



Chronicling the Anabaptist Rediscovery of their Special Spiritual Heritage

Introduction

By David Kirkwood

Greetings, once again, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ! I hope this issue of *The Awakening!* finds you blessed in every way.

First, thanks to everyone who wrote to us in response to the previous issue, in which we focused on the terrible plague of CSA. We give God all the praise for all the good fruit that has been, and will be, forthcoming because of addressing that very sensitive and difficult subject. To those who encouraged us in our efforts, may you similarly be encouraged in all of your efforts to serve our Lord.

I also want to especially thank those who have financially supported *The Awakening!* over the past few months, making it possible for us to print and mail this issue freely to over 55,000 households. Because of your sacrifices, minds and hearts are being challenged, and lives are being touched for the glory of God.

In this issue, we're including articles for both those who have been born again

and for those who have not yet been born again. For those in the latter category, we are including the testimony of a man whom I refer to as "Andy," a Lancaster County Amish dairy farmer who, just a few months ago, was wonderfully born again. Andy, like so many others, both Amish and English, thought he already had been born again, but he then realized that he wasn't. I think you will find his story about process of his discovery and enlightenment quite interesting. Both Andy and his wife are now "new creations in Christ," enjoying a peace and joy unlike anything they've ever experienced. Andy's story could change your life.

We are also including an article that was inspired by communication we've received from a number of folks in Lancaster. Because the Lancaster Amish are currently in the midst of a multiple-way split, comparisons are being utilized among the factions to the famous Old Testament story of Korah's Rebellion. I think you will find our article titled, "Another Look at Korah's Rebellion" to be thought provoking. Our goal, as always, is to serve as peace-makers and agents of reconciliation among all those whose Lord is Jesus.

One very interesting development since our last issue is our publication of a book that is a biblical response to the book *Why Be Plain?*, written by Old Order Stauffer Mennonites Larry Weaver and Terry Zimmerman. Larry Weaver contacted us after we published *Why Be Plain? A Biblical Response*, requesting six copies. After he read it, he and I talked by phone for two hours, and we have conversed several times since.

Like most all Old Order people, Larry impressed me as being a good man. I learned that he is just 27 years old, that he started writing his book when he was 22, and that he is not a minister in his church. Neither is the co-author of *Why Be Plain?*, Terry Zimmerman, who is in his 50s.

Larry helped me realize that I had made some assumptions regarding the practices of his Old Order Stauffer Mennonite group. I have since corrected those assumptions in the latest edition of my book. As we always remind our readers and need to remind ourselves, there is a wide spectrum of practice among Amish and other Old Order groups. Stauffer Mennonites, for example, are certainly not identical to Swartzentruber Amish!

Along those lines, if something we write in *The Awakening!* does not have application to you or your community, please just ignore it.

Why Be Plain? A Biblical Response was written for sincere seekers of biblical truth, and it addresses many common questions that Old Order people have. Instructions for ordering a paperback or free electronic copy are on the final page of this issue of *The Awakening!* And we have included the very first chapter in this issue as a way of introduction, hoping it will encourage you to read the entire book!

We've also selected some excerpts from a few of the hundreds of interesting letters—both encouraging and discouraging—that we've received over the past three months, in order to respond to them. We wish we could respond to every letter, but we simply do not have the resources. But we appreciate everyone who takes time to write to us, and we do read every letter.

Finally, speaking of letters, we've included a very special one, lovingly written three years ago by Ida Kurtz to her family members and friends soon after she was born again and consequently excommunicated for "adopting a new faith." It is very touching.

May God bless you as you read!

A Good Amish Man in Lancaster is Born Again

By David Kirkwood

In late October of 2023, I received my first communication via Facebook Messenger from an Amish man from Lancaster, PA, whom I will call "Andy." That began an off-and-on conversation that lasted right up to the present time. Much of our discussion centered around our disagreements.

If I published our entire conversation, it would amount to a small book, so I

will focus on the parts of our discussion that revolve around the subject of the new birth. Over the process of time, I found Andy to be good, sincere man who wanted to do what was right, just like most all Amish folks. I eventually learned from him that, when he started receiving *The Awakening!* magazine in his mailbox, he purchased a tablet so that he could investigate me to see if I was "a wolf in sheep's clothing" (his words).

As we began to dialogue via Facebook Messenger, I had to wonder if Andy had ever been born again and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, a subject I addressed early in my correspondence with him. I wrote:

It seems to me that a large majority of Amish people have not been born again as their Anabaptist ancestors were, so they do not have the Holy Spirit living in them, and so they will never enter God's kingdom according to Jesus, and they will remain captive to their sins, never knowing the freedom from sin that accompanies the new birth. In fact, when Amish people are born again, in many communities they will be excommunicated for "adopting a new faith." I've witnessed that first hand and heard scores of firsthand testimonies of those who have suffered it. All of this is to say, in many communities, the ordnung is an idol that usurps God, as it takes a higher place in Amish life than does obedience to God.

Andy, if you have been born again and the Holy Spirit lives in you, you don't need any exterior rules to curb your behavior, because you are a new creation in Christ, and your heart's desire is to serve God. Plus, you have the power to obey God in you by the Holy Spirit.

If you are not born again, you can be. Just believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Another way of saying that is to make Jesus your Lord. Then you will be a changed person on the inside, and it will show up on the outside too. It is the best thing that can happen to anyone.

Here is one of Andy's early replies that made me continue to wonder if he was born again:

It's very interesting reading your letters [The Awakening! magazine]. But there is one thing that seems to amaze me is you think every Amish person is a terrible person. Yes I am baptized by water, but each and every day we all have a battle against the devil and his evil!! And I hope by the grace of God that there will be enough of blood to cover my sins!! Because thru his son Jesus is there hope and the only hope!! We have all sinned or we are denying ourselves!! David I have been around in my younger days never on vacation but have been to Louisiana a month after hurricane Katrina for relief work. I've been to Mississippi a few days after tornadoes went thru. I've been a lot of places soon after disasters struck. And who do I go with?? My Amish friends with a non-Amish driver. I have no longing to go on vacation but I do long to help people in need when I can. My calling has changed since I have married. I now farm and produce food to eat. You will most likely say works don't get you to heaven and they won't alone but your works can keep you from making it to heaven. How do we live for Jesus?? If you feed a poor man, you have done it for God, if you clothe him, you have done it for God and so on. You know the rest!!

Although Andy's words contained much truth, I was concerned about a few things that he wrote. I wondered if he was equating baptism with being born again (as I know many Amish people do). I also wondered about his statement of daily battling with the devil. Christians are told in the New Testament to "resist the devil and he will flee from you" (Jas. 4:7, emphasis added) and that we have "overcome" all evil spirits because "greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). I wondered if Andy's daily struggle with the devil wasn't the struggle of someone who did not really know how to biblically resist the devil and who did not have the "Greater One" living in Him.

I was also concerned about Andy's statement, "I hope by the grace of God that there will be enough of [Jesus'] blood to cover my sins!!" Andy was uncertain about something that the New Testament is very clear on. And then he wrote, "Because through his son Jesus

is there hope and the only hope!!” Andy was only *hoping* to be saved in the end. He was uncertain of his present standing with God, something that would have been foreign to the original Christians as well as the original Anabaptists. And then Andy began listing good things he had done, like serving disaster victims, which, of course, is a very good thing. But it seemed that Andy’s view was typical of so many Amish people who are (1) hoping that they were born again when they were baptized, (2) trying to do their best in fighting the devil, (3) hoping God’s grace will be sufficient to forgive their sins, and (4) trying to earn favor with God by acting like sheep rather than goats (see Matt. 25:31-46). All of this is to say that my heart went out for Andy. I replied:

Andy, I’m not sure where you got the idea that I think that every Amish person is a terrible person. Because I don’t think that at all. There are wonderful Amish people and there are some terrible Amish people, including Amish pedophiles. The most wonderful Amish people are those who are born again. They have the Holy Spirit living in them, which makes it possible for them to obey Jesus’ commandments. And they aren’t just hoping that they are accepted by God. They know that they are children of God, born of His Spirit, filled with His Spirit, and thus filled with all the fruit of the Spirit...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness and self-control (see Galatians 5:22). They want everyone to be born again, and they share the gospel with the lost.

But it seems most Amish people are trying to do what is right by their own strength and within the fences of the ordnung. Some are trying to be good enough to get to heaven, which is impossible apart from the Holy Spirit. It is commendable that you have helped bring relief to victims of natural disasters. So have I, for the last 20 years. I have traveled to 80 nations bringing relief and assistance to the poor, including victims of natural disasters. I have raised tens of millions of dollars from other Christians all over the U.S. and around the world to help the poor in developing nations. But I haven’t done it to earn my way to heaven, but because I am a new creation in Christ, and Christ lives in me. All for His greater glory!

And I’m not hoping I’m going to heaven. I have faith. We are saved by grace through faith. Faith and hope are not the same. Hebrews 11:1 says that faith is the assurance of things hoped for. Again, I am not hoping I am going to heaven. I am certain of it, because Jesus died for my sins, He has forgiven me of all my past sins, and He has empowered me to obey His commandments. That is what it means to be born again! You could experience it too. You only have to believe. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever BELIEVES in Him, WILL NOT PERISH, but will have ETERNAL LIFE.” That is the gospel. That is the gospel that your Anabaptist forefathers believed and enjoyed, and the gospel that is found in the Dordrecht Confession that all Amish people claim to believe (but don’t). And that is the gospel that is missing from many (but not all) Amish communities. It is tragic!

By the way, in Jesus’ foretelling of the future judgment of the sheep and goats, the sheep are those who served “the least of these My brethren.” The goats are those who did not. Jesus’ brethren are all those who are born again. John wrote that “we know we have passed from death to life (been born again) because we love THE BRETHREN.” Muslims help the poor. But generally speaking, they don’t help Christians. I know, as I’ve traveled throughout the Islamic world helping Christians. All of that is to say, just helping the poor is not a sign that one is born again or on the way to heaven. Loving others who are born again is the sign of that....

Finally, being baptized in water is not the same as being born again. That is what Catholics believe, and your Anabaptist forefathers completely rejected that. Some gave their lives because they taught against “baptismal regeneration.” In the New Testament, those who truly believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who were already born again by faith in Him, were baptized in water, which symbolizes their death, burial and resurrection in Christ. (They baptized by immersion.) Just because you were baptized in water is no proof that you were or are born again. Being born again is a radical change. It is like dying and coming back to life as a brand-new person. People who are baptized who are

not yet born again do not change like that. They just go from being dry sinners to wet sinners.

In his reply, Andy assured me that he had been born again: “I enjoy your writing and yes, I am born again I believe, have faith that I will be going to heaven!” But it still seemed to me as if Andy was uncertain that he had been born again. A few days later he wrote: “I have hope for eternal salvation through the death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who on judgement day will reveal if I am truly born again.” Again, it seemed that Andy was *hoping* he was born again and *hoping* that Jesus would confirm it on judgment day. So I replied:

I’m glad you have a hope for eternal salvation through Jesus. But the New Testament teaches that we are saved by grace through FAITH. Faith and hope are two different things. Hebrews 11:1 says that “faith is the assurance if things hoped for.” If I died at this moment, I would not be hoping for eternal life. I have Jesus’ promises, and I believe them. You can know that you have eternal life. See 1 John 5:13 [which says, “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”].

I have no doubt that I am born again. How could God’s Holy Spirit come to live in someone and not radically change their life? That is what happened to me over 45 years ago, and I experience the miraculous power of God every day in my life. It is so wonderful. That is why I want everyone to experience it. You can!

Again, as I stated at the beginning of this article, shared all of our conversation and the various topics we discussed. Parts of it grew contentious, and I confess that I finally lost patience with Andy after three weeks of almost daily debate. We stopped communicating. I suspect that Andy was just as frustrated as I was.

For that reason, I was surprised to hear again from Andy a little more than a year later, in late 2024. Our renewed conversation began very congenially and respectfully, but as it progressed

over a few weeks, it seemed to me that Andy was trying to find fault with me in retaliation for the faults I found in the unbiblical ordnung-based Amish system. For example, when I told him that my wife and I did not have a TV in our home when we were raising our children, he accused me of hypocrisy for criticizing the Amish for their hundreds of extra-biblical rules. I replied:

Andy, what I find fault with in all Amish/Old Order/Plain churches is their ordnungs, which they enforce under the threat of shunning, excommunication and hellfire—something that is forbidden by the Bible as well as the 1632 Dordrecht Confession, to which all Plain groups say they subscribe. And enforcing hundreds of extra-biblical rules on adults at the threat of losing their families and livelihoods is vastly different than parents raising their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord according to what the Bible teaches parents to do! It seems you are looking to find fault and you are succeeding.

Regarding your tablet, either your church ordnung allows it or prohibits it. If it prohibits it, you are breaking your baptismal vow and your twice-annual vow to keep the ordnung (as does everyone else in ordnung-promoting groups, so I am not picking on you). But Andy, the most important thing is, have you been born again? Have you been set free from slavery to sin? Are you indwelt by the Holy Spirit? Have you experienced what Paul called “the righteousness of God”? Do you have the fruit of the Spirit evident in your life? Are you a child of God? Once you can answer “yes” to all those questions, then you won’t need hundreds of man-made rules to motivate you to do what is right. You will do what is right because you love Christ, just as He said, “If you love Me, you will keep my commandments.” To claim that we need hundreds of man-made rules in order to help us keep Christ’s commandments is to admit that we don’t love Christ.

Our goal in publishing The Awakening is so all Amish people can recover the spiritual heritage of their ancestors, who were all born again and who had no ordnung. They would be horrified by any Amish church today that has an ordnung, just as they were horrified by all the extra-biblical rules that were pro-

moted by the Roman Catholics of their day.

Our conversation went back and forth for several months, and much of it seemed like a debate. I referred Andy to some articles I had written years earlier at DavidServant.com in order to address some of his questions. He said he appreciated them, but still seemed a bit hostile. Eventually I wrote, “Andy, honestly, you are grasping at straws to find fault with me.” He replied, “Do you understand now how it feels?” It seems we had come to another impasse.

A few days later, however, Andy surprised me with this text:

David I just wanted to get back to you and your efforts to spread the gospel. I hope you will forgive me for some of the things I said but like I said in the beginning I wanted to see who you are.... So I’m sorry I said some of the things I did but I was testing you to see if I really can trust you or not. I enjoy reading your things which I don’t always understand everything but that’s okay it’s called learning and growing!!! Yes I am a member of the Amish church here in the middle of Lancaster County PA, and our church needs prayers right now!! I honestly have no idea what will give in the next few months but we will live on, Lord willing, and find out!!! I really like your post on your Facebook titled, “There’s a Sheep Born Every Second.” If I may I’d like to make some copies and give them to people when the time is right!! Want to wish you well and good luck on spreading the gospel!! I send this in peace and I hope you will accept!! I’m done being your worst critic and hope to be a friend!! If you don’t mind, I’m sure I’ll still ask questions!!!:)

That was certainly a welcome communication! I had heard the Lancaster County Amish were in the midst of a split (over ordnung issues, of course), and it seemed Andy was starting to open his mind in the midst of it. I replied:

Andy, all good to read this morning! I have to admit that I had almost given up on you and lost all hope. But I’m glad to see your true heart, and that you are open to compare Amish tradition with the Word of God. There are some wonderful things are happening in Lancaster.

For a number of weeks after that, Andy and I had a lot of positive dialogue. Andy also frequently mentioned the trouble in Lancaster, and his hope for reconciliation between the two factions. One time he wrote:

Wow just reading your things [on Facebook] about the author of Why Be Plain? contacting you!! There is a lot of pressure on the bishops right now from the churches!! Without the threat of excommunication people are speaking up and letting their voices be heard!!! Keep on praying for the Amish community!!

And a few days later, Andy sent me another message that was like dropping a bomb:

David I just can’t help but share this with you!! A week ago my wife and I were preparing to just walk away from our church district and search for something else because it was apparent that we couldn’t find the true peace we were searching for. But Saturday morning we decided to attend our ordnung church but not agree to the ordnung because we just didn’t feel like a true follower of Christ needs an ordnung other than Christ and God’s will. [That sentence shocked me!] So we went with feeling of we are now going to follow Jesus and not the ordnung. Little did we realize till that evening what joy and peace we would have within ourselves!! We both didn’t understand it at first but as the evening went on, we both realized that our church ordnung was being our lord and that by saying no to the ordnung and making Jesus Christ our Lord was what we were missing in our life!!!! We knew Jesus as our savior as our only hope for heaven to be right with God!!! But we did not know him as the Lord of our life!!!! Sadly, without knowing it, our ordnung was the ruler of our life, but no more!!!! We can now both boldly proclaim that not only is Jesus Christ our savior but he is also our Lord and shepherd!!! Not the Amish church ordnung!!!!

I was thrilled to hear that news, as it appeared that Andy and his wife had finally experienced an authentic new birth. They had been born again because they had finally truly believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. When you believe in Him, He becomes your Lord. If Jesus is

not your absolute Lord, you are not born again. It is just that simple.

Not long after that, Andy wrote:

David we are still trying to wrap our brains around this!! It just seems so crazy... We thought we were following the Lord till we really started studying the 23rd Psalm and started removing "the Lord" from it and instead inserted "the ordnung" where it says "Lord" and all of a sudden we started realizing that this simply does not work!!! That we are trying to serve two masters and not just one!!! We feel so unworthy!!! But we are so grateful that the Lord had patience with us and has revealed it to us!!!! Wishing you and your family a blessed Easter weekend!!

I felt that Andy's understanding was profound. He realized, just as Jesus declared, that it is impossible to serve two masters. He and his wife realized that the ordnung had been their master, rather than Jesus. But now, Jesus had become their Master. I replied:

Your testimony is going to help many other Amish folks find the same peace and joy that you now have! May you and your family also have a blessed weekend celebrating the resurrection of our Lord, and His resurrection in everyone who believes in Him!

Andy later wrote:

So our ordnung church was a week ago. So after we [made Jesus our Lord] is when the peace and joy came over us. It felt like we rejected a "lord" that was standing in the way so we can truly serve and follow Jesus!! The true Lord!!.... The thing I still struggle with is the fact that maybe we just didn't understand something correctly, or was the ordnung really that much in the way that we couldn't truly understand it!!! It's just that a peace and joy came over me and my wife that we had never experienced before.

I replied:

I suspect what you and your wife have experienced is a genuine new birth. With that comes the indwelling of the Holy Spirit along with all the fruit of the Spirit, of which two of the first three are joy and peace (see Gal. 5:22). And there is no doubt that the ordnung can be an idol. Another way of say-

ing that is, as you did, the ordnung is one's lord.

Andy replied:

The peace and joy we found we just want everyone around us to feel it as well!!! And yes, we feel it is the Holy Spirit, and we both never want to lose it ever again!! We feel we have so much to learn but also we want to share what we know!! One thing I've learned is to never give up searching for the truth!!! David any tips or advice I greatly appreciate!!! I would enjoy having a phone conversation with you sometime!! I never felt ready for that but I do now!

I replied:

All great to hear! Jesus promised, "Seek, and you will find," and He has kept his promise to you!

As far as advice, the most important thing is to stay on the same course. Keep seeking and finding. Jesus promised, "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him" (John 14:21). So you can expect that Jesus, by His Holy Spirit in you, will disclose (or reveal) Himself to you as you follow Him.

You are probably going to face some rejection from others who don't understand what has happened to you, but love them anyways (as Jesus commanded).

Andy soon wrote:

Thanks for all that. And yes on the rejection part. If I put it into perspective how long it took me to truly see it, which it's got to be getting close to 2 years that I tried to understand what you are saying, that's all I need to think of to stay patient that it took me a long time!!!

And a few days later Andy wrote:

Hey we are doing well still adjusting to everything and our new outlook on following Jesus. It's crazy how much more the Bible makes sense now!! Compared to how it used to!!....

This journey is interesting. We are finding more and more people who are like us David, who are walking away from the ordnung and

making Jesus their true Lord!!! And we are encountering a lot of people who were just like we were. They want to believe what we say but still can't quite give up on the need for the ordnung.

Andy's experiences are very typical for those who are born again. The Bible starts making more sense, and the reason is because born-again people have the Holy Spirit in them to teach them. Jesus promised His disciples, "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things" (John 14:26). And those who have experience the new birth and all the blessings that accompany it want everyone else to experience it as well.

If you have not yet experienced it, you can. It is as simple as making Jesus your Lord! That is what it means to believe in Him.

Here is one of Andy's most recent communications, and one of my favorites:

It really is amazing this new journey of faith in Christ!! I love to sing and always have loved songs like Amazing Grace!! But since our new birth, I can now relate to the person who wrote that song! I was lost but now I'm found, was blind but now I see!!! Amazing Grace!!!!

(If you would like to personally communicate with Andy about his new birth, please contact *The Awakening!* to request his contact info.)

Another Look at Korah's Rebellion

By David Kirkwood

Most Christians know the Old Testament story of Korah's rebellion against Moses. Korah was one of 250 "leaders of the congregation, chosen in the assembly, men of renown" (Num. 16:2). Recall that overburdened Moses had assigned from among Israel's 600,000 men (Num. 1:46) "leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens" (Ex. 18:13-25). So, the 250 men who

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rose up against Moses were from among those *leaders*. That is an important fact to remember.

The Bible tells us that those 250 leaders “assembled together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, ‘You have gone far enough, for all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is in their midst; so why do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?’” (Num. 16:3).

Their collective rebellion against Moses and Aaron resulted in their collective judgment. The ground beneath their encampments “split open; and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, and their households, and all the men who belonged to Korah with their possessions. So they and all that belonged to them went down alive to Sheol; and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly” (Num. 16:31-33). It is a tragic story from beginning to end.

Only God knows how many times Korah’s story has been employed by Christian leaders to put the fear of God into those who are grumbling against their leadership. They see themselves as leaders who are ordained by God, comparable to Moses and Aaron, and they see church members as rebels who are questioning their authority, comparable to Korah and those who joined him. The problem is, that analogy is flawed on several levels.

A more accurate analogy is to compare Moses, not to ministers or church leaders, but to Jesus (just as the Bible does in Hebrews 3:1-6). Moses, like Jesus, was undeniably called and sent by God, and he spoke directly on God’s behalf. There was no doubt about his divinely-granted authority. Through Moses, God gave Israel laws that He expected them to obey. They are collectively referred to in the Bible as the “Law of Moses” just as the commandments that Jesus gave are collectively referred to in the Bible as the “Law of Christ” (1 Cor. 9:21, Gal. 6:2). God used Moses to deliver the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, just as He used Jesus to deliver us from our sins.

So Moses, like Jesus, held a singularly-important position of leadership in his time over God’s people. The thousands of other leaders in Israel, like Korah, were of no comparison to Moses, just as the thousands of clergymen in the church world today are of no comparison to Jesus, including all Amish bishops and ministers. Jesus alone is the head of the church (Eph. 1:22; 5:23; Col. 1:18). All other leaders are under Him, just as all other leaders in Israel were under Moses.

Moses and Jesus were undeniably chosen by God. Nobody voted them in! In contrast, Israel’s thousands of lesser leaders were chosen by men, just as are all Amish bishops and ministers (even if they are secondarily chosen by lot which is equated with being chosen by God).

All of this is to say that Korah and the other leaders who wanted some of Moses’ authority are not really comparable to disagreeable church members. *Rather, they are much more comparable to ministry leaders who want, whether knowingly or unknowingly, some of the authority that rightly belongs only to Jesus.*

Here is an example—that may be surprising to some—of what I’m referring to: When ministry leaders invent rules that can’t be found in the New Testament, and they enforce those man-made rules by threat of shunning, excommunication and hellfire, they are actually creating *commandments* and *establishing requirements for salvation*. They thus usurp authority that belongs only to Jesus (whether they realize it or not). Again, Jesus alone is Lord and head of the church. He alone has the right to make commandments and establish requirements for salvation. *Anyone else who does those things is comparable to Korah and the 250 leaders in Israel who wanted some of Moses’ God-ordained authority.*

And when church members question the legitimacy of those man-made commandments because Jesus is their Lord, and because they are committed to only following Him and obeying His commandments, those church members are certainly not comparable to Korah and the other rebel leaders. Rather, they are

comparable to all the people of Israel who did not join in Korah’s rebellion, but who remained faithful to Moses, a leader whom they were sure was ordained by God.

Recall that Jesus solemnly warned, “Do not be called teacher; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ” (Matt. 23:8-10).

Think about those sobering words from the lips of the Son of God! Although most of us would think that calling someone “teacher,” “father,” or “leader” would be a relatively harmless thing to do, God views it as potentially very dangerous. *He is deeply concerned that a human leader might usurp what only belongs to Him.* Giving someone a title that rightfully only belongs to God can be a form of idolatry. Scripture tells us the He is a “jealous God” (Ex. 20:5; 34:14). He declared, “I will not give My glory to another” (Is. 42:8). Those truths should cause every ministry leader to shudder.

All of this being so, what must God think when church leaders require baptismal candidates to vow their lifelong allegiance, not only to a set of man-made commandments that are powerless to save anyone, but to the human leaders who promote and enforce those commandments? Could they actually be requiring new church members to not only commit a form of idolatry, but also to join them in a rebellion against the Lord Jesus Christ, just as Korah led a rebellion against Moses?

And what an affront it must be to the Great God and Savior—who provided a means of salvation through His torturous death and glorious resurrection through which He atoned for our sins and offers to indwell and empower everyone who believes in Him so that they can be freed from sin and obey Him—when human beings invent hundreds of rules that are portrayed as essential requirements for salvation? Who would dare ever think of such a thing, much less promote it? Clearly, only those whose lord is not the Great and Mighty

Lord Jesus, who is “the King of kings and Lord of lords” (Rev. 19:16). They walk where angels dare not tread.

And this is exactly what it all comes down to, whether you are a layman or a leader: The all-important question, *Is Jesus your Lord?* If Jesus actually is your Lord, He is your *only* Lord. You can’t have two lords, just as Jesus declared: “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other.” (Matt. 6:24). Jesus then contrasted God as master and money as master, but He could have contrasted God as master with anything else that people allow to control them.

Jesus reiterated this same theme when He declared: “If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters...he cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:26) and, “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). The Lord Jesus Christ demands and deserves our highest allegiance, devotion, and love, far beyond the allegiance, devotion and love that we naturally possess for our closest family members.

All this being so, every Amish bishop and minister needs to ask himself, “Am I leading the flock to submit to the ordnung or to the Lord Jesus Christ?”

And every lay person needs to similarly ask himself or herself, “Are my bishop and ministers leading me to submit to them and the ordnung, or are they leading me to submit to the only true Lord and His commandments? Are they comparable to Korah who wanted some of Moses’ God-ordained authority, or are they comparable to the majority of Israel’s leaders, who were submitted to God’s ordained leadership through Moses?”

It is an undeniable fact that the people of Israel could not submit to Moses *and* Korah. Similarly, no one can submit to the Lord Jesus Christ and any earthly church leader who usurps some of His

authority. No one can serve two masters.

Who controls your life? The ministry? The ordnung? Religious tradition? Your family members? Or the Lord Jesus Christ? Unless your answer is “the Lord Jesus Christ,” you have not yet actually believed in Him, because He is Lord. Moreover, you have not yet been born again.

“But does not God appoint leaders to whom we should submit?”

Yes, He does appoint leaders to whom He expects us to submit, but only if those leaders are submitted to the Lord Jesus Christ themselves. As the apostle Paul wrote, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1, KJV). Leaders who “lord it over” their flocks usurp Christ’s lordship. Recall that Jesus warned, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles *lord it over* them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave” (Matt. 20:25-27). True ministry leaders are servants who, first of all, serve the Lord Jesus Christ, and who secondly serve their flocks by teaching them, by precept and example, to serve and obey the Lord Jesus Christ, neither adding to or subtracting from His commandments.

Recall that Peter wrote to ministry leaders of his day:

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, *according to the will of God*; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; *nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge*, but proving to be examples to the flock (1 Pet. 5:1-3, emphasis added).

Ministry leaders who “lord it over” their flocks take what belongs only to the singular Lord who is ordained

by God. Those who usurp any of His authority—whether intentionally or unintentionally—should be shunned just as Korah and his band should have been shunned. Recall that God warned all of the Israelites who were loyal to His ordained leader, Moses, to move away from the dwellings of Korah and the other rebels, lest they be swallowed by the earth that was about to open underneath them. The lesson is clear. God’s people don’t want to support or be anywhere near ministry leaders who want to usurp any of Christ’s authority or lordship!

Is Jesus your Lord?

Why Be Plain? A Biblical Response, Chapter 1

Chapter 1 of *Why Be Plain?* introduces a number of themes that authors Weaver and Zimmerman elaborate on in later chapters. One of those themes is the threat of “easy-believism,” which the authors define on page 3:

On top of that, the message of easy-believism preachers have reached the ears of many, teaching that one’s lifestyle has nothing to do with being a Christian.

That particular theme is fully addressed in Chapter 2 of *Why Be Plain?*, titled “A Working Faith.” Along with many others, I have been warning about the same danger for decades. I refer to it as the “false-grace gospel,” which is not only a threat to Plain people but to everyone who desires eternal life. Allow me to elaborate.

Anyone who has read the Bible knows that salvation depends on God’s grace, because all of us have sinned, disobeying our Creator. He has written His moral law on every conscience, and we are without excuse (Rom. 2:14–16). Therefore, if we hope to escape our rightful punishment, we need forgiveness, and forgiveness, of course, is predicated upon grace.

What is grace? It is often defined as “unmerited favor.” That is because grace cannot be deserved or earned; otherwise it is not grace.

Perhaps the most well-known passage in the New Testament regarding the fact that salvation is by grace is Ephesians 2:8–9:

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 (emphasis added).

Because of that passage and others like it, some have concluded that there can be no behavioral requirement connected to salvation; otherwise, they claim, “salvation is not by grace, but by works.” Such folks often talk about the *unconditional* grace of God. God’s grace can’t be conditional, they claim, for then salvation would not be by grace.

But hundreds of New Testament passages contradict this idea of salvation by “unconditional grace.” One of them is the very passage I just quoted, Ephesians 2:8–9. Paul wrote that we are saved “by grace ... *through faith*.” Our salvation does not hinge just on grace; it also hinges on faith. Obviously, grace is God’s part in salvation, and just as obviously, we have something to do with the faith part. Both facts are repeatedly affirmed in Scripture.

So for someone to benefit from God’s saving grace, he must have faith. If salvation’s only component was grace, then everyone would be saved, because Jesus died for everyone (1 John 2:2), God desires for everyone to be saved (1 Tim. 2:3; 2 Pet. 3:9), and His grace is extended toward everyone (Tit. 2:11). But not everyone benefits from God’s saving grace, because not all meet the condition of God’s *conditional* grace, which is faith.

Faith That Saves

Of course, *saving* faith is not just faith that the sun will rise tomorrow, or that a man named Jesus walked the earth 2,000 years ago. Saving faith is *faith in a divine person*. That person is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the object of faith

that saves. The Bible’s most well-known verse affirms this fact:

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).

What a wonderful promise! Those who believe in a unique person—God’s only begotten Son—shall not perish but will have eternal life.

Obviously, it is not just ten seconds of faith in Jesus, followed by a lifetime of unbelief, that save a person from perishing (as some strangely claim). It is faith that *continues* to believe in Jesus. That is why the original apostles repeatedly encouraged believers to “continue in the faith.” For example, the apostle Paul wrote:

Yet He [Jesus] has now reconciled you [to God] in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach—if *indeed you continue in the faith* firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard (Col. 1:22–23a, emphasis added).

Many other New Testament scriptures affirm that same fact. The apostles not only encouraged believers to “continue in the faith” (Col. 1:22–23; Acts 14:22), but also to “remain true to the Lord” (Acts 11:23), “not grow weary of doing good” (2 Thess. 3:13; Gal. 6:9), “hold fast to their confession” (Heb. 3:6, 14; 4:14; 10:23; 1 Cor. 15:2; Rev. 2:12; 3:11), and run with endurance the race that is set before them” (Heb. 12:1).

Faith’s Fruit

Naturally, anyone who truly believes in Jesus—the “King of kings and Lord of lords” (1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 17:14; 19:16)—will strive to obey Him. That is why Paul wrote of “the obedience of faith” (Rom. 1:5; 16:26).

That is why Peter wrote that by practicing godliness, “the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied

to you” (2 Pet. 1:11).

That is why John wrote, “By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments” (1 John 2:3).

That is why James wrote that faith without works is dead, useless, and cannot save (Jas. 2:14–26).

And that is why Jude warned about false teachers “who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness [a license to sin] and [in so doing] deny our only *Master and Lord, Jesus Christ*” (Jude 4, emphasis added). The five apostles who wrote the New Testament letters could not have made it clearer.

Clearly, the proof of continued faith is continued obedience. Saving faith starts with repentance and continues with obedience. Anything less is not saving faith.

And this is what Weaver and Zimmerman similarly warn against in the second chapter of *Why Be Plain?* According to them, numbers of Plain people have been deceived by the false-grace gospel that is prevalent in so many North American churches. That is indeed tragic. Here is a helpful paragraph penned by Weaver and Zimmerman:

The salvation-by-faith-alone theory [that is, an alleged faith that is void of works] ... is likely a big factor in the decisions of various people to move on from an Old Order setting, since it helps them think salvation has nothing to do with what we do, but only with what we believe. Some theologians bring so much discredit to good works and obedience that it has become a negative term to many professing Christians. It makes them suspicious of living holy lives for fear that it might be a denial of faith and a rejection of Christ—in spite of the fact that Christ clearly taught that those who do not obey Him are the ones who reject Him! Satan has twisted man’s understanding of the Bible to where they are more afraid of the works of God than the works of the devil!

And thus it's not only unnecessary to strictly obey the Bible. It is viewed as sin! (p. 15).

That appraisal is tragically true. The false-grace gospel reduces faith to nothing more than mental acknowledgement that may not produce any fruit of obedience. Weaver and Zimmerman add:

As a holy God, He [Jesus] cannot overlook unholy, unrepentant lives. On the Day of Judgment, He will sit on the throne, dividing the saved from the unsaved. All our works are written in a book, and we will be judged according to our works written therein. The Holy Bible will be the standard we'll be judged by—according to whether we followed its teachings (p. 16).

In the second sentence of this last quotation, the authors seem to be citing Jesus' warning found in His foretelling of the judgment of the sheep and the goats (Matt. 25:31–46). At that judgment, the eternal destiny of everyone will be determined by whether or not they cared for those whom Jesus referred to as “the least of these my brothers”—believers who suffered from hunger, thirst, homeless, lack of sufficient clothing, being ill, or imprisonment. Those who cared for “the least of these” will inherit God's kingdom and eternal life. Those who did not will be cast into eternal fire (Matt. 25:34, 41, 46).

Jesus said nothing about faith in that particular warning, and that can only be because genuine faith always results in obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ and love for brothers and sisters in Christ (1 John 2:3; 3:14). So all of us should ask ourselves if we will be among the sheep or goats at that future judgment. Are we making sacrifices for those whom Jesus referred to as the “least of these His brothers”? If we aren't, then we're goats. We prove by our actions that we really don't believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, even if we think we do.

Jesus' warning in that passage motivated me, decades ago, to launch a Christian organization called *Heaven's Family*, which, with the generous help of

thousands of followers of Christ, serves poor and suffering believers all over the world. We do it because we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and all that He said. We obey Him because we believe in Him. It is just that simple.

Weaver and Zimmerman clearly state that “the Holy Bible will be the standard we'll be judged by—according to whether we followed its teachings.” The only thing I say differently is that we will be judged specifically by whether or not we obeyed the commandments of Christ.

Paul's Conditional Grace

Later in chapter 2, Weaver and Zimmerman point out that although Paul told the Ephesian believers that they were “saved by grace” (Eph. 2:8–9), just a few paragraphs later, in the same letter, he warned them about the danger of disobedience:

But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God (Eph. 5:3–5).

Clearly, Paul believed the Ephesian Christians were capable of committing immorality, impurity and greed, or else he would not have admonished them to avoid all three. And he further warned them that “no immoral or impure person or covetous man ... has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.” So the grace by which they were saved was conditional.

Weaver and Zimmerman also respond to the often-used argument that another of Paul's letters, Galatians, proves that obedience has nothing to do with ultimate salvation because salvation is by grace. The authors wisely point out that if that were true, Paul would have had no reason to warn the Galatian Christians in the same letter that certain sinful behaviors could cause them to forfeit

their inheritance in God's kingdom:

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* (Gal. 5:19–21, emphasis added).

All this proves that the grace God is offering to all of humanity through Jesus is not a license to sin. Rather, it is a temporary opportunity to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, turn from one's rebellion, be forgiven of all one's past sins, be spiritually reborn, be set free from captivity to sin, be empowered to obey Him by the indwelling Holy Spirit, be forgiven of any future sins through confession, and inherit eternal life in His eternal kingdom. *That is salvation by grace through faith.*

The Nonsense of Unconditional Grace

The idea of unconditional grace is actually foreign to the Bible, just as it is in human experience. If you have ever been a father or a mother, you know that. Sometimes your children may disobey you, but you don't discipline them immediately. Rather, you warn them. That is an example of conditional grace. You aren't giving your disobedient child a license to disobey you. Rather, you are showing your child conditional grace in the hope that they won't disobey again. If your child does disobey again in the same way, they probably won't enjoy the same grace that you offered after their initial disobedience.

Here's another example. Imagine that you are caught by a state policeman driving your buggy down the wrong side of the road. Imagine him saying to you, “I'm not going to issue a citation that will require you to pay a \$500 fine. I'm going to show you grace.” Is his grace “unconditional”? If you want to find out, just thank him for his grace and then continue driving down the road on the wrong side. You will soon discover

that his grace was conditioned upon your repentance!

Recall that Jesus warned, “But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions” (Matt. 6:15). Obviously, forgiveness from our Heavenly Father is an expression of His grace. It is undeserved favor. But His forgiveness hinges on us forgiving others. His grace hinges on our grace. So His grace is conditional. Conditional grace is still grace.

The very idea that unless grace is unconditional, it is not grace is absurd. God’s saving grace is undeniably conditional. This is why Paul wrote about God’s grace:

For the *grace of God* has appeared, bringing *salvation* to all men, *instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly* in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds (Tit. 2:11–14, emphasis added).

That was the apostle Paul’s gospel of grace. Again, God’s grace is not a license to sin (as it is portrayed in so many churches today). Rather, it is a call to repentance and an opportunity to be purified and prepared for Christ’s return.

Clearly, a behavioral standard is required to ultimately inherit God’s kingdom, and Paul repeatedly refers to it. We have already considered warnings found in Ephesians and Galatians. Here is another one from 1 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).

It is indeed tragic that so many Plain people have fallen for the false-grace gospel. They are joining millions of non-Plain people in their deception, and when they wake up, it may well be too late. Their opportunity to rightly respond to God’s gracious offer may have passed.

The Unwitting Contribution to Plain People’s Deception

Based on what they wrote in chapter 2, I’m sure Weaver and Zimmerman would never intend to drive any Plain person into the deception of the false-grace gospel. Tragically, however, they unwittingly do that very thing when they promote, in the same chapter, extra-biblical, Plain traditions as essential components of saving faith.

As we have seen, obedience to Christ’s commandments is an essential component of saving faith. But Weaver and Zimmerman make obedience to the ordnung essential as well. That adds the weight of hundreds of extra rules that must be followed, rules that were never required or mentioned by Jesus or His apostles. That heavy burden often pushes people to look for an escape, which makes them extremely vulnerable to the false-grace gospel. Tragically, they embrace a message that removes all responsibility to obey Christ’s commandments. I have seen it happen over and over again. I’ve even had former Amish people who claim to be born again, but who have embraced the false-grace gospel, refer to me as a “wolf in sheep’s clothing and a “false prophet” because I teach that obedience to Christ is a necessary component of saving faith.

Immediately after Weaver and Zimmerman expose the fallacy promoted by the false-grace gospel that holiness is not essential, they lament:

Now it doesn’t matter if you disobey the church, how you dress, what you own, or what you do. It doesn’t matter if you live like the world as long as you have mentally accepted the correct beliefs (p. 15).

The authors don’t bemoan the idea that, under the deception of the false-grace gospel, people assume they can ignore the plight of the “least of these,” practice immorality or greed, or commit any of the other sins Paul listed in 1 Corinthians, Galatians and Ephesians that prevent people from inheriting God’s kingdom. Rather, they focus on ordnung rules. That may not be so evident to non-Plain readers, but it is certainly clear to Plain readers.

If I was to paraphrase, for the benefit of non-Plain readers, the two sentences I just quoted from *Why Be Plain?*, they would read something like this:

Now it doesn’t matter if you disobey the church [that is, if you disobey the hundreds of ordnung rules that are enforced by Plain church leaders], how you dress [that is, if you keep the scores of ordnung regulations about outward attire], what you own, [that is, if you own what is forbidden by the ordnung, such as cars and cell phones], or what you do [that is, what you do that transgresses any other ordnung rules]. It doesn’t matter if you live like the world [that is, not wearing clothing that identifies you as Plain, or driving cars, owning cell phones and other technologies and so on], as long as you have mentally accepted the correct beliefs.

To Weaver and Zimmerman, keeping the ordnung is just as important as keeping Christ’s commandments. A few pages later, they write:

If we truly live for Christ, His commandments are not grievous, *neither are the rules of the church* hard to keep, since they help us live out His commandments (p. 22, emphasis added).

Clearly, in the minds of the authors, “living for Christ” entails both keeping Christ’s commandments and keeping the rules of the church. That is an admission that church rules are different from Christ’s commandments and yet are of equal importance. The justification given for the hundreds of church rules that govern every aspect of Plain life is that “they help us live out His commandments” (p. 22).

That may sound good but, as I will show later in this book, the ordnung actually causes Plain people to live out Jesus' commandments *as they interpret them through Plain lenses*, and not as the early Christians or the earliest Anabaptists interpreted them. Moreover, ordnungs also help Plain people follow age-old traditions that have no connection to Jesus' commandments or to any moral, ethical, or biblical principle.

My point here is that the heavy weight of ordnungs makes Plain people vulnerable to the deception of the false-grace gospel. If Plain people want to see fewer people depart from their ranks, if they want to keep their families intact, if they desire more harmony and unity and less division, and (most importantly) if they want to see more of their family members and friends in heaven, they should to take a look at their ordnungs in the light of the New Testament. I hope to help in that regard in the remainder of this book. (To receive a copy, see information on the final page of this magazine.)

Letters from Our Beloved Readers

By Jonas Kurtz

As usual, we received hundreds of responses to this past issue of *The Awakening!* in which we addressed the pervasive issue of CSA. Those responses ranged from people who were themselves victims, to people who were appalled to think such sin is named amongst them, to people who denied that these things happen, to people who claimed the majority of people who claimed to be victims were not victims but rather willing participants. Thankfully the demented thinking of that latter category was only a few fringe folks, and I have to wonder how many victims they themselves have left in their wake.

Below are three encouraging notes that represent a large number of the people who reach out to us.

Keep up your encouraging papers of The Awakening! I am saddened by the way some people lash out at you. Don't be discouraged! Praying God will keep you strong. Sometimes it is hard to control anger towards them (for me anyway). Stay strong! I like the way you just kick all doubts and fear as you go.

Thank you for all your hard work in spreading the gospel... The total absolute "peace that passes all understanding" that comes with the assurance of being born again is so very precious and you wish you could give it to all who are around you – but hearts are closed...

My name is _____. I am 14 years old. I am blessed with loving parents and four precious siblings. We live in a large Old Order Amish community in _____, MO. However, we ourselves are not Amish, but we are what Amish people call "English?" We are of Russian heritage.

I love and admire the Amish. They are a group that I have always been interested in studying. The Awakening! has really helped me in my study of the Amish. I love reading The Awakening! When it comes in the mail, the first chance I get, I devour it! I know that The Awakening! is mostly for the Amish, but if possible I would like to keep receiving it.

Thank you. Keep up with the good work. Don't let the people who write cruel, unkind letter to you discourage you. May God bless you.

Here is a letter from someone who could use all of our prayers:

Take me off your mailing list immediately! I don't want anything to do with your false teachings. I think maybe you are holding a grudge and a lot of your information is just made up. So please share it with someone who is more gullible. AND STICK IT WHERE THE SUN DON'T SHINE!! Bye Now. (Middlefield, OH)

Here is an interesting letter from someone who admits that there is sexual abuse among Amish communities but

believes that anyone who has a smart-phone is not Amish:

Marie's story is probably true. And I agree there are too many of those stories amongst the Amish. I am trying in my corner to be aware. To remain silent is sin! But the Old Order Amish church does not allow Facebook usage, so how do you expect me to believe your survey? If I have a smart phone I am not a true member of the Old Order Amish church. (Metroplex, MI)

Here is an encouraging email we received from an *Awakening!* reader who recognizes the need for laborers in the harvest:

Hello Jonas, Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I pray all is well, my friend. I thank the Lord Jesus for your evangelistic zeal. And the love you have for the lost. We need more laborers sent out into the harvest. I would like to request a PDF copy of The Awakening!. I'd also like to know how I can get David's book, Why Be Plain? A Biblical Response? If you could let me know I would greatly appreciate it, my friend. God bless you.

Below is an email from an Amish man who is disturbed, as everyone should be, that CSA exists in Amish circles. In the first half he is asking why it exists, but he eventually answers his own question. In a nutshell, CSA exists because there are Amish people who have not yet been born again.

Hi, Can you email me a copy of Why Be Plain?

Regarding sexual abuse. A close family member works with abused Amish girls and women to help them find healing in Jesus and to forgive their abuser. And yes they have reported abusers to the Authorities in the process and worked with many church leaders to resolve things.

It is mind boggling to me that there are hundreds or maybe even thousands of sexual abuse cases currently in our Amish circles and the big question is why? How did we fall so far from our original Anabaptist roots and the faith established through Jesus and the disciples? Imagine Paul writing a letter to the Amish church of today regarding sexual abuse. I'm guessing he would be very

Chronicling the Anabaptist Rediscovery of their Special Spiritual Heritage

disappointed and would write a rebuking letter asking for repentance. Again, I asked the big question why? Why so many abuse cases?

Is it because of the lack of Sunday school and teaching our young about Jesus on a level that they understand at a very young age? Is it because we don't have youth groups for each church that would allow our youth to participate and focus on clean fun? Is it because we don't allow Bible study and searching the Lord's word together as a small group of believers seeking and walking, journeying through this life?

Have we become a group that is more focused in the outward appearance and a traditions than we are focused on the hearts and the very souls of our individual members within our community? I feel that we Amish largely have a false sense of security with our traditions that allow predators to hide in plain sight, I think that only through a big shift and a heartfelt revival throughout the Amish community, allowing certain traditions to be changed as we become a group of people that can live with little focus on the outward appearance, but more focused on the inner renewing of our hearts and minds. And to be born again as a follower of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. To be lusting or have hidden sins is the most worldly way you could possibly live your life.

Worldly is not driving a truck or not being English. In Jesus time they did not have vehicles but in the Scripture it asks the believers to be separated from the world in which they were referring to the purification of the heart. It seems like we Amish think that worldly is materialistic things and it can be if the heart is wrong, but again it is a heart that needs to be born again and be purified through the love of Christ that we can be separate from the world.

Currently a 33-year-old husband and father in the Old Order Amish church.

Here is a short letter to which we wrote a response. The letter is in italics and our reply is indented below it.

Just to let you know... Jesus did not get baptized twice like you guys do. You are feeling guilty about leaving your faith so you want

to convince other people that your way is right. That letter "The Awakening" is the devil's play. The devil wants to get all the people to go with him. And that's exactly what you guys are doing, trying to get people to leave their faith. (Bryant, IN)

Reply: It is true that Jesus did not get baptized twice. As the sinless Son of God, we don't understand why He was even baptized once. Do you? But to claim that no one should never be baptized twice because Jesus was only baptized once is a weak argument. You might as well claim that, because Jesus only washed His disciples' feet once, so we should only wash the feet of fellow believers once. Or because Jesus only ate the Lord's Supper with His disciples once, so we should only eat the Lord's Supper once.

All your Anabaptist ancestors were baptized twice, once as babies in the state churches as required by the authorities, and then once again as true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Anabaptist actually means "re-baptized." And their re-baptisms were part of the reason they were persecuted by the authorities. How ironic it is that people with an Anabaptist heritage would be finding fault with modern "re-baptizers."

If you read your Bible, you know that there is a story of twelve men getting rebaptized by the apostle Paul in Acts 19:1-7. The first time they were baptized, they were not true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul baptized them a second time once they truly believed in Jesus. Similarly, many Amish people, just like us, feel that they should be rebaptized when they finally realize that they were not true believers in, and followers of, the Lord Jesus Christ when they were first baptized. For that reason, our first baptism as teenagers was meaningless. But our second baptism is very meaningful, because it represents what has happened to us now that we have become true followers of the Lord Jesus Christ and have been born again. According to the

New Testament, true believers in the Lord Jesus have died, been buried, and raised to live a new resurrected life as "new creations in Christ" (Rom. 6:1-7, Col. 2:11-14, 2 Cor. 5:17). And that is what our baptism represents. When we are immersed under the water, it represents our death and burial. When we are raised out of the water, it represents our being washed of our sins and our resurrection. I am talking, of course, about baptism by immersion, as the early Christians practiced it. The Greek word translated "baptize" in the New Testament is *baptizo*, and it literally means "to immerse, submerge, or wash."

When people genuinely believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and are born again, they start obeying Him, and according to the New Testament, the very first step of obedience is to be baptized. (In the book of Acts, new believers were baptized immediately.) This includes Amish people who, for the first time in their lives, make Jesus Lord of their lives. Even if their ordnung tells them not to be rebaptized, they want to obey Jesus, remembering that Jesus said it is impossible to serve two masters. If the ordnung takes precedence over what Jesus commanded, then Jesus is not Lord, the ordnung is.

To your claims that we are trying to get people to leave their faith, and that we have left our faith, I wonder if you have read any issues of *The Awakening*.

First, we often mention "born-again Amish people." Many born-again Amish people financially support our work. We've published articles written by Amish bishops. Many of the testimonies we have published are those of Amish people who are still Amish. And, in many of the testimonies we've published of ex-Amish people, the authors have said that they wanted to remain Amish, but they were excommunicated when they were truly born again.

Second, we have not “left our faith.” On the contrary, we discovered that we actually did not possess real faith. We were just culturally Amish, just like so many others. When we finally believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, making Him, not our culture or the ordnung, our Lord, we repented of our sins and were born again. That is when our faith began!

A Letter to My Family

By Jonas and Ida Kurtz

In April 2022, my wife Ida and I were excommunicated from our Amish church because of our decision to follow the Lord Jesus Christ rather than church traditions, which resulted in our being genuinely born again. It was a difficult and painful time, but it was also a time of peace and freedom. Not freedom from obedience to God, but freedom from our past slavery to sin. Freedom from bondage and brokenness because of the redemptive work of Christ in our lives. Ever since then we have truly enjoyed “the peace that passes all understanding” (Phil. 4:7). Peace with God!

During the time of our excommunication, rumors flowed in our community. Some were saying that we had begun reading a newly written translation of the Bible that allowed driving cars. Some said that we believed we couldn’t sin any more. Others claimed that we no longer believed in being faithful in marriage. In response to those rumors and accusations, and heavily burdened for the salvation of her family, my wife wrote the following letter that she mailed to about 50 of her family members and friends. As I was recently reading it again, I was struck by its sincerity and relevance to Amish people everywhere, even though Ida was a very young believer in, and follower of, the Lord Jesus. With Ida’s permission, I decided to share it with you. I hope it speaks to your heart! -- Jonas

Dear Friends and Family, Greeting in Jesus name!

First of all, we would like to say that we

love everyone very much, and it is our sincere desire that we could continue as family and friends, sharing the blessings of our Lord. We desire to continue to fellowship and share in communion, as we know all believers are part of the body of Christ. If we are not able to fellowship here one earth, we will not be able to fellowship in heaven.

Why we got excommunicated for our faith:

Articles 16 and 17 of the Dordrecht Confession of Faith explains Bann & Meidung and how and why we are to use it. 1 Corinthians 5 and 6 also explain excommunication and to whom it applies. It is really quite simple. If someone in our church is sinning and is doing it openly and refuses to repent, then we excommunicate him so the rest of the church won’t begin to follow his example. There simply are no scriptural instructions to excommunicate someone who believes in, and is following, Jesus.

Now you might say that we should be excommunicated because we have gone against the ordnung. Colossians 2 speaks, however, of ordnung rules and how we are not to become involved with a group of people that teach that such laws are important, because these laws are of no benefit to following Jesus. The truth is, we have not sinned by breaking your ordnung, you have sinned by creating and enforcing an ordnung against the teaching and will of our Lord.

Mark 7 says, “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me, their worship is a farce for they teach as doctrine the commandments of man.” Sadly, this is a description of too many of our Amish communities today.

Some of you say that driving vehicles and having a haircut is being a part of the world. Let’s take a look at what the Bible has to say about that. We read in 1 John 2:10-11: “Do not love the world, neither the things in the world. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.” According to those two verses, if we have lust of the flesh or lust of the eyes we are part of the world. Any type of

sinful pursuit would fall into this category, such as drunkenness, sexual sin, coarse and filthy joking, and many other things like that, about which the Bible speaks clearly. I am sure you will admit these sins are just as rampant—and in some cases more rampant—in our community than they are in the “world” around us.

If vehicles, smart phones (which most Amish people appear to have anyways) or haircuts are a part of the world, no one would make it to heaven except the Amish people. In contrast to that thought, Romans 12:2 shows us the way to avoid being a part of the world. It says, “Be not conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” To escape being conformed to this world, we must be transformed by the renewing of our mind! That begins by being born again, and continues by learning and obeying Jesus’ commandments. And that leads me to the next issue, the “assurance of salvation.”

I know there was a lot of misunderstanding about this. It was always taught that we do the best we can and just hope we’re good enough. Our problem is, none of us have been good enough! That is why God sent His only Son, so that whoever believes in him will not perish but will have everlasting life (John 3:16).

If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, we will turn away from our sins and make Him our Lord. That is when we are born again and our sins are forgiven. And that is when Jesus comes to live in us, to help us obey His commandments. We know that he has forgiven us from all past sins because of verses like 1 John 1:9: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Also, Psalm 103:11-12: “For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west so far does He remove our transgressions from us.”

We can then know that we have eternal life because of verses like John 5:24 "Truly, truly I say to you, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life. He does not come into judgement, but has passed from death to life." And 1 John 5:13: "I write these things to you who believe on the name of the son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life." That is what gives us the assurance of salvation.

Our journey towards eternal life begins with hope. We all begin by hoping to enter heaven. But this hope becomes something deeper when we place our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His sacrificial death on the cross for our sins. His sacrifice was sufficient to atone for all our sins, and His resurrection was sufficient to empower all who believe in Him to live holy lives that please Him.

Hebrews 11:1 tells us, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." In other words, faith gives substance to our hope; it transforms our hope into confident assurance, grounded in the person and work of Christ. Yet even with this assurance, we continue to live with a "living hope," as Peter wrote (1 Peter 1:3). This hope looks forward with trust in God's grace, knowing that today our salvation is secure, yet aware of our need to continue in faith. We trust that God will keep us from falling (Jude 24), even as we are dependent on Him day by day.

Ephesians 2:8-9: "For by grace are you saved through faith and not of yourselves, it is a gift of God not of works lest anyone should boast." You can't be proud to say you are assured of your salvation. It's actually humbling because we know it's not because of something we did, but it's because of what Jesus did and is doing!

Spreading the gospel:

We read in Matthew 28:19: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations baptizing them in the name of the father the son and the Holy Ghost." These were some of Jesus's last words before ascending to heaven. These are also one

of the most ignored commandments that Jesus gave, in our Amish communities. The excuse is often given that "those words were just for the apostles" and they are not for us today. If we believe those words aren't for us today then what keeps us from saying baptism isn't meant for us either? We cannot explain away or ignore scriptures because they make us uncomfortable. There are many other scriptures that instruct us to teach others about Christ.

That was the main reason we could not just start another Amish church. Because to follow this commandment we have to be able to invite all people to our church. We cannot make a difference if we just serve believers. All believers are one body in Christ. We know that there's only one flock and shepherd. We know who the shepherd is, but who is the flock? The flock consists of all believers! We are not going to be divided in heaven. We cannot be divided here on earth either!

An explanation on why we got rebaptized:

The Bible teaches that baptism is an outward sign of an inward happening. Believing in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior needs to happen *before* baptism. If it didn't believe before you were baptized, you were not actually baptized for the right reason. You were just made wet! Baptism is identifying that your old self has died and been buried and you are rising up as a new creation, as a disciple of the Lord, and you want to strive to obey all his commandments.

Ephesians 4:5 says that there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism. In today's world there are many different gods. Some people worship Allah or idols as their God. But there is only one true God. There are many different faiths. But there is only one true faith. The same with baptism. There is only one true baptism. Some people think that our rebaptism is the worst thing we could have done. But you can't read anywhere in the Bible that it is wrong to be rebaptized. You can read in Acts 19 about 12 men whom Paul rebaptized even though they believed in God when they were baptized the first time. But they had not

yet believed upon the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, Paul deemed it necessary for them to be baptized once they believed upon the Lord.

Honoring our parents:

The Bible teaches children to *obey* their parents, and it teaches adults to *honor* their parents. Honor does not mean obey. Honor means to respect. But even if we, as adults, were supposed to obey our parents, we must first obey and honor God. God must be first in our lives. And if our parents don't approve, we cannot help that. But we still should honor them and be respectful and love them very much.

As for preaching a new gospel, as some accused us of doing, we have made sure that what we say is in the Bible. That it is God's Word. It is now your choice to believe us or the rumors that you are hearing! Also read for yourselves to see if what we say is true. Read the New Testament in a language you understand. It made a huge difference for me to read it in a language we use and speak every day, and to also consider the context of every verse.

If anyone has concern for us and wants to talk or has questions about what we wrote, you're more than welcome to stop in write or call anytime. You can call at 814-952-7758 or 814-952-9677. Our address is 1983 Johnsonburg Road, Rossiter, PA 15772. We love you all very much and Jesus loves you even more!

Contact Us

We appreciate everyone who communicates with us. Your letters of encouragement are what keep us encouraged, and your donations make it possible for us to continue publishing *The Awakening!* four times a year. You can write to us at The Awakening!, P.O. Box 611, Punxsutawney, PA 15767. Call or text us at 814-952-7758. Email us at Jonas@HeavensFamily.org. If *The Awakening!* is of no interest to you, we would appreciate your letting us know so that we can remove your name from our mailing list. God bless you!

Why Be Plain? A Biblical Response

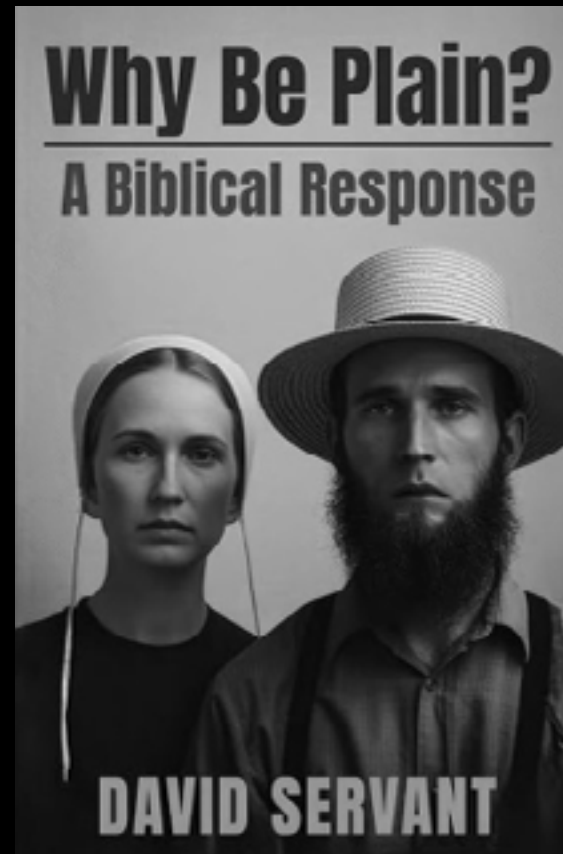
It is no secret that, over the decades, tens of thousands of adults who have been born and raised in Plain communities have decided to abandon their Plain lifestyle.

Most have done it fully understanding the consequences. They knew their family members and friends would excommunicate them from their church and shun them for the rest of their lives. Some knew they would forfeit their livelihood or an inheritance, yet still, they were willing to pay the price. The exodus from Plain communities never stops.

To address this perennial problem, Old Order Mennonite authors Larry S. Weaver and Terry B. Zimmerman co-authored a book titled, *Why Be Plain?* Their purpose was to persuade Plain people to remain Plain. Appealing to Scripture, they addressed the common reasons Plain people offer for their exodus.

But are Weaver and Zimmerman's arguments based on a sound and honest interpretation of the Bible? Are Plain ordnungs scriptural? Is it biblical to excommunicate and shun unrepentant ordnung-violators? Must church members all agree on issues which Scripture does not address? Is it possible for broken Plain families to be reconciled? Are modern Plain people practicing the same faith as their Anabaptist forefathers? These questions, and many like them, are answered in *Why Be Plain? A Biblical Response*.

You can request your free pdf copy by emailing Jonas@heavensfamily.org, or you can order a physical copy at Amazon by searching *Why Be Plain? A Biblical Response*. You can also order a physical copy by mailing us with your payment of \$12.99 enclosed, at Heavens Family, PO Box 611, Punxsutawney PA 15767. Any checks should be made payable to Heavens Family.



>>> A Pressing Need <<<

URGENT: Congolese Refugees in Uganda Need Life-Saving Food and Supplies

Hundreds of Congolese families have fled to Uganda, escaping unimaginable violence. Among them is 56-year-old widow Beatrice Kabasomi, who lost her husband, eldest son, and relatives in a brutal rebel attack in Masisi, Congo. She escaped with her daughter and seven grandchildren, carrying only grief and the will to survive.

The family lacks consistent access to food, clean water, shelter, and medical care. Some children are sick, and none can attend school. Her daughter suffers from trauma-induced nightmares.

You can bring life-changing support through food, shelter, medical care, school supplies, trauma healing, and discipleship.

We have a goal of raising \$44,661 dollars to help Beatrice and hundreds of other families like her. Will you help a refugee family today?

Scan the code below or mail a check to provide immediate help: Heaven's Family, P.O. Box 611, Punxsutawney, Pa. 15767



Heaven's Family
P.O. Box 611
Punxsutawney, PA 15767

The Awakening!



Inside:

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