I would be happy to mail you one. You don't need me, or anyone else, to discover the truth that is in the Bible. Jesus promised everyone, "Seek and you will find" (Matthew 7:7).

You are dearly loved by God! Jesus died for all your sins so that you could have eternal life! You can be born again today and become a "new creation" in Christ!

If you have a question, would like to receive additional information about being born again according to the Bible, or would like to be contacted by someone who was born Amish but who has been born again and is now a follower of Christ, please respond by mailing the enclosed card back to me. It will only cost you a postage stamp. You can also write to me at: P.O. Box 33, Smicksburg, PA 16256.

I hope to hear from you. In the meantime, I will not stop praying that you will read the New Testament for yourself that you might believe the truth that is only found there! If you have already been born again by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, spread the good news to those in your Amish community who are waiting to hear!

James 4:6: God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

Ephesians 2:8: For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Hebrews 11:1: Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Romans 6:23: For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

John 3:16: For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

TWELVE

My Apology, Replies to My Letter, and Hope for Family Reconciliation

As two of staff members of Heaven’s Family (the international relief and development ministry that I founded two decades ago) worked on collecting Amish community directories from all over the U.S. for our mail list, I worked on a follow-up letter to the letter we mailed in June of 2022 to 63,000 mostly-Amish and Amish-background households.

Below is that follow-up letter. As of this writing, it is scheduled to be mailed in February of 2023. Our hope is that it will not just be immediately discarded by Amish households that receive it, but that the words on the exterior of the mailing—“My Apology, Replies to My Letter, and Hope for Family Reconciliation”—will motivate them to open and read it.

Greetings from beautiful Pennsylvania, a state that was named after William Penn, a Quaker Christian man who, in the 17th century, was instrumental in creating a safe place for persecuted European Christians, including Mennonites and Amish folks. For thousands of Anabaptists, Pennsylvania was an answer to their prayers. Today, Pennsylvania has the largest Amish population

of all the states (81,500), leading even Ohio and Indiana. Anyone who lives in or near any Amish community knows what a blessing they are to local economies and everyone's well-being. They have a reputation of being family-centered, hardworking, and honest. I count myself blessed to live within the boundaries of Pennsylvania's third-largest Amish community, and within the vicinity of several others.

I wrote a letter in June that we sent to thousands of Amish households across North America. (If you didn't receive it and you would like to, please just write to me and request it.) I'm happy to report that I received over 200 written replies, including many requests for English Bibles and more information about being born again, as well as many phone calls. I'd like to share some of the written replies with you later in this letter, as I think you will find them interesting. But first, I would like to apologize for a misunderstanding.

As I shared the story of the "Johnsonburg Amish Awakening," I told how two-dozen Amish adults were born again—including a bishop named Levi and minister named Jonas—and how they were eventually excommunicated from their Amish community for "adopting a new faith." For that reason, some who received my letter assumed that I believe a person cannot be Amish and also be born again. So please allow me to clear that up. I don't believe that! (And I never said that in my letter.) There are many Amish people who have been born again and who follow an Amish lifestyle. I've received letters from some of them (and I'll share a few with you). Most all of them know that believing in Jesus and obeying His commandments are what is most important.

The primary purpose of my previous letter was to spread the good news that Amish people in Johnsonburg had recovered their Anabaptist spiritual heritage. They have been born again as described in the Bible and the 1632 Dordrecht Confession. And that same spiritual blessing has occurred to *tens of thousands* of other Amish-born folks, some of whom are still Amish and some of whom are not.

I also wanted you to know the good news that, if you have not been born again, you can be. Jesus said that, unless we are born again, we cannot see or enter the kingdom of God (see John 3:1-16). So being born again is *very* important. If you are interested in learning more about what the Bible teaches about being born again, I would be happy to mail you two articles I've written on that

subject, titled, “What Does It Really Mean to be Born Again?” and “Amish and Born Again.” If you would be interested in learning what the Dordrecht Confession says about being born again, I would be happy to mail you an article I wrote about that titled, “An Honest Look at the 1632 Dordrecht Confession.” Just write me with your request.

Before I continue, perhaps I should tell you a little about myself, because a number of people wrote asking, “Who are you?”

I am a 64-year-old man, married for 43 years. My wife and I have 3 children and 12 grandchildren. My wife was born again at a very young age, and I was born again when I was a teenager. Over the past 43 years, I have served in vocational Christian ministry as a pastor and a Bible teacher. All during that time, I have read and studied the Bible. That, of course, doesn’t mean I might not be wrong about some things. But I have focused for 43 years on trying to understand the Bible and teaching others what I’ve learned. I have written a number of Bible-based books, including two daily devotionals. (And I would be happy to mail you a free copy of one of those devotional books, titled *HeavenWord Daily*, that guides you through the entire New Testament in one year. Just write with your request.) I believe the Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit and the most important book that exists. It contains the accounts of Jesus’ ministry and His words. Everyone should be reading it every day.

Additionally, twenty years ago I founded a ministry called *Heaven’s Family* that is somewhat similar to a ministry you might be familiar with called *Christian Aid Ministries*. Like *Christian Aid*, *Heaven’s Family* works around the world to serve the poor, and particularly poor Christians. With the help of other Christians all over the world, *Heaven’s Family* has invested tens of millions of dollars over the years serving suffering Christians and expanding God’s kingdom. I have had the privilege of traveling in about 80 of the world’s countries in ministry service over the past four decades, and I know many Christians around the world. And when I say “Christians,” I am speaking of people who have been born again and who are striving to obey the Lord Jesus Christ.

In addition, I’ve also found that I have a special and sincere love for Amish people. I can only think that love has been given to me by God. That is why I have a bumper sticker on the back of my car that says, “I love Amish people.” And that is why I raised tens of thousands of dollars from

Christian friends (who also love Amish folks) to pay for the printing, postage, and mailing expense to send my previous letter to 63,000 mostly-Amish households. That was a small price to pay, however, to help Amish people whom God loves rediscover their lost spiritual heritage. And it was a *very* small price to pay compared to what Jesus paid on the cross so that all of us could be born again and enter God's kingdom!

So that is a little about me. Of course, I am nothing without Christ. If there is any good in me, it is because of Him. Like Paul, I can say, "But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. 6:14).

Another reason I'm telling you a little about myself is because I have heard that some Amish leaders are saying that I am a "wolf in sheep's clothing." Actually, however, I am a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, striving to obey His commandments, which is why I sent my previous letter, and why I am sending this letter. Two of Jesus' commandments are, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15), and "Go and make disciples of all the nations...teaching them to observe all that I commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20). Again, those are commandments of Jesus. When I once asked an Amish bishop why the Amish don't obey those two commandments, he told me that Jesus only gave those commandments to His original apostles. That is like saying Jesus only gave the Sermon on the Mount to the first Christians. Please note: Jesus commanded His apostles to "go and make disciples of all the nations...*teaching them to observe all that I commanded you,*" so Jesus' apostles also taught their disciples to go and make disciples of all the nations...teaching them to observe all that Jesus had commanded them. It was an on-going, never-ending commandment.

God has wanted every generation since the apostles to hear the gospel and become Jesus' disciples, which is why true Christians (those who are striving to obey Jesus) over the past 20 centuries—including your Anabaptist forefathers hundreds of years ago—proclaimed the gospel far and wide. And that is what I have been trying to do for the last 43 years. Our ministry has a Christian website full of Bible-based articles I've written that have been read by millions of people, and a YouTube internet channel where we've posted over 1,400 Bible-based videos that have collectively been viewed by millions of people. God wants other people to go to heaven besides me, or besides just Amish people, because Jesus died for the sins of the entire world (John 3:16; 1 John 2:2). That is why He commanded His followers to preach the gospel all over the world. If you are born again,

you should be involved in spreading the gospel, not only to Amish people who are not yet born again, but to others who have not yet been born again. Again, Jesus *commanded* His followers to spread the gospel—and not just by how they live their lives, but by spoken proclamation, just as Jesus, the apostles, and the first Christians all did (see Matt. 4:17; Mark 16:20; Acts 8:1-4).

And the gospel we should proclaim is the one that John the Baptist, Jesus, and His apostles preached, a gospel that offers people forgiveness of their sins through repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (see Matt. 3:2; 4:17; Mark 1:4, 15; 6:12; Luke 24:47; Acts 20:26; Heb. 6:1).

Interesting Replies

Now I want to share some of the replies I've received from Amish readers to my previous letter. Those replies reveal a broad spectrum of belief and practice within Amish culture. Some replies were very kind, while others were rather unkind. Regardless, I appreciate everyone who took time to write to me, and I wish I had time to send personal replies to all of them. I also wish you could read all of them. Some were deeply spiritual, very thoughtful, and referenced numerous Bible verses, while others reflected tragic biblical ignorance.

As I read those many replies, it also became obvious that many Amish folks are not aware that there are Amish communities that are very different than theirs. Some Amish folks think that all Amish people are, like them, born again and striving to follow Jesus. But minister Jonas, who was born again in January of this year, and formerly of the Johnsonburg Amish community, told me that he didn't know of a single pure courtship among the young people in his community, including his own courtship. Just in the last year, two Johnsonburg Amish men have gone to prison, convicted of pedophilia, a sin that many Amish communities try to hide. One of those convicted men told minister Jonas that his father told him and his siblings, "I don't care what you do with each other, but I don't want any pregnancies among you." That Amish father was encouraging incest among his children.

So there are Amish people and communities that are deeply spiritual and Bible-focused, and there are Amish people and communities that are full of religious hypocrisy—like just about every other Christian denomination in the world. *My burden is for those Amish folks who are not yet born again.*

To begin looking at the replies I received to my initial letter, here is one from an Amish woman in Ohio who, thankfully, is not representative of most Amish people:

We received your devilish letter. Their is no such thing as being born again, unless you are working for the devil. If we join Church and make that promise before God and people, that is the only time, their is nothing like being born again. I feel like turning you in for harassing other people and communities. If you think you are saved, keep it to yourself, why would you want someone else to know.... Once judgment day comes I am afraid HELL will be the place for your people. Those Johnsonburg people are breaking God's first rule, Honor thy Farther & Mother... I have not read you whole letter, but what I did read, it is the Devils path, not Gods ways as their is nothing like being born again. And when that Judgement day comes, it will not be Jesus, it will be God. As it looks like you don't understand the Bible, it says ONLY GOD knows when that will happen, not even Jesus or the Angels know. Jesus does or will NOT rule the entire world. GOD is in control of it all.... If you would keep your ass out of their [the Johnsonburg Amish's] business and leive them alone, maybe they would be better off.... I think you got your brains in the wrong end of your body. We don't want to see another letter from you or we will turn it into the prosecutor. Their is one more thing the German Bible did not change since day one and it will not change, it is people like you that are changing it for your own good, not how God wants it.

Sadly, I did receive quite a few letters from other folks who, like her, were not very good at “turning the other cheek.” The worst thing is that she believes “there is no such thing as being born again.” She contradicts Jesus as well as the apostles Peter and Paul (see John 3:1-16; 1 Peter 1:3, 23; Gal. 4:29). I hope that born-again Amish people will reach out to her, and others like her, with the gospel, so that she might be born again.

Although it is not as serious of an error, she also mistakenly believes that “God’s first rule” is to honor one’s parents. I’ve noticed that many Amish people think that, because they’ve heard Ephesians 6:2 quoted from the German Bible, but they don’t understand German well enough to understand that Paul wrote that God’s commandment to honor one’s parents is “the first commandment *with a promise*.” That is, it is the first commandment God ever gave that was a coupled with a promised blessing to those who obey it. God’s *actual* first commandment was given

to Adam to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:28). God's commandment to honor one's parents wasn't given for another 2,500 years.

Rather than focus on negative letters like that one, let's focus on some encouraging letters that can help us discover God's will for our lives. Here is an insightful letter from a gracious born-again Amish bishop in Pennsylvania:

Dear David...

I will begin by quoting Eph. 2:8-10: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." (the good works)

The good works are the fruit of a born-again Christian—not by which we are saved, but Jesus Christ "our Lord" made it clear in Matt. 25 that they which don't respond "with works" to those in need will be told, "Depart from Me, ye cursed...etc." My concern is—we need verse 10 as much as verses 8 and 9 that you quoted.

We certainly need the new birth (everyone) which changes the way we think, which changes the way we act—everything matters (Romans 12:1-2). It is being preached over & over in the Amish churches. I will admit some ministers take the new birth & the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit within, through which we grow in grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, together as one & the same. [Yet] we believe the new birth is the beginning of a new life in Christ Jesus—the same as the birth of a child is only the beginning and that child has lots of growing ahead to reach maturity. We will not reach perfection in this life, but through faith, repentance, confession of sin, restitution etc we can be blameless – made righteous – through the blood of Jesus Christ, our Lord & Savior....

As a bishop, I feel the responsibility and weight of truly loving God and fellow man—leading them by word and example—pointing them to Christ Jesus as Lord and Savior. There is no other salvation, but we are well-satisfied with what God has provided through Jesus' blood for forgiveness of sins. May we glorify His name in all that we say and do. Amen.

What an excellent letter! That bishop has a good understanding of the gospel, knowing that “we are saved by grace through faith” (Ephesians 2:8), and that salvation is “not a result of works”

(Ephesians 2:9). He also understands, however, that God’s grace transforms those who have faith, so that they live lives characterized by good works, as Paul made so clear in Ephesians 2:10 and Jesus made so clear in His foretelling of the judgment of the sheep and goats (Matthew 24:31-46). If I were Amish, I’d want to have a bishop who believed like that bishop!

That bishop also understands that some Amish leaders are mixing the Bible’s teaching about the new birth with the Bible’s teaching about growing spiritually *after* the new birth. They mistakenly think that the “new birth” occurs gradually, over one’s lifetime. But it doesn’t. There are no verses in the New Testament that mention or imply a *gradual* new birth. If you read the book of Acts, for example, you will read about thousands of people whose new birth was an event, not a process. As that Pennsylvania bishop wrote, “We believe the new birth is the beginning of a new life in Christ Jesus—the same as the birth of a child is only the beginning, and that child has lots of growing ahead to reach maturity.”

Jesus used the phrase “born again” to help us understand that spiritual rebirth is an event that occurs in a short period of time, just like a physical birth. You must first be born again, and only then can you grow spiritually, because only then does the Holy Spirit live in you.

Here’s an excerpt from a born-again Amish woman in Pennsylvania who, like bishop Levi and minister Jonas, realized later in life that she had not been genuinely born again when she was baptized as a teenager:

...I love what you wrote on being born again. How true, how precious and amazing!

I’m so thankful to Jesus who made it possible for us all, Amish, Mennonite, or anyone [to be born again].

I agree too, that although I wanted to be born again, I basically just was baptized because I wanted to do what was right....

Thanks be to God I grew enough to finally realize what born again means and made the change! (Inwardly I felt different not outwardly, I don’t think people could tell.) I finally really truly TRUST HIM. What peace!

Once you know that all your sins have been forgiven (Acts 10:43), that you are God's dearly-loved child (1 John 3:1), and that His Holy Spirit is living in you (1 Cor. 6:19) to help you obey His commandments, you automatically have peace that you never previously enjoyed (Rom. 5:1). That is just part of the blessing of being born again!

Here's an excerpt from a short letter from a recently born-again Amish man in a state I will leave unnamed who is hoping to help other Amish folks in his community to experience the same blessing:

Hello David, and greetings sent to you from above where all good things come from.

I'm a born-again Christ-follower Amish man. I'm ____ years old. It was just a few years ago when I was born again. Wow. Life is good. Life is great....

We will try to win one soul at a time....

I have been told by a few people that I have a new faith. I praise God for my new faith!

It is never too late to be born again, whether you are 33 or 93! I was blessed to actually meet the author of that letter and his wife when I was traveling in his region a few months ago. A wonderful couple who love the Lord!

Here's an excerpt from a corrective and gracious letter from another born-again Amish man in Kentucky:

...I have never heard it preached or even said that baptism itself will make you born again. That is not the way the Amish believe. I have heard it said often that baptism is an outward ceremony of what has already happened in that person's heart. I have heard & we can read it in the Bible as in Romans 10:9: "That is thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. Actually, you explained it very well in your letter. We often told that our Ordnung, as we call it, will not save us! Salvation only comes through Jesus....

As far as baptizing, we cannot read in the Bible that sprinkling or immersion is best. None of that has anything to do with the new birth that happens within.... [I agree 100%!]

I sense you are a well-meaning born-again minister of God but you have been misinformed or at least poorly informed of the Amish beliefs. I trust when you see me driving down the road or my church brethren you can think, "There goes a brother in Christ," instead of, "There goes a lost soul"!

If I ever saw him driving his buggy down the road, I would certainly think, "There goes a brother in Christ"!

Here's an excerpt from a wise born-again Amish man in Ohio:

Dear David, greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ! We received your letter regarding being born again....

...we don't have to be Amish or ex-Amish or non-Amish to be or not be born again. I personally know of a lot of Amish people that are born again, but sadly, yes, I know a few that do not appear to be born again, or know the meaning of such.

I would never discourage someone from studying the Bible, if that someone is seeking the truth. My own grandfather studied his Bible very well, but only picked his passages. Today he is ex-Amish, all alone, even his ex-Amish children cannot get along with him, and for years he was on probation by law. He has molested and abused, but still today he quotes scripture to prove that he is saved. My personal feelings here is this, May God bless all who truly seek His will.... I wish you the Lord's blessing with spreading the gospel.

I like what he said about the error of "picking your passages." God gave us the entire Bible, not just a few verses. You can make the Bible say anything you want it to say by isolating verses from their context.

One of the most spiritual letters I received was from a remarkable teenage, born-again Amish girl who sees herself as an "Amish missionary." She is greatly burdened for Amish young people who are thinking about leaving the Amish:

Greetings to you in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior, Father, Lord, Redeemer, God, Best Friend, Lover, Provider, and Protector. These are only a few of the names to describe our Lord. I have personally experienced Him to be all that, and I understand in your letter that, that's how you've experienced Him too...."

By the way, I am a ____-year-old Amish girl who loves her God, her family, her friends, and her heritage....

But I also have another concern: That is for all the hurting, confused, searching [Amish] youth who are desperate for a change. And they think leaving the Amish is the only way.

Do you feel it is the only way?

Do you feel that we cannot be a sincere, vibrant, hope-filled, alive Christian, as an Amish person? I know I've wondered. But not anymore. Up until I was 15 years old I always read my Bible and kinda had a relationship with God, but I still didn't know Him personally. Didn't know Him to be the Life-Changer He is. When I was 15 I had a breakthrough in the way I viewed God. At that time I was dealing with a lot of hurt and pain. I felt dead, helpless, desperate, cold, hard, empty, and was living my life in such a way. I thought death look more appealing than life. Then, through His grace, He allowed me to see Him as "Jesus, my perfect Father." That changed my life. From there on it's been a journey. Continuously growing and changing in my love and knowledge for Him....

Honestly, David, I admit there's much about our culture that I don't understand, that simply doesn't make sense. There is much that I really wish were not the way it is but there is also much about our heritage that I deeply value and hope I will never need to give up....

I believe that in every denomination under the heavens we all have our personal choice. Will we believe in Jesus? And you know, I cannot blame the people who leave the Amish. Because I know that there are preachers and people who preach the Ordnung more than the Bible. My church rarely preaches about anything other than the Word. I know there's Amish out there who simply don't know God and live their lives that way. And they're desperate for a change. But I wish the same thing you wish, that the change would happen in their hearts. They can serve Jesus as an Amish person or an English person, Greek, Jew, servant or freeman. And then impact the people closest to them with the Word of God, with the love of God.

As for Bible studies, I have often wished we could do that [but it is apparently not permitted] but I've found there are plenty of ways to be filled if we seek and search.... I prayed for years for friends who could challenge me spiritually and who would desire the deeper things of life. My prayers have eventually been answered. I have the same friends I did as a 16-year-old, but I've changed and they've gone through hard times and changed too. Once they hit hard things in life they started searching, I was able to offer them Jesus.... Two years ago the possibility of friends who desire more and are on that road, and friends who have more and continue to find more of Jesus, looked pretty unlikely. [That has all changed now.] We do not have meetings, but we do talk and encourage each other whenever we have the chance....

Like I wrote earlier there's much about the Amish church that could use improvement. As in more love, less hypocrisy, less focus on outward appearance, more boldness with God and His Word...honestly, I could go on and on....

I don't know if you've ever heard that there are 200 different ways to be Amish. But that's how it is. Every church, every youth group is still different. Just like in all other cultures, every family, every church is different....

I really appreciate you, David. The day I knew God as my Father is also the day I felt a distinct impression that I was to remain in my home, my family, my church and be an "Amish missionary." I think you are with me on that one. I just wonder what would happen if you'd encourage Amish to do it the hard way. Stay Amish and work for peace instead of confusion. Respect their authorities in every way possible, but continue to spend time with Jesus. Alone in their rooms if that's what it takes. And then have those good conversations, and get brave and bold and tell their brothers about a better way. The way of respect, peace, stability, and truth. Transform their thinking, their ways, but remain Amish. Wouldn't that spring a great revival? We truly need one.

Wasn't that a precious letter? There isn't any doubt that she has a very personal relationship with God through the Lord Jesus. That is what happens when you are born again.

Here's an excerpt from a great letter from a born-again Amish man in Indiana:

Dear Brother David, I have read your letter and am glad to hear about the born again Amish....

I believe there will be people in Heaven from all corners of the world, including Amish and all true believers. If I didn't believe that I would have left the Amish. I've been to many different denominations. Mennonite, Baptist, Assembly of God, Beachy and more. I feel at home in my church....

I hope the Johnsonburg church will start preaching so all can understand. Our churches in Indiana have some very talented preachers. Many use the English language sometimes to explain the Scriptures if it is easier to understand.

You must be born-again to reach Heaven. Read John 3:3.

Here is a heart-breaking letter from a born-again Amish wife and mother who feels trapped in a spiritually-dead Amish community:

I am an Amish housewife and mother. I want to thank you for reaching out and attempting to bring truth and light to our culture. God knows we need it!

I have felt so suffocated by rules, rules, and more rules, and I've been starved for spiritual nourishment in a language I can understand! At church, the sermons, the songs, the prayers and reading of the Bible are mostly in High German. The vast majority of people in our community do not understand that language very well. The most important words we will ever hear and read—from God's Word—are in the language we understand the least. It is so tragic!

So many of our young people are into partying, bed courtship, and so on, and their parents don't stop them. It has been this way for generations, and I cannot see that it will ever change. Any change is frowned upon. Tradition is more important than God's Word!

I want my children to live godly lives, but this spiritually silent culture is not conducive to that. We hardly dare talk about God or Jesus to others in our community or they will think we've become "extreme." Most would prefer their children not read too much Bible, lest they be led astray! How sad!

I have been so miserable in this strict, silent culture. Please pray for us and continue spreading light! My prayers are with you! May God open Amish eyes, minds and hearts!

By the way, a number of those who wrote to me told me how blessed they are to be able to read the Bible in three languages (German, English and PA Dutch) so that they can compare them and arrive at the intended meaning. I agree! I can only read English, but it is for the same reason I like to read different English translations. But for those who live in Amish communities where German is not well understood, the preaching and Bible-reading ought to be in a language everyone understands. That is why Martin Luther translated the Bible into German...for German-speakers!

And here is the majority of an insightful, gracious letter from a 20-something Amish woman in a southern state:

David, greetings in our Lord's name. I am a young Amish girl and sincere about my faith. I readily admit that there are too many inconsistencies and hypocrisy and not enough open-minded studying of God's Word among us Amish people. It has often made me sad.

Sometimes I fear we are too much like the scribes & Pharisees who held their traditions higher than God's Word. But I hope you realize that there are sincere Amish people who love the Lord, believe in Him and follow His Word.

There are many Amish churches and they are not all the same — we are having splits among us and sometimes shunning gets done in an unscriptural way I believe — but I am quite content to let God judge everything — He searches the reins & the hearts — He know what our goals are in life and what we are willing to endure for His sake.

Today, if someone tells you they are a Christian that does not necessarily mean they are....

Today's Christian often says if the heart is right nothing else matters — I have had no college education but I would say if your heart is right everything matters!!

Words are easy to throw around — many people say they are Christians or they are born again and then in works deny Christ. If we love Him we will keep His commandments and we will believe that faith without works is dead...

We owned a very nice property here in _____ County, sold it, and are relocating "just because" of church issues and the way they are being handled (but we are still Amish). I could just cry sometimes because of the condition of some of our churches and I think that is why so many Amish people look for something better. God's Word has all the answers if we seek with an open mind.

I'm sure that many Amish readers can identify with what she wrote. I like that she emphasized that, if we love Jesus, we will strive to keep His commandments.

Finally, here is much of an excellent letter sent from an Amish bishop in Missouri. His letter is so well-written and biblical that I wish it could be read by all the Amish people across North America who have not yet been born again:

I was born Amish 55 years ago, baptized 38 years ago (after having been sufficiently instructed and taught in the Christian Faith), married 35 years ago, ordained to ministry 25 years ago, and ordained a bishop 15 years ago, all in the Amish church. I was taught and instructed at a young age that all of that has absolutely no power to save me, but we believe and confess with the 1632 Dordrecht Confession of Faith Article 6, that "neither baptism nor the Lord's Supper nor church membership, nor any other outward ceremony can without faith and the new birth, change or renewal of life, avail anything to please God or to obtain from Him any consolation or promise of salvation. (Eph 4:21, 22) On the contrary, one must go to God in true and perfect faith and believe in Jesus Christ as the scriptures say and testify of Him. Through this faith we obtain forgiveness of sins, are sanctified, justified, and made children of God, yea partake of His mind, nature and image, as being newly born again of God through the incorruptible seed from above." This is what I was taught at a young age and in my great weakness still try to teach that to my community and congregation.

Like I said I don't know anything about the Johnsonburg community, but here in the Midwest in our circle of fellowship all of the communities will encourage their respective churches to study the Bible so that everyone understands what the will of God is. Because we know that "not everyone that saith, 'Lord, Lord' shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven. But he that doeth the will of my Father which is in Heaven" (Matt. 7:21). So we know and confess that it will not help anyone to say, "I am Amish and I obey all of the rules and regulations of the church, etc., etc." And in the same way it will not help to say, "I have been saved at the altar, and I got to Bible study meetings multiple times per week, etc., etc." But note what our Lord says, "He that doeth the will of my Father which is in Heaven."

I feel blessed and privileged that I can study The Holy Bible in 3 different languages German, English and our Pennsylvania Dutch. I also have in my bookcase the English Bible in 3 different translations the King James Version, the New King James Version, and the Wycliffe translation. But having said that, I also realize that having all those different Bibles in my possession, or even being very knowledgeable in the Holy Scriptures is still not going to get me to Heaven, but remember, "He that doeth the will of my Father which is in Heaven."

I love how that Amish bishop is focused on what is the most important thing...doing the will of God. If the Ordnung helps to accomplish that, it is a good thing. If, however, it hinders people from accomplishing that, it is not a good thing. I can't imagine anyone could disagree with that!

Family Reconciliation and Harmony

Finally, I'd like to talk about something that is universal among everyone who has been born Amish, and that is the hope of family reconciliation. I received many letters and phone calls from Amish people all over the country regarding that hope. Not only have Amish families been divided due to different Ordnungs, but practically every Amish family has suffered division between family members due to shunning/excommunication/defection (it is often stated that about 15% of all Amish people ultimately leave the Amish).

Even though excommunication and shunning are practiced to different degrees of mildness and severity from community to community and family to family, no one enjoys any of it, either those doing the excommunication and shunning or those being excommunicated and shunned. Amish folks are hoping that family members who have left will come to their senses and return to their Amish roots. Folks who have left their Amish roots are hoping that their still-Amish family members will come to their senses and escape as they have. The hearts of those who are being shunned and those who are doing the shunning are broken. Both long for reconciliation. How tragic it is that so many families have been torn apart.

Of course, everyone longs for a harmonious relationship with all of the members of their families and extended families, and I think we'd all agree that is also what God desires. He wants us to be

rightly-related to Him and rightly-related to each other, as those two things are the basis of the two greatest commandments—to love God and love each other (Matthew 22:35-40).

Jesus told us that, because of His coming to earth, families would inevitably be divided (Matt. 10:34-37). But the family division of which we foretold would be between *believers* and *unbelievers*, between those whose Lord is Jesus and those whose Lord is not Jesus. God never intended that families would divide over opinions, convictions, or Ordnungs.

One bit of good news is that the gospel of Jesus Christ, as revealed in the New Testament, not only makes a way for reconciliation between God and people, but it also makes a way for reconciliation between people who were previously at odds. In New Testament days, the gospel resulted in the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles (see Eph. 2:11-19), two groups that previously had very little to do with each other. But when both Jews and Gentiles were born again, they all then had the same Lord and Savior, the same Heavenly Father, and the same indwelling Holy Spirit. The early churches were full of reconciled Jews and Gentiles!

Similarly, when we realize that we are all sinners who have “fallen short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23), and that salvation is offered to us all through God’s grace and received by faith, it puts us all in the “same boat.” There is no room for pride, or thinking that we are better than others. Consequently, those who believe in the Lord Jesus and strive to obey His commandments love all others who also believe in the Lord Jesus and who strive to obey His commandments, *even if they might hold to different convictions regarding issues about which the Bible is silent.* The outstanding mark of those who are born again is their love for each other, as the apostle John wrote, “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren” (1 John 3:14), and as Jesus said, “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).

Among all the Amish folks who sent replies to my first letter, their love, or lack of it, clearly identified those who were born again and those who were not. Those who are born again expressed love and sincere appreciation for me in their letters, even though many, if not most, hold to different convictions than me regarding driving buggies or using electric appliances. I knew that if I met with any of those folks, we would enjoy wonderful fellowship with each other, as we are children of the same Heavenly Father, and we share the same Lord and Savior. In stark contrast, those letters that

expressed hatred and animosity against me were clearly written by Amish people who have not yet been born again. If they were born again, they would love other people (like me) who are born again, and they would rejoice in any effort that is being made to help people who are not yet born again to be born again.

The apostle John affirmed these facts when he wrote, “By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother” (1 John 3:10). So it is not only false prophets who can be identified “by their fruit” (as Jesus taught in His Sermon on the Mount), but non-believers can also be identified by their fruit. Those who don’t “practice righteousness” and don’t “love their brothers” are *not* children of God. They are children of the devil. *That is what the Bible says.*

And when John wrote about “practicing righteousness,” the “righteousness” of which he spoke had nothing to do with any Ordnung, because the early church had no Ordnung. John was talking about keeping Christ’s commandments. In fact, he wrote in the very same letter: “By this we know that we have come to know Him [Jesus], if we keep His commandments. The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1John 2:3-4).

Again, having a relationship with Jesus is not based on keeping manmade fence laws or traditions. It has everything to do, however, with keeping Jesus’ commandments. As Paul wrote, “What matters is the keeping of the commandments of God” (1 Cor. 7:19). So, when Amish people excommunicate and shun people who have been born again and who are striving to obey Jesus’ commandments, and they shun them because those people aren’t keeping certain Amish traditions, they reveal that they are not born again themselves. They also reveal that their traditions are more important to them than Jesus’ commandments. Worse, they reveal that they are spiritually children of the devil!

The good news is that children of the devil can be transformed into children of God by being born again! And when they are born again, they discover that they *automatically* love all others who are born again, including those with whom they were previously at odds. That is how the gospel brings about reconciliation in families. Paul wrote, “Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another” (1Thes. 4:9).

If you have family members who are genuinely born again—as evidenced by their striving to obey Jesus’ commandments—and you are shunning them because they no longer follow Amish traditions, if you will be born again, *you will not be able to shun them any longer*. You will be reconciled to God and your born-again family members. And that wonderful story of family reconciliation has happened millions of times around the world as people have been born again!

Here are some beautiful words written by a young man who was raised Amish but who had not been born again until recently, and who then led his Amish mother into the new birth:

It is so touching to hear your mom humbly but seriously admitting that they as parents were wrong, and their parents were wrong too. Mom's [new] faith is beautiful! And mom, if you read this, we love you, and Jesus does even more! Also, we never hold it against you parents. This has been happening for many generations and obviously everyone wants to think their parents have sound doctrine so you all followed in the footsteps of the one before you. Praise God, He gave you and I and anyone that wants His beautiful gift of salvation and our blinders fell off!

Family reconciliation does not require that everyone agree on certain lifestyle convictions on which the Bible is silent, because born again people love each other in spite of their differing convictions. It is clear in the New Testament that the early Christians did not all share the same convictions on certain issues, such as the propriety of eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols (Rom. 14:1-23, 1 Cor. 10:14-33). Paul instructed them, however, that their differing convictions should not stand in the way of them loving one another and living harmoniously. Living harmoniously implies accepting each other’s differences, just as musical harmonies are different than melodies, yet both complement each other.

But doesn’t the New Testament teach the practice of excommunication and shunning? Yes, certainly, but the New Testament teaches excommunication and shunning of people who unrepentantly disobey *Christ’s commandments*, not people who share different convictions regarding issues on which the Bible is silent. We are supposed to excommunicate and shun people who claim to be Christians yet who deny Christ by their blatant, unrepentant practice of disobedience to His commandments. They bring a stain upon the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, because Jesus is clearly *not* their Lord. You can read in 1 Corinthians 5, for example, about a man whom Paul

instructed the Corinthian believers to excommunicate. That man was living in an unrepentant, immoral, sexual relationship with his stepmother. In the New Testament, there are no instructions to shun someone who has transgressed the Ordnung, because the early church of the apostles had no Ordnung. They focused on obeying the commandments of Christ, because that is what Jesus told them to do (Matt. 28:18-20).

All of this is to say, if you are born again as an Amish person, and you have family members who are also genuinely born again but who are not Amish (even if they were at one time), if you are shunning them, you are sinning. Jesus commanded us to “love one another” (John 13:34-35). May I gently suggest that you need to repent and ask their forgiveness. And then enjoy family harmony as God intended—harmony that is not conditioned upon everyone agreeing on issues on which the Bible is silent.

But what about reconciliation with family members who have left the Amish who are *not* born again, and not only are they not following the Ordnung, but they are also ignoring the commandments of Christ?

Of course, to be reconciled and enjoy family harmony with such family members it is imperative that *you* be born again. If you *are* born again, and you hope to enjoy reconciliation and harmony with those kinds of family members, they will have to be born again as well. So you need to *obey one of the commandments of Jesus* and share the gospel with them so that they can be born again by repenting and believing in the Lord Jesus Christ.

However, (and this is vital) if you lead them to think that they must also start keeping the Ordnung along with repenting and believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, you have added to the gospel what is not part of the gospel. You have erected a barrier to the gospel which may well prevent your family member from believing the gospel. You will be held responsible before God for misleading them into thinking that He is expecting something from them that He actually isn't expecting. To avoid that, *you must convey to them that keeping the Ordnung is not necessary for salvation*. If they then repent and believe the gospel, they will be born again and become “new creations in Christ” (2 Cor. 5:17). Then both you and they will be children of God, and you will enjoy sweet reconciliation and family harmony that is not conditioned on agreement on issues about which the Bible is silent!

What about those who have left the Amish who *think* they are born again, but who show no evidence of it by obedience to Christ's commandments or love for other born-again people? How can you enjoy reconciliation and family harmony with them?

Again, if *you* are born again, those kinds of family members should be treated as needing to be born again, because they *do* need to be born again. So you should obey Jesus' commandment and share the gospel with them, telling them that if they will repent and believe in Jesus, God will forgive their sins and make them His reborn children. You will, however, have to first convince them that they actually are *not* already born again, even though they think they are. I suggest that you show them a few of the Bible verses I referred to earlier about the marks of all true believers, such as 1 John 2:3-4 and 1 John 3:10, 14.

A Common Barrier to Family Reconciliation

But isn't it wrong for your family members to have broken the lifetime-vows to the Amish church that they made at their baptism as teenagers? I've asked many formerly-Amish people what they say to their still-Amish family members when they make that accusation. They've given me various answers. The most common one is that they think their still-Amish family members are asking the wrong question. They should be asking *themselves* why they are part of a church that expects teenagers to make a lifetime vow to it, something that the original apostles never asked anyone to do and that is not found anywhere in the New Testament. Asking or requiring *anyone* to make vows to a certain church or doctrine is unbiblical.

Beyond that, many say that they only made vows because they were pressured to, or they knew they could never be married unless they did. Now that they are born-again children of God, their allegiance is no longer to any church or bishop, but to their Lord Jesus Christ. Had they made vows when they were teenagers to Mohammed, Molech, Buddha, or Baal, they are certain that God would not be expecting them to keep those vows since they have repented and been born again.

Regardless, you will never ever enjoy family reconciliation if it is conditioned upon your formerly-Amish family members returning to Amish traditions. If you think they are going to hell because

they are no longer Amish, there is nothing in the New Testament to support your view. If they are willing to reconcile apart from you leaving the Amish, but you are not willing to reconcile unless they rejoin the Amish, you are the one standing in the way of reconciliation, not them. Can you imagine getting to heaven and seeing your born-again family members there whom you shunned? Wouldn't that be embarrassing, to say the least? When the Ordnung, by itself, breaks families apart and keeps them apart, then obviously it is not a good thing.

Many folks who wrote in response to my previous letter explained why they believe the Ordnung is a good thing. Many of their reasons are biblically sound. Yet the fact remains that the early Christians and the apostles who led them had no Ordnung other than the commandments of Christ. They also had the indwelling Holy Spirit to help them obey His commandments. And that was sufficient for them. Why are those two things not sufficient for Christians today? I have written an article that take a closer look at the idea of Ordnungs, titled, "A Tale of Two Ordnungs." If you would like a copy of that article, I would be happy to send it to you. (Just write and request it.)

Thank you for allowing me to share from my heart. My conscience is clear that I have tried my best to help Amish folks experience the blessing shared by all the original Anabaptists—your ancestors—the blessing of being born again by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. As I shared in my previous letter, you don't need me to teach you. You have the Bible, hopefully in a language that you understand. If you don't, I would be happy to send you a free, English New Testament. If you need a large-print Bible, I would be happy to send you a large-print, red-letter King James Bible, but it will cost me \$30, so I would appreciate your financial help on that if you can afford it.

May the Lord bless you as you seek for His truth!

THIRTEEN

Regarding the Traditions You Were Taught

This short article is one I wrote for my hundreds of Amish-background Facebook friends, posted on November 23, 2022. I addressed a common mis-handling of Scripture that Amish bishops and ministers often use to attempt to persuade wayward, born-again Amish people to “return to the fold.”

When your still-Amish relatives, friends, bishops and ministers tell you that Bible says that you should “hold to the traditions that you were taught” (2 Thes. 2:15), it might be good to gently remind them that Paul wasn’t referring to various traditions handed down to children by parents and grandparents. Rather, he was talking about traditions He handed down to the Thessalonian Christians. Here is what he actually wrote: “So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the *traditions* that you were taught, whether by word of mouth or my letter *from us*” (2 Thes. 2:15, emphasis added). He similarly wrote to the Corinthian Christians, “Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the *traditions, just as I delivered them to you*” (1 Cor. 11:2, emphasis

added). Both 2 Thes. 2:15 and 1 Cor. 11:2 have nothing to do with parental or grand parental traditions.

And who handed down to Paul those traditions of which he wrote? It wasn't his parents. Paul's traditions had been handed down to him by the Holy Spirit, and he recorded those traditions in his letters to the New Testament churches.

So, if you are following the New Testament, you are following the traditions Paul wrote about in 2 Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians. In contrast, those who ARE following traditions handed down to them by their parents and grandparents that contradict the New Testament, are *not* following the traditions Paul wrote about in 2 Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians.

And if still-Amish friends and relatives tell you that you aren't "honoring your parents" if you reject any of their traditions, you might gently remind them that God struck Paul down on the road to Damascus, in a sense, because he was following the tradition of his parents and grandparents! From then on, Paul certainly rejected the traditions of *his* parents and grandparents that contradicted God's truth. Jesus became his Lord, and so he listened to and obeyed Him, the One who said, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Matt. 10:37).

Rejecting the unbiblical traditions of your parents and grandparents is not a sin; it is an act of repentance.

FOURTEEN

To Those Who Have "Broken Their Lifetime Vows" to the Amish Church

This short article was written in an attempt to help my many Amish-background Facebook friends have an answer for the common Amish criticism that they had "broken their lifetime vows." It was posted on Face on 11/23/22.

Your still-Amish relatives who are asking you how you could break your lifetime vow to the Amish church are asking the wrong question. They ought to be asking what gives any church the biblical right to require people to make a lifetime vow to it. The apostles had no such practice, because Jesus never commanded it. So, rather than be on the defensive, take the offensive stance, with love and respect. Ask them to show you in the New Testament where the apostles asked anyone to make lifetime vows to any church, sect, or list of rules.

Beyond that, ask them if they are still practicing the Ordnung to which they made vows as a teenager. Have they moved to a different Amish community with a different Ordnung? Then they broke their lifetime vows.

On top of all that, if you had made a lifetime vow to a church that you eventually realized had strayed in many significant ways from biblical truth and practice, you could be sure that remaining loyal to such a church would make you disloyal to God. If you had made a lifetime vow as a teenager to serve Baal, Molech, or Mohammed, would God expect you to keep that vow? We all know the answer!

Breaking a lifetime vow to the Amish church is not a sin; it is an act of repentance.

FIFTEEN

Regarding Honoring Your Parents

This was another short Facebook article for my Amish-background friends, many of whom find themselves accused of “not honoring their parents” due to the fact they’ve left the Amish against their parents’ wishes. It was posted on 11/24/22.

I’ve learned that many Amish folks think that the first commandment God ever gave is to “honor your parents.” The reason they think that is because they’ve heard Ephesians 6:1 read from the German Bible in their churches, but they don’t understand German well enough to grasp Paul’s words that honoring one’s father and mother is not “the *first* commandment,” but “the *first commandment with a promise*.” That is, it is the first commandment that is accompanied by a promised benefit if you obey it, namely “that is may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth” (Eph. 6:3).

In any case, the point of the common Amish misconstruction of Ephesians 6:1 is that there is supposedly nothing more important than obeying/honoring one’s parents. So, no Amish person, they say, should ever leave the Amish if his or her parents are against it. That is why so many who would prefer to leave remain in the Amish Prison.

Of course, honoring one's parents is important (it is contained in the Ten Commandments), but Jesus said that the most important commandment is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matt. 22:37). So, if one is forced to make a choice between obeying/honoring one’s parents or loving/obeying God, one should love/obey God—even if one’s parents are dishonored in the process.

You probably recall the man in the Bible who wanted to follow Jesus, but he requested Jesus’ permission to first bury his father, an obvious act of honoring a parent. Jesus said to him, “Follow Me, and allow the dead to bury their own dead” (Matt. 8:22). If that man returned home to honor his parent, *he sinned*. You might want to stop and think about that.

All of this is precisely why Paul did *not* write in Ephesians 6:1, “Children, obey your parents,” but rather, “Children, obey your parents *in the Lord*, for *this* is right” (emphasis added). Children, even young children, should *only* obey their parents so far as their obedience does not require them to disobey the Lord.

Here’s another relevant Bible verse that could almost be paraphrased, “Children, *disobey* your parents *in the Lord*, for this is right”:

“I [God] warned their children *not to follow in their parents’ footsteps*, defiling themselves with their idols. ‘I am the Lord your God,’ I told them. Follow my decrees, pay attention to my regulations” (Ezek. 20:18-19, emphasis added).

How about that? God effectively told children not to "honor their parents."

Since we’re considering Ephesians 6, I should mention that it also includes instructions to parents regarding how *they* should treat their children. Ephesians 6:1-3 was never intended to be quoted without including the very next verse: “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and *instruction of the Lord*” (Eph. 6:4, emphasis added). Paul did not instruct parents to teach their children religious, manmade traditions. Rather, he told them to teach their children about Jesus and what Jesus taught. Fathers should be "making disciples" of their own children, teaching them to obey all that *Jesus* commanded (Matt. 28:18-20).

I'm sorry to say that too many parents, Amish and otherwise, are tragically ignoring the first part of Ephesians 6:4. I love the Amplified Version's rendition of it (read slowly): "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger [do not exasperate them to the point of resentment with demands that are trivial or unreasonable or humiliating or abusive; nor by showing favoritism or indifference to any of them], but bring them up [tenderly, with lovingkindness] in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."

It is heartbreaking to see children whose parents exasperate them under the alleged "discipline of the Lord." Why can't those parents foresee the inevitable future? The time is coming when their children will get as far away from them—and their religion—as they possibly can. And when they do, they will take all their emotional scars with them.

Regarding *adult* children, only very foolish parents attempt to control them. Almost nothing could be more unnatural or perverse within human relations. And only *extremely* foolish parents attempt to control their adult children by quoting Ephesians 6:1-3! Wise parents know that love, self-sacrifice, and encouragement are the magnets that keep children—both young and old—close, while angry threats, finger-wagging, and shunning all repel like skunk squirt.

All of this is to say, if you followed Jesus out of the Amish Prison and your parents are condemning you and shunning you for it, it is they, not you, who should feel guilty. They were wrong to keep you in that prison all of your childhood, and they are wrong for condemning you for escaping it. As God said through Ezekiel, "I warned their children *not to follow in their parents' footsteps*" (Ezek. 20:18, emphasis added).

I should add that your parents are themselves victims of how they were raised, as were their parents. So there is reason not to be angry with your parents, but sympathetic.

Thank God you did not follow in your parent's footsteps and escaped. Now, follow Jesus! And pray, as Jesus taught, that God will send laborers into the harvest...people whom your parents respect who can influence them to follow their children out of the Amish Prison to become slaves of Christ and sons of God!!!

SIXTEEN

Coping with Amish Family Rejection

One thing, among many, that I often admire about Amish-background believers is their willingness to pay a price to follow Jesus, and that price often includes rejection on some level by their family and friends. That willingness to suffer affirms the sincerity of their faith. Still, I know it isn't easy, having faced plenty of rejection myself for my love for our Lord Jesus. This short article was posted on Facebook in two installments (on 11/25 & 29/22), the second of which I felt was the most significant.

I'm writing primarily to Amish-background believers who've faced rejection by their parents, siblings, relatives, and former Amish friends. Much of what I have to say, however, applies to anyone who has suffered rejection for the sake of Christ.

I've titled this article "Coping with Amish Family Rejection" rather than "Overcoming Amish Family Rejection," because I'm uncertain that anyone who has suffered rejection from those who ought to love them is able to "get over it," at least in this life.

Although it is often said that “time heals all wounds,” wounded people know that, although the deep psychological pain of rejection may hurt less over time, it very often leaves permanent scars. Many wounded people—for good reasons and because they are good people—do their best to hide their pain. Still, they’re wounded. And how they cope affects their lives every day. For example, people who are wounded by rejection are apt to guard against being rejected again. For them, any and all relationships are risky.

As I’ve observed newly born-again Amish friends be rejected by their Amish parents, relatives and friends, I’ve marveled at their grace towards those who’ve rejected them. It is a testimony to the Holy Spirit’s transforming power. Still, I can’t imagine they aren’t hiding some hurt. I wish I could help them, and this article will be my attempt at that.

Of all people from whom we would expect love, certainly our parents would be at the top of the list. And for that reason and others, parental shunning is utterly perverse. Everyone knows that fact deep within them—including Amish parents who shun their adult children—but their mixed-up minds have mastered their hearts.

Of course, it is appropriate for parents, at times, to express their disappointment with a child, and that can even be appropriate at times with adult children (although the downside risk is much higher then). But the only proper way to express disappointment to any age child (or just about any person for that matter) is with affirmation, love, and encouragement.

Parents, if your child’s behavior falls short of your reasonable expectation, make sure any correction, verbal or physical, is jammed full with love, beginning to end. Even to a small child whose behavior requires discipline, you can first say, “Johnny, you are a good boy, and good boys don’t act the way you just did. So, I’m going to punish you to make sure you remain the good boy that you are.” That’s affirming, not demeaning. And after you administer the punishment, add some more verbal and physical affirmation. If your child is crying, hug them until they stop.

The hearts of older children—as well as all of us adult children—are no less fragile, and we all need just as much tenderness and affirmation if correction is going to have a positive, rather than a

negative, result. When I think about Amish parents who tell their adult children that they are no longer welcome at any family gatherings because they've left the Amish, I marvel at the utter foolishness of such actions and the strangeness of the social system that motivates such madness. Shunning is a method of coercion, that is, forcing people to do what they don't want to do. Of course, that is what being Amish is actually all about if the truth be told. It is nothing but a system of social coercion under the guise of Christianity which, by the way, has absolutely nothing to do with coercion. Christianity at its core is antithetical to coercion.

I can't think of anything more miserable than a bunch of people who all outwardly conform to rules just to prevent their loved ones from hating them! It's like a circular firing squad, and everyone has a gun. "Don't even think about removing yourself from our 'circle of love,' or else we'll shoot you!" (If anyone ever writes a country song about Amish life, a good title might be, "Hating To Love You.")

But I'm not writing to foolish Amish parents, and neither are they reading this. So what are the victims of attempted social coercion—followers of Christ who are being shunned by Amish family members—supposed to do? Let me tell you what I've admirably observed among many ex-Amish people who are suffering family rejection. May their example inspire you as it has inspired me:

#1) Remember that the Lord once said to Samuel, "They have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me" (1 Sam. 8:7). If you've been born again and your Amish family is shunning you because of it, then God's words to Samuel certainly have application to you. More than rejecting you, they're rejecting Jesus Christ, even if they don't recognize it.

Jesus once similarly said to 70 of His disciples, "The one who listens to you listens to Me, and *the one who rejects you rejects Me*; and he who rejects Me rejects the One who sent Me" (Luke 10:16, emphasis added).

It can help you cope with your family's rejection if you recognize that they are actually rejecting Jesus, of whose body you are a member. And that, of course, will help you to feel compassion for them rather than bitterness or anger. They are people who need to repent, believe in the Lord Jesus, and be born again, or they will perish. Good reason to pray for them.

And while their rejection of you is the sure evidence that they are not in Christ, it is also the sure evidence that you are in Christ. Which leads me to a second coping suggestion...

#2) Jesus said, “Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, *for your reward in heaven is great*; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matt. 5:11, emphasis added). Your rejection by people is proof of your acceptance by God.

Jesus told His followers that families would be divided because of Him, because some would believe and some would not:

Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man’s enemies will be the members of his household (Matt. 10:34-36).

So don’t be surprised that your family is divided.

Jesus continued:

He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me (Matt. 10:37).

Although some professing Christians think that “not being worthy of Jesus” has nothing to do with salvation, they would have a hard time explaining how that could possibly be. Did Jesus actually mean: “If you love your father, mother, son or daughter more than Me, you are not worthy of Me, but don’t worry about it, because *everyone* is not worthy of Me, including those who actually do love Me more than they love their family members...so it really doesn’t make any difference if you love Me more, or love Me less, than you love your family members”? That would not seem to be too likely...

Can we just be honest? In Matthew 10:37, Jesus clearly revealed that people *can* be “worthy” or “deserving” of Him. That is indisputable. And people who don’t love Him more than they love their “loved-ones” are not worthy or deserving of Him. Jesus doesn’t belong to them.

The truth is, everyone who *genuinely* believes that Jesus is the Son of God makes Him Lord, and they love Him supremely, more than their families. And they *deserve* Him. If you don’t love Jesus supremely, more than anyone else, you are not yet a Christian believer. Matthew 10:37 is very simple to understand, yet it is all but ignored by the purveyors of false grace who litter the landscape of modern Evangelicalism.

All of this being so, those who, like you, have been faced with the choice of pleasing “loved ones” or Jesus, and who choose Jesus, prove that they are worthy of Him. And that should certainly provide consolation to Amish-background believers who are being shunned by their Amish families. You’ve passed the test! You’ve proven that your faith is genuine. You are worthy of Jesus...according to Jesus! That is one "silver lining" in your "dark cloud" that can help you cope.

So, rejoice that "the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, will be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:7). And let your shunning family see your joy in being shunned for Christ's sake. It might help them see the error of their way.

#3) Remember that you are a victim of people who are victims themselves. Like you, your parents were born into a system of social coercion, as were their parents. There have been generations of victims over hundreds of years. For that reason, you can have mercy on those who are shunning you, reminding yourself that, “If they knew better, they’d do better.”

Although Jesus said it would have been better if Judas had not been born, we note that He prayed for His persecutors who divided His garments because they, unlike Judas, did not "know what they were doing.” In that respect, your shunning family members are more like the Roman soldiers at Jesus’ crucifixion than they are like Judas. And worse, they think they are doing what is right and perhaps what is best for you, hoping to lure you back (into their bondage).

All of this is to say, it is easier to have mercy on family members who are shunning you if you remember that they are not entirely to blame for their sin against you. The blame also belongs to their ancestors all the way back to Jacob Amman (at least).

If you can model mercy, there is a better chance that your alleged "Christian" Amish family members who are shunning you will wake up to their error as they witness Jesus living through you. You can "do all things through Christ who strengthens you" (Phil. 4:13), and being persecuted by your own flesh and blood is an opportunity to experience not only "the fellowship of Christ's sufferings," but also "the power of His resurrection" (Phil. 3:10). That's good!

Here's something else to remember:

#4) Jesus suffered the rejection of His family, so He has felt the same pain as you. He, however, found a remedy that will also work for you.

Of course, Jesus suffered rejection throughout His entire earthly ministry. John wrote, "He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him" (John 1:11). Can you imagine being rejected by people whom you created?

Rejection was such a predominant part of Jesus' experience that Isaiah wrote of Him hundreds of years before His incarnation:

He was *despised* and *forsaken of men*,
A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;
And like one from whom men hide their face. He was *despised*, and we did not esteem Him (Is. 53:3, emphasis added).

If you are in Christ, a member of His body, you *will* share in His sufferings. And rejection is a primary part of those sufferings. If you *haven't* experienced at least some rejection, you should be concerned. Jesus warned, "Woe to you when all men speak well of you" (Luke 6:26).

It is one thing to be rejected by strangers and acquaintances. But that pales in comparison to being rejected by “loved-ones.” Many Christians have never realized just how much Jesus was rejected by His family. Concerning His four half-brothers (see Mark 6:3), the New Testament records, “Not even His brothers were believing in Him” (John 7:5).

Although we might be able to sympathize somewhat with the challenge of being one of Jesus’ brothers who all grew up in a family where one person never sinned—their rejection of Him is still difficult to understand. Surely, they heard from their mother the supernatural circumstances that surrounded His birth. And although they were aware of His miracles (see John 7:1-4) and were likely present at His first miracle when He changed water into wine (see John 2:1-12), they still did not believe in Him. Scripture records that they encouraged Him to attend a feast in Jerusalem where they likely knew He would be endangered (John 7:1-9). Were they hoping He might be harmed? Perhaps just as Joseph of the Old Testament foreshadowed Christ, so Joseph’s jealous brothers foreshadowed Jesus’ siblings.

When Jesus visited His hometown—the backwater village of Nazareth and a place where everyone knew Him, His earthly father, mother, half-brothers, and half-sisters—the residents tried to kill Him by throwing Him over a cliff (Matt. 13:54-58; Mark 6:1-6; Luke 4:16-30). Being hated by your hometown friends would be bad enough, but it is VERY possible that some or all of the members of Jesus’ own family heard Him preach in Nazareth’s synagogue that day and even participated in the attempt to kill Him.

There is no indication in the New Testament that any of Jesus’ half-brothers, with the exception of James (Gal. 1:19), and perhaps Jude, ever believed in Him. And the fact that Jesus, during His crucifixion, entrusted His mother Mary into the care of His disciple John (John 19: 25-27) makes us wonder if His half-brothers had rejected her because of her faith in Him.

How did Jesus cope with such painful rejection by His own family? We can find a clue in Mark 3:

And He came home, and the crowd gathered again, to such an extent that they could not even eat a meal. When His own people [or “kinsman”] heard of this, they went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, “He has lost His senses”....

Then His mother and His brothers arrived, and standing outside they sent word to Him and called Him. A crowd was sitting around Him, and they said to Him, “Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are outside looking for You.” Answering them, He said, “Who are My mother and My brothers?” Looking about at those who were sitting around Him, He said, “Behold My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother” (Mark 3:20-21, 31-35).

Jesus identified with a *new* family, one that accepted and received Him. And that is just what we should do when we suffer rejection by our families. Just as with Jesus, our new family consists of all those who “do the will of God.” Those are all *true* believers in Jesus, His “sheep” (not the goats). Christians, by New Testament definition, are those who strive to follow and obey Jesus. Those who don’t aren’t actual believers.

When we are born again, we become instant members of God’s great big family, with Him being our spiritual Father, Jesus being our oldest brother, and with many other brothers and sisters all over the world. That is why we soon discover that we actually prefer, if given the chance, to spend time with our *spiritual* family more than our *physical* family (if our physical family members are not yet born again).

This is also why Jesus promised: “Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel’s sake, but that he will receive *a hundred times as much now in this present age*, houses and *brothers and sisters and mothers and children* and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life” (Mark 10:29-30). Although we may not all literally leave our families in order to take the gospel to faraway places, we all, in a sense, leave our families when we decide to follow Christ against our family’s wishes.

Of course, when Jesus promised the blessing of many “brothers and sisters and mothers and children,” He wasn’t talking about attending one-hour church services once a week to look at the backs of other people’s heads in the pew in front of you. He was talking about the kind of close relationships that true born-again believers continually enjoy with each other. It is truly a little taste of heaven, the “fellowship [Greek: *koinonia*] of the Spirit” (Phil. 2:1).

If you don't have that, "seek and you will find" (Matt. 7:7), and it will go a long way towards mitigating the pain of your family's rejection. In fact, if you do, your Amish family might even become jealous. That would be a good thing (Rom. 11:13-14) if it helps them realize that you are being blessed in spite of their efforts to make you miserable and bring you back into their darkness!

SEVENTEEN

Regarding the Ominous Predictions about Your Children by Your Still-Amish Family

Those who leave the Amish will inevitably be told by well-meaning family members that their children will ultimately “go to the world.” That danger, of course, does exist. But it is not inevitable, as has been proven plenty of times. This word of encouragement to Amish-background parents was posted on Facebook on 12/3/22.

“Just wait and see. Since you've left the Amish, all your children will go to the world.”

Many former Amish folks have heard that threatening forecast from their still-Amish relatives and families. It is usually followed by solemn examples of children who "went to the dogs" when their parents left the Amish.

Most ex-Amish parents considered that risk before they defected, and they decided it was worth taking the chance. The alternative was to stay in the Amish Prison and continue raising little

prisoners—who would one day be adult prisoners who could then start raising some little prisoners of their own.

Of course, if you want to control people's behavior, prison is a great place to do that. You may have noticed that no prisoner ever robbed a bank as long as he was in prison. If you put prisoners in solitary confinement, you can even keep them from punching fellow prisoners. If you tape their mouths shut, you can keep them from using curse words. There is no end to how "holy" you can force people to be...all you need is enough restraint.

I hope by now you are chuckling, and I hope you noticed that the word "holy" in my last sentence was in quotation marks. That is because imposed holiness is not holiness at all. It is coercion. No one finds any virtue in prison inmates who don't rob banks while they are in prison.

You may have noticed that God has placed us all in an environment that is not void of temptation. From the Garden of Eden, He has allowed the devil to tempt people (but with limitations). Free moral agents must be tested. Thus the reason for the "forbidden fruit."

Parents, however, can take a tip from God, who promised *His* children that He will never "allow [them] to be tempted beyond what [they] are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that [they] will be able to endure it" (1Cor. 10:13). All Christian parents must determine the right balance of protection from, and exposure to, temptation for their children, based on their ages and maturity. The goal is to prepare them to one day "leave the nest," equipped to resist temptation and follow Jesus—because they love Him. (By contrast, if you are Amish, the goal is to prepare your children for life sentences in prison...Amish Prison, that is.)

Along those lines, should your children be educated in home school, private Christian school, or public school?

Personally, I recommend the protection of the first two options for as long as possible. Some say those options are "over-protection," but neighborhood hoodlums and Sunday school gangsters will usually provide your children with ample exposure to the contrast between darkness and light. And please note that Jesus only sent *adults* out to evangelize the world, calling even them "lambs in the

midst of wolves” (Luke 10:3). God is not calling your children to win the heathen; He is calling you to "bring [your children] up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4).

So don't fear your still-Amish family members' pernicious predictions regarding your precious children. Let your children see you obey your Lord Jesus every day, and teach them God's Word. They will follow your example and one day raise your grandchildren the same way!

EIGHTEEN

Are You “Worldly” Like They Accuse You?

It is fascinating, and at the same time tragic, to learn what many Amish people consider to be “worldly.” Obviously, just about any technological advancement over the past century falls into the “worldly” category in Amish thinking, even though they’ve accepted most technological advancements from the prior century. Amish folks teach their children that anything that isn’t found in Amish culture that is found in non-Amish culture is “worldly,” and those things should be avoided because Paul taught us “not to be conformed to this world” (Rom. 12:2). That, however, is contrary to what Paul meant, and it is ironic that, by biblical definition, most Amish folks are actually very worldly. This article, posted on Facebook on 12/7/22, explores that idea.

I’ll never forget reading an Amish mother’s letter to her adult daughter who had left the Amish and was now driving a car. Her mother told her that there was nothing more “worldly” than that. Strangely, her mother, like all Amish people, regularly rides in cars as a paying passenger. So, the “worldliness” of cars apparently only applies to owning or driving them, but not to renting or riding in them. One can sit for days in the right front seat without being worldly, but if one shifts three feet to the left and grabs the steering wheel, hell rejoices!

In the minds of many Amish folks, anything that lies outside of Amish thinking or culture is “worldly.” Of course, they find their scriptural support by twisting New Testament passages that warn believers about the world. When the New Testament authors warned against the world, however, they weren’t warning against what stood in contrast to relatively-recent Amish peculiarities and traditions, but against sinful practices of the unregenerate *world*, evil that God had been condemning from the beginning.

So what does actual “worldliness” look like? The apostle John wrote:

"Do not love the *world* nor the things in the *world*. If anyone loves the *world*, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the *world*, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the *world*. The *world* is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever" (1 John 2:15-17, emphasis add).

John summarized the “world” as first being characterized by the “lust,” or better, the “*desire* of the flesh.” Paul helpfully elaborated on what he called “the deeds of the flesh” in Galatians 5:19-21:

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

If Paul's "deeds of the flesh" are the outcomes of those who yield to John's "desires of the flesh," then people who are characterized by Paul's "deeds of the flesh" are *worldly* by biblical definition.

I don’t want to generalize, because there are Amish folks who are born again, godly people. Yet there are plenty of Amish people who, by John and Paul’s definition, are every bit as worldly as the world. Statistics show that almost half of all Anabaptists have been sexually abused by fellow church members. Porn use is also prevalent, and fornication before marriage with one’s fiancée/fiancé is common. All of those things certainly fit into Paul’s categories of “immorality” and “impurity.”

And although outsiders often think of Amish people as being peace-loving and inspiringly cooperative, the truth is, they are frequently fighting and dividing, so that there are literally hundreds of church divisions among just Old Order Amish. And all of that would seem to fit into Paul's categories of "enmities, strife...disputes, dissensions," and "factions."

Moreover, the Amish have pockets of everything else Paul mentioned, including drunkenness and carousing.

Added all together, it's completely *worldly*.

If John's second phrase, "lust of the eyes," is equivalent to greed as is often suggested, that is something that is curbed by social pressure in Amish circles (but not eradicated from Amish hearts), and the same could be said of the "boastful pride of life," John's third phrase. Pride would certainly seem to be a factor, however, in the hearts of Amish people who actually think they could merit a place in heaven, or who are convinced that only the Amish people will be there. A thin veneer of false humility can hide a heart bursting with pride.

Regardless, how tragic it is when Amish people redefine worldliness to exclude themselves from their definition. Imagine being proud that you live in a house that isn't connected to the "worldly" electrical power grid, but that same house is where you've molested your daughter or sister. Then imagine condemning your ex-Amish daughter as being worldly because she now drives a car!

It is interesting that modern technology is often deemed to be "worldly" by modern Amish, but that 100-year-old technology is not, by either modern Amish or their ancestors. A horse-drawn buggy was at one time a disruptive technology, and one that could have called for a "fence law" that prevented some potential sin. Somehow it was allowed. The fact is, any technology can be used for good or evil. (I'm using a laptop for good as I'm writing this.)

Regarding automobiles, I understand that many Amish "draw the line" between owning/driving one and riding in one under the belief that it curbs sin. If you can't just hop in your car anytime you want and drive to a bar, that might help you avoid getting drunk so often. Fair enough. But those of us who are born again, new creations in Christ don't need fence laws to help us stay sober. We have the

indwelling Holy Spirit to empower us. Plus, our desires have changed. Getting drunk no longer has any appeal.

The need for fence laws is a tacit admission that the Holy Spirit is absent, and the fence law becomes the cheap substitute that exchanges love for God for fear of man.

The solution to all this? Only the gospel of Jesus. So, "keep the main thing the main thing." Don't argue about non-essentials, traditions and customs. Just keep repeating the only important question to your still-Amish family members and friends, "Have you been born again through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ?"

NINETEEN

The Amish Prison Uniform

Among the multitudes of rules in Amish Ordnungs, rules regarding clothing number in the hundreds. It is no exaggeration to say that Amish people wear required uniforms that, in their minds, “separate them from the world.” To those who understand Amish culture, Amish clothing is akin to the uniforms that incarcerated people wear that identify them as prisoners. Just like those behind bars, Amish people have no choice in what they wear. This article, posted on Facebook on 12/8/22, explores that topic.

Most “outsiders”—the “English” as we are called by the Amish—are apt to think that all 350,000 Amish people in North America dress uniformly. They have no idea that there are scores of subtle variations in Amish dress codes from one Amish community to another. Those variations include acceptable women’s dress colors (always muted, solid colors but never patterns), number of pleats on women’s kapps, the number of men’s suspenders (0, 1 or 2), the brim width of straw hats, and

much more. Amish people can often tell where other Amish people are from by observing those subtle dress code differences. And they also quickly notice if anyone within their own community is transgressing the dress code. Violators are corrected and disciplined if necessary.

Many Amish people have no clue about the origins of their dress peculiarities. If you ask an Amish woman, for example, why she has no buttons on her dress and must use scores of straight pins for fasteners, she is likely to tell you that is just how it has always been. And why are buttons *not* forbidden on men's clothing? No one knows that either. (Buttons are used on men's trouser flies and shirts.)

Amish folks would likely be *very* surprised to learn that modern Amish obsession with meticulous details regarding outward attire may well stem from the culture in which Jakob Amman, their founder and namesake, was born. Amman, a tailor by trade, was just as familiar as every other European of his time with what were called "sumptuary laws." Those were strictly-enforced civil regulations that, among other things, stipulated detailed clothing restrictions for various classes of people.

For example, in 1672, officials in Switzerland's Canton of Bern mandated that silk clothing be forbidden for the general population. They made an exception, however, for nobility—as long as their silk clothing was unadorned and without ruffles. Interestingly, the same mandate required maids to make their dresses from simple, "rural" cloth, with plain collars and without any lace or ribbons. The rationale was obvious: Maids should be easily distinguishable from their higher-class superiors.

So, imagine living under a civil government, wedded to a state church, that *stringently regulated* clothing styles and adornment of all citizens. Imagine your state government encouraging all its citizens to spy on and report the non-compliant. That was the only world Jakob Amman ever knew. As a tailor, he risked paying steep fines if he made or sold forbidden clothing.

All of this is to say that, although modern Anabaptists generally justify their distinctive attire with biblical references to modesty, simplicity and humility, the actual origin of their peculiar dress is more likely overbearing 17th-century European civil law that was designed to preserve class

distinctions and the social order. Said another way, Amish attitudes regarding clothing distinctives have their origins in the “world”! Modern Amish culture is just a vestige of everyday European culture from three centuries ago.

This is not to say, of course, that authentic Christians should have no convictions regarding outward attire. John the Baptist, who wore a garment made of camel’s hair, told his convicted audiences that the person who has two coats should share with someone who is without a coat (Luke 3:11), and James similarly warned the rich that their garments had “become moth-eaten” (Jas. 5:2), a reference to Jesus’ prohibition of laying up earthly treasures. All of this indicates that clothing can be a stewardship issue.

In addition, both Paul and Peter gave general instructions regarding women’s outward attire that encouraged modesty and discouraged vanity (1 Tim. 2:9; 1 Pet. 3:3). Jesus also warned about those who cause others to stumble, which certainly has some application to modest clothing.

Still, there is no hint of a “Christian uniform” in the New Testament. And Scripture does allow for individual convictions regarding issues on which Scripture is silent, while also prescribing respect, toleration, and love for those whose convictions differ. So that is what followers of Christ do. We don’t establish clothing regulations or require uniforms.

Have you noticed that God made us all different? Our faces are all unique. Our personalities vary greatly. There are numerous body types. We possess different talents, skills and abilities. So why would God want or expect us to all dress and groom identically? That goes against how He’s made us.

And what could possibly be wrong with expressing my personality and my personal preferences in dress and grooming, within reason?

And is it possible to *not* wear a uniform and *not* be proud? Or maybe a more important question to ask would be, is it possible to allow others to *not* wear a uniform and *not* be jealous of them?

(Jealousy may well be the root behind any demand for uniformity.)

Here's one more question: Should I not care more about what my *spouse* prefers regarding my appearance than my *bishop*?

Amish folks and other Anabaptists sometimes make the claim that their distinctive attire “sets them apart from the world,” which sure sounds biblical. They also claim that their distinctive attire serves as a reminder and incentive for them to live righteously before those who are watching. OK, but distinctive dress also serves as a barrier to the gospel, because it sends the silent message to the unsaved that, if they want to be accepted by God, they must start wearing a uniform. That is one reason why modern Anabaptists are so ineffective in spreading the gospel and building God's kingdom. (And most Amish people, of course, make no effort to reach the lost because most of them are lost themselves.)

All of this is to say that, at least to me, the Amish uniform is emblematic of a prison uniform, because all Amish people live in a social prison, jailed behind walls not made of concrete, but of threats from people whose love is conditional.

What should ex-Amish people do whose still-Amish relatives require them to dress Amish if they want the “privilege” to visit? Personally, I would have difficulty playing that game. If they know you've left the Amish and are no longer wearing the Amish prison uniform every day, what difference does it make if you pretend you are still Amish when you are around them? How would they react if you told them they had to dress “English” if they wanted to visit you?

I think that if I was ex-Amish, and my still-Amish family required that I wear the Amish prison uniform when I visited them, I would say:

Sorry, but I've believed in Jesus, the Son of God. He is now my Lord, not the bishop. And He has never given anyone a commandment regarding any uniform. Plus, He Himself never wore Amish clothes. Rather, He wore what everyone else in His day wore. If Jesus showed up today at your house without Amish clothes, would you let Him in? Apparently not! Neither would you allow Peter, Paul, John, James and Jude, who all followed Jesus' example and wore the same clothing as everyone else, to enter your house! You might want to think about that.

So, if you want to follow manmade rules and conform to autocratic 300-year-old European culture, that is your choice. But if you reject me for following Jesus, Jesus said you are rejecting Him. And that is also your choice.

For me, I'm going to follow Jesus even if it costs me everything, including my family relationships. Knowing and serving Him is more important to me than anything, and I love Him more than anyone. Beyond that, I now have a new family consisting of millions of other people around the world who believe in the Lord Jesus like me. And I am welcome in all their homes without Amish prison clothes!

Not everyone will agree on those last couple of paragraphs, and they might suggest more grace on my part. They may well be right, and I am aware that I am still “a Christian under construction”!

TWENTY

Women’s Head Coverings in Corinth: Are the Amish Doing it Right?

This final chapter is an article that was published as my last monthly “e-teaching” of 2022, in December. I wrote it in response to a request from one of the young Amish-background believers from Johnsonburg.

One of the things I’ve been blessed to observe among the Amish-background new believers in Johnsonburg, PA, is their toleration for diversity of personal convictions regarding issues on which the Bible is silent—a phenomenon that is generally foreign in Amish culture. I’ve noticed, for example, some of the women continue to wear some form of daily head covering, while others don’t. And they all still love each other and get along! No one is condemning anyone else for their personal convictions because everyone loves the Lord and is trying to please Him. Of course, that is exactly what the New Testament teaches believers to do regarding issues on which Scripture is silent (see Rom. 14; 1 Cor. 8).

As I was writing that last sentence, I knew some readers would be thinking, “But Scripture is not silent on the subject of women’s head coverings.” That, of course, is true. Paul did mention something about women’s head coverings, once, in 1 Corinthians 11:1-17.

It is worth noting, however, that Paul’s instructions to the Corinthians were not about *daily* head coverings for females. His words were only in relationship to women being covered or uncovered when praying or prophesying, that is, when speaking to, or on behalf of, God. Here is the evidence:

Every man who has *something on his head while praying or prophesying* disgraces his head. But every woman who has *her head uncovered while praying or prophesying* disgraces her head, for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved (1 Cor. 11:4-5, emphasis added).

We can add to those two sentences a similar one near the end of the passage: “Judge for yourselves: is it proper for *a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?* (1 Cor. 11:13; emphasis added). Note that Paul did not ask, “Is it proper for a woman to have her head uncovered?” but, “Is it proper for a woman *to pray to God* with her head uncovered?”

And because Paul specifically mentioned women *prophesying* in 11:5—something done to edify others (see 1 Cor. 14:4)—it seems safe to assume that what he wrote about head coverings applied to women *during Christian gatherings*. That is, he was not necessarily telling Christian women to cover their heads when praying alone at home, or to cover their heads at any other place or time for that matter.

So, Paul’s words about female head covering in 1 Corinthians 11:1-17 apply to women when they are praying or prophesying in Christian gatherings. At such times, Paul said, their heads should be covered. When we claim that the passage is about women’s *daily* head coverings, we read what is not there. And if we claim that 1 Corinthians 11:1-17 somehow implies that women should always wear head coverings, then we must also claim that men must *never* wear hats, because Paul talked in 1 Corinthians 11:4 about how men should not cover their heads when they pray or prophesy. So, no baseball caps, toboggan caps, or cowboy hats, ever.

The fact is, there are no requirements found in the Bible—Old or New Testaments—regarding women wearing head coverings as part of their daily attire. You won't find daily female head coverings mandated in the Law of Moses or the Law of Christ. Granted, cultural norms have dictated the practice around the world in both ancient and modern times, including in ancient Corinth (which we will soon consider), but nothing codified it in any scriptural law from God for His people.

Some Historical Context Regarding Corinth

Before anyone attempts to interpret Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 11, they should understand that in ancient Greece, women were generally kept sequestered in homes, either of their parents before marriage, or of their husbands after marriage. When they ventured out into the public, they wore veils called *tegidion* that hid their *entire* faces, with the exception of their eyes. It was literally a rectangular piece of cloth with two holes cut out for eyes, fastened by a forehead band.

Those coverings conveyed that a woman was “off limits,” something that served a valuable purpose in a society in which sex with prostitutes and female slaves was considered normal and acceptable. For a married woman to go out into public unveiled was to act like an available prostitute or a bold adulteress.

Of course, women who wore such veils across their faces also had their entire heads covered with what we might call a shawl that was an integral part of the wrappings of their dress. So, as you imagine Corinthian women at Christian gatherings, that is how you should imagine them—shawled and veiled. *You would not be able to see their hair or faces.*

That being so, Corinthian women looked nothing like modern Amish women. If any ancient Greek women saw modern Amish women, they would likely gasp at the immodesty of their small head “kapps” and unveiled faces! “Are all Amish women prostitutes?” would be an inevitable question that would arise in their minds.

And when Christian groups appeal to 1 Corinthians 11 to advocate little white head caps, black bonnets, or head scarves, they ought to do some additional historical homework. Corinthian women had their heads *totally* covered. If any modern Christian group wants to copy the culture conveyed in

1 Corinthians 11, their single and married women should start wearing shawls that *completely* cover their hair and veils that *completely* cover their faces, with the exception of their eyes. Something tells me that modern head-covering advocates are probably going to resist that idea.

Why the Need for 1 Corinthians 11:1-17?

We ought to ask what was happening at Corinth that motivated Paul to write what he did about head coverings. At bare minimum, it seems that at least some Corinthian women were advocating removing their shawls, veils, or both, when praying or prophesying publicly. We are not told their reason. It seems highly unlikely that there was, as is sometimes claimed, a contingency of rebellious, “liberated women” in the Corinthian church who were rising up against strongly-held, centuries-old Greek cultural norms. I’d prefer a more plausible explanation.

Because Paul specifically mentions Corinthian women not remaining covered when *praying* or *prophesying*, I wonder if some women were removing their *veils* temporarily when they prayed or prophesied because those veils gagged their mouths to some degree when they spoke. That would at least seem plausible. (Having worn a COVID mask, I can relate!) Why would they ever want to pull their *shawls* off their hair when they prayed or prophesied? I struggle to think of a reason.

So, were they removing their veils but keeping their hair covered by their shawls? Or, were they uncovering their hair by removing their shawls but keeping on their veils? Were they removing both shawls and veils? We just don’t know.

Regardless, in light of Greek cultural standards for women’s head covering, you can understand why any variation of those scenarios could be alarming to those inside and outside the church. And we should not be surprised that Paul addressed the issue. He did so by weaving divine principles within the context of cultural norms, and that is one reason there is so much modern debate regarding the entire passage. If what Paul wrote was purely based on deference to culture, we could easily ignore it. If, however, what he wrote has its basis in divine principle (and it does), we should take it seriously and at least think about how it applies within our own culture.

Much of what Paul wrote in this passage raises questions for which I've never found satisfying answers. 1 Corinthians 11:1-17 even seems self-contradictory on some levels. Commentators have come up with many contrasting conclusions that are constructed from questionable assumptions. And I'm wondering if I'm crazy to be writing *anything* about it! But some of my Amish-background friends are wondering about head coverings. So, I will share what little I think I understand about 1 Corinthians 11:1-17 and how it should be applied within a modern context. So here goes...

The Disgraced Head

It is clear that one consequence of a woman being uncovered was that she “disgraces her head” (1 Cor. 11:5). Was Paul speaking of an uncovered women’s own physical head or was he speaking of her husband? Two sentences earlier, Paul had made reference to her *husband* being her *head*. (See 1 Cor. 11:3 and note that ancient Greek did not have different words for “man” and “husband” or for “woman” and “wife.” Translators must look at context to determine the best English equivalent. You can rest assured, however, that *every* man is not the head of *every* woman. Only husbands are heads of their wives; see Eph. 5:23.) That sentence, and the flow of Paul’s argument, leads me to think that the uncovered woman disgraces her *husband*. Is there any other indication that I’m correct on that? I think there is.

Paul goes on to say that the uncovered woman “is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved” (1 Cor. 11:5), a comparison that all the Corinthian believers must have understood, but one that causes modern scholars to scratch their heads. What was Paul talking about?

It is often claimed that all the prostitutes shaved their heads in ancient Corinth, but there is no historical proof of that claim. Moreover, it certainly would seem odd that prostitutes, who were in the business of attracting men, would do something that would likely have the opposite effect. A better explanation, and one that is supported by some historical evidence, is that married women who were found guilty of adultery had their heads shaved as a public shaming. Such unfaithful women had removed their coverings of both shawl and veil, and so as a shaming punishment for their immoral uncovering, all of their natural covering was removed by shaving their heads. It would take years to regrow their long hair, during which time their reputation would be ruined.

If we try and tie it all together, Paul was saying that a married woman who, against cultural norms, removed her covering before other men at a church gathering, was acting like an adulteress, wrongly uncovering herself. No Greek husband would ever want his wife to remove her veil or shawl in front of other men. If she did, he would be insulted by her and humiliated before others. From a Christian perspective, her “head” (her husband) would be disgraced.

And that was good reason for Paul to remind men and women, as he did, of divine principles regarding marriage, because those principles had application to the problem. So, it was time to remind the Corinthians that husbands are the heads of their wives, and that wives should be subject to their husbands, and so on. Wives who remove their veils and shawls to commit adultery, and wives who remove their veils and/or shawls in church to pray or prophesy, are both not lining up with God’s divine order in marriage.

To try to make every aspect of 1 Corinthians 11:1-17 apply, however, to modern, Western Christianity seems impossible, because Western cultural standards are so dramatically different from those in ancient Greece. Unless you are ready to begin advocating that all Christian women be veiled and shawled in public, then the best you can do is try to apply the biblical principles to marriage and church life within the context of modern culture.

Unlike ancient Greek men, most modern, Western husbands are not expecting their wives to always be shawled and veiled in public! I’ve been married for 43 years, and not once have I said to my wife, “What are you doing, going again to Walmart with your hair and face uncovered, without a shawl and veil? I will be the laughingstock of the county! Why do you so dishonor me?”

The Modesty Question

Although Paul never overtly mentions any issue of modesty in the passage under consideration, modern advocates of female head coverings often appeal to modesty as a primary justification. And for advocating female modesty, they should be commended. It is interesting, however, that they have often embraced a 350-year-old European cultural view of female modesty—a view that would have been condemned as grossly *immodest* by just about everyone in ancient Corinth!

Similarly, many modern Christian women who dress quite modestly by current cultural standards would have been condemned 350 years ago in Europe for their immodesty (which is also why they are often condemned by modern Anabaptist folks whose standards stem from Europe 350 years ago).

So, modesty is obviously relative to time and place. Having traveled in about 80 of the world's nations, I can testify that female modesty standards differ dramatically in cultures around the world. Modern Western culture has got to be one of the most immodest cultures in the history of the world.

For those reasons, in my opinion, modesty doesn't require a head covering for a woman who lives in a culture like the one in which I live. You may not agree, and that is okay! We are commanded to love each other in spite of our differences. I respect your convictions.

Although a couple of New Testament passages admonish women to be modest in general, and Jesus warned all of us to avoid causing others to stumble, there are no specific instructions that tell us what is, and what is not, modest. So, again, a woman's degree of public modesty is a matter of personal conviction—within her particular culture, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, with sincere respect toward other believers and, if she is married, in deference to her husband.

Who is to Blame When Men Stumble?

Hyper-modesty advocates frequently lay the entire burden upon women for preventing men from lusting. That simply isn't fair. You may recall that Abraham was afraid he might be killed by men who lusted after his beautiful wife (Gen. 12:14), and there is no doubt that Sarah dressed very modestly by any standards, always wearing a head shawl that could be used, if necessary, to cover her face. She may have also always worn a veil in public. Still, Abraham knew men would lust after her, and they did. There is nothing a woman can do that will guarantee no man will mentally undress her.

Also recall that Jesus didn't say, "Whoever looks at a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery in his heart, but no man should feel guilty about that, because it is always the woman's fault, usually because she wasn't dressed modest enough." No, God holds men accountable for their lust.

Yes, God holds people accountable who cause others to stumble (see Matt. 18:7), so that would certainly include immodest women who send sexual signals in public. But most of us are living in cultures where men are being bombarded every day with overt sexual imagery. It doesn't take much for modern women to be modest by comparison.

Perhaps it should also be mentioned that a man can notice the beauty of a woman without lusting after her. Female beauty was God's original idea, and so was male attraction to female beauty. So, there is nothing wrong with either. Keep in mind that Scripture specifically describes Rachel and Esther as being "beautiful of form and face" (Gen. 29:17; Esth. 2:7), so it seems both were visible and apparent. Any man could appreciate Rachel or Esther's beauty without having to succumb to lust, just as a father might admire the beauty of his own daughter.

The Bible also speaks of Rebekah as being "very beautiful" (Gen. 24:6). It also mentions the physical beauty of Abigail, Bathsheba, Tamar, Abishag, Queen Vashti and Job's daughters (1 Sam. 25:3; 2 Sam. 11:2; 13:1; 1 Kin 1:3; Esth. 1:11; Job 42:15). So, folks who always equate beauty with immodesty or lust could probably use a little biblical balancing.

But What About All the Divine Principles Paul Enumerated to Promote Head Coverings?

Let's close by reading the primary theological foundation—removing any cultural connections—that Paul laid down regarding the divine order of gender and marital roles:

But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man [husband], and the man [husband] is the head of a woman [wife], and God is the head of Christ.... For a man...is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake.... However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor

is man independent of woman. For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman; and all things originate from God (1 Cor. 11:3, 7-12).

These are timeless, unchanging truths that should be applied by followers of Christ at all times in every place. Their *application*, however, could vary at different times and places, depending on cultural practices. How they were applied in Corinth, Greece, in AD 60, for example—where culture dictated a certain degree of female modesty and public identification of marital status via women’s head coverings—is not necessarily how they should be applied in Corinth, Kentucky, AD 2022. If Paul was establishing a church in the latter of those two places, it is very doubtful he would be requiring all the married women to start wearing face veils and head shawls in public and in church gatherings! But he certainly would be admonishing believing husbands and wives to follow God-given gender roles.

If you are a woman who lives in Corinth, Greece, in AD 60, keep your veil and shawl on when you publicly pray or prophesy. If you are a woman who lives in Corinth, Kentucky, AD 2022, don’t rip off your wedding ring and throw it to the ground when you publicly pray or prophesy! In both places, dress modestly by your culture’s standards. If your husband feels uncomfortable, or worse, disgraced, with what you are wearing publicly, change. Women who do those things don’t transgress any of Paul’s timeless truths.

Finally, while the world is going to hell without the gospel and millions of people are literally starving, the church is dividing over little pieces of cloth on women’s heads! We may want to take heed that we don’t become like the Pharisees who “strained out gnats while swallowing camels” (Matt. 23:24)! Let’s walk in love with fellow believers with whom we disagree on minor issues and stay focused on what is most important!