



Chronicling the Anabaptist Rediscovery of their Special Spiritual Heritage

Five Lovely Days in Lancaster

By David Kirkwood

Greetings, once again, in the name of our great Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We hope this edition of *The Awakening!* finds you drawing closer to Him through His Word, the Bible.

Almost one-fourth of all Amish people live in Pennsylvania, and almost one-fourth of them live in the Lancaster County region. We are blessed to count many of them as friends and supporters of *The Awakening!*, and so Jonas and I, along with our wives (and Jonas' seven children), spent five days in July visiting Amish folks in Lancaster. We enjoyed some lovely times of fellowship and encouragement, especially with Amish folks who have been born again because of reading *The Awakening!*

One of them was "Andy," whose story we shared last time, and his wife. We spent three hours with them at their home and dairy farm. They are both rejoicing in a peace and joy they've never known before. And, they have not

changed anything regarding their Amish lifestyle, but they will tell you that Jesus is now their Lord, whereas before, the ordnung was a higher authority in their lives than Jesus.

There were other special, born-again Amish folks with whom we spent considerable time. Almost one year before the current big split in Lancaster began, some of them met to discuss what a New Testament church would look like. They consequently started some evening meetings that they simply called "The Fellowship." A few months ago, they changed their meeting time to every-other Sunday, and they often meet under a large tent. Those gatherings have attracted as many as 250 Amish adults! They include singing and preaching, just like any other Amish church service. On non-church weeks, they are gathering in small groups in homes.

They explained to us that the vision of The Fellowship is to make disciples of Jesus (Matt. 28:19-20) among Lancaster's Amish by proclaiming biblical truth within the context of Amish lifestyle distinctives, "becoming all things to all men" (1 Cor. 9:22) as the apostle Paul

taught and practiced. The Fellowship believers want to avoid erecting unnecessary barriers that would hinder Amish folks from opening their hearts to the gospel, being born again, and becoming genuine followers of Jesus. At the same time, however, they are committed to demonstrate tolerance for those who follow Jesus but deviate from Amish lifestyle distinctives, something also taught by the apostle Paul, and something we will consider later in this magazine in the article titled, "What to do When Convictions Differ."

If you live in the Lancaster region, we encourage you to visit The Fellowship some Sunday soon. You will meet some wonderful followers of Christ. Many will be able to tell you their story of being born again and how it has changed their lives.

I am happy to report that we recently mailed a copy of my book, *Why Be Plain? A Biblical Response* to all households in the Lancaster, PA Amish directory (with the exception of those who previously requested to be removed from our mailing list). That book, as the title reveals, is a response to a book titled *Why Be Plain?* written by an Old Order Stauffer Men-

nonite, and it addresses every chapter in light of the New Testament.

Printing and mailing *Why Be Plain? A Biblical Response* to 13,589 Amish households in the Lancaster region and daughter settlements cost \$49,438. The vast majority of that cost was donated by Amish readers of *The Awakening!* who were concerned about the misleading messages contained in *Why Be Plain?* and who wanted to see it counteracted with the truth.

If the Lord is laying on your heart to help us send that same book to the remaining 42,000 households on our mailing list, please let us know. Every \$3.64 will provide one book for one household. All total, we need \$152,802.

My primary ministry over the past 46 years has not been trying to help Amish people rediscover their special spiritual heritage, but teaching the Word of God all over the world and serving the people whom Jesus referred to as the “least of these” (see Matt. 25:31-46) through the ministry of *Heaven’s Family*. We’ve compiled decades of Bible teaching at DavidServant.com as well as 1,600 teaching videos on our “Little Lessons” YouTube channel. And at HeavensFamily.org, you can learn about our projects around the world that are helping lift very poor Christians from poverty while also expanding the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. Please do visit both of those websites (if your ordnung permits)!

Finally, a Philippian jailer once asked the apostle Paul what he must do to be saved. Paul replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). Obviously, if you “believe in the Lord Jesus,” then Jesus becomes your Lord. That is, you submit to him and live to please and obey Him. Anyone who does that, from their heart, will be born again. Every Amish reader should ask himself/herself: Is Jesus my Lord? Or is there something else that dominates and controls my life? If there is, that makes you an idolater, and according to Paul, no idolater will inherit God’s kingdom (see 1 Cor. 6:9-10). Thank God that, when Jesus becomes our Lord, that is, when we “take His

yoke” and He thus becomes our Master, we experience His promise that “My yoke is easy, and My burden is light” (Matt. 11:30). The reason is because “His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3), plus He empowers us to obey Him through His indwelling Spirit. It is actually easier to serve Jesus than any other “master,” which is why Jesus said:

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. 11:28-30).

Have you found that wonderful rest yet? If you haven’t, you can today!

What to do When Convictions Differ

By David Kirkwood

The article that follows is an adaptation from chapter 12 of *Why Be Plain? A Biblical Response*, which directly addresses claims made in the book *Why Be Plain?* by Larry Weaver and Terry Zimmerman. To receive a copy of the entire book, see the final page of this magazine.

Most people know that the spectrum of belief and practice within Christendom is very broad. People who identify as Christians comprise almost one-third of the world’s population. That amounts to about 2.4 billion professing Christians. They can be divided into three major categories: Catholic (49%), Protestant (40%), and Orthodox (11%).

Among the Protestants, there are many subgroups, one of which is the Anabaptists. They represent slightly more than 2 million of Protestantism’s 960 million people. They live in 86 nations.

Anabaptists are divided into more than 300 subgroups, including Mennonites, Hutterites, Schwarzenau Brethren, River Brethren, Apostolic Christian, and of course Amish. Most Amish people live in North Amer-

ica, with about 395,000 in the U.S. and 6,000 in Canada (as of 2025). They represent about 19% of all Anabaptists, but only .017% of all people who identify as Christians. So if you had 6,000 pennies that represented all of the world’s professing Christians, only 1 of them would be Amish.

There are literally tens of thousands of distinct Christian groups. All of them hold to beliefs and practices that are based upon a combination of biblical revelation, fallible reasoning, and human tradition, and each group possesses different percentages of all three.

New groups are often spawned from old groups because of the desire to follow more biblical revelation and less human tradition. That is the story of the Protestant Reformation, which broke away from Catholicism. That is the story of the Anabaptists, who were made unwelcome among the Protestants and who initiated their own “Radical Reformation.” That is also the story of the Amish, whose founder and namesake, Jakob Ammann, felt that the Swiss Brethren had drifted from certain biblical convictions and practices.

There have been many divisions among the Amish since then. In the second half of the 19th century, they divided into Old Order and Amish Mennonites, the latter of whom eventually joined Mennonite groups.

Today there are three main Amish subgroups that all have significant differences in their ordnungs: Old Order, New Order and Beachy. And there are at least 60 smaller sub-groups. I live within a 30-minute drive of three Old Order communities, and none of them fellowship with each other. In fact, the second one is a split from the first one, and third one is a split from the second one. All the splits were over ordnung issues.

Generally speaking, many if not most of the members of Christianity’s tens of thousands of distinct groups think that their group is the best, based on some criteria. The potential for pride is real, and all of us should stop and ponder how silly it is to imagine that God is

most pleased with our group among the tens of thousands of other Christian groups who hold to different variations of belief and practice.

We also can't help but mourn for all the division that exists among 2.4 billion people who all claim to believe in the One who prayed, "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me" (John 17:20–21), and who also told His followers, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (John 13:34).

We are not doing a very good job of obeying Jesus' new commandment, or of being the answer to His prayer that we should be one. We should ask ourselves if the things we consider worth dividing over are equally as important to Jesus. All true Christians could find common ground more readily if we focused on obeying the clear commandments of the Son of God and mutually respecting our different convictions in matters where His will is not as clear.

That, in fact, is exactly what the New Testament instructs Christians to do. Not every Christian in the apostolic church agreed on every detail of what Christians should and shouldn't do. In a previous chapter, we have already studied the early church's first internal dispute, regarding Gentile believers' relationship to the Mosaic Law. Although the Jewish believers were generally following the Law of Moses, they eventually agreed that Gentile believers were not obligated to be circumcised or to keep any of the Mosaic Law's rules that were not contained in the law of Christ. They did, however, request that Gentile believers avoid a few practices that would be particularly offensive to Jews, at least when in their presence. It was a compromise of love on their part.

A Closer Look

Two passages in Paul's letters focus on the issue of differing convictions among Christians. They are found in Romans 14:1–15:12 and 1 Corinthians 8–10. The message Paul conveys in both passages is that Christians of differing convictions should love one another, which requires them to respect one another, not judge one another, not cause a fellow believer to stumble, and compromise to some degree. The authors of *Why Be Plain?*, however, twist Paul's instructions into a justification for ordnungs:

In Romans 14 we read of how Christian liberty should be limited by Christian love, meaning we should set boundaries for ourselves so that we don't knowingly offend our brothers and sisters in Christ. If we insist on owning something or doing something that offends another church member, we're not walking charitably, or in other words, not according to Christ's will.

Since we cannot serve two masters, it's self-evident that a true Christian will limit himself, and the Scriptural church will set standards to avoid offenses and stumbling blocks (p. 90).

To paraphrase the authors, all church members should obey all ordnung rules lest they offend other ordnung-keeping church members or cause them to stumble. But that is a gross twisting of what Paul actually taught.

First, the early church had nothing that remotely resembled modern Plain ordnungs consisting of hundreds of extra-biblical rules that govern even the smallest details of life.

Second, the very idea of ordnungs flatly contradicts the very principle of loving one another in spite of differing convictions. Ordnungs establish hundreds of standards to which everyone must conform. If people don't conform to these rules, they are disciplined, and if they still don't conform, they are excommunicated and shunned. *That is the exact opposite of what Paul taught in Romans 14–15 and 1 Corinthians 8–10!*

Romans 14

Let's consider both passages so that all readers can plainly see this for themselves. We will start with Romans 14:1–4:

Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

One example of differing convictions in the early church revolved around eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols. Some believers, most likely those of Jewish background, avoided eating any meat because of the possibility that it might have been sacrificed to pagan idols. To them, eating such meat constituted participating in idolatry. So they became "vegetarians for Jesus." Paul referred to this group as "weak in their faith." We can, however, admire them for their desire to avoid any hint of idolatry and thus not offend the Lord. Other believers (like Paul) had no such convictions. They didn't believe eating meat, even if it had been sacrificed to idols, was sinful or offensive to the Lord.

Notice that Paul didn't create an ordnung rule to which everyone must conform. Doing so would have contradicted his instructions for each group to respect the convictions of the other group and not judge one another. Again, ordnungs do the exact opposite of what Paul taught. They cause everyone to judge anyone who doesn't conform to one standard.

A second example of differing convictions in the early church revolved around the Sabbath. Obviously, Jewish believers would have strictly kept the Sabbath every week—from Friday at sundown to Saturday at sundown (as

Jews have always done). Gentiles, however, would not have been accustomed to that Jewish practice and may have questioned its relative importance.

Paul continued:

One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats [meat], does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not [does not eat any meat], for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God. For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living (Rom. 14:5-9).

Paul's point is that all true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are striving to obey Him. And that is what matters. Contrary to the "vegetarians for Jesus" who judged the meat-eaters to be idolaters, those meat-eaters were giving thanks to the Lord prior to every meal. They were not idolaters! They were servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. For that reason, both groups should stop judging each other and looking at each other with contempt, as they apparently were:

But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall give praise to God." So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God (Rom. 14:10-12).

Ordnungs set up church members to constantly judge each other and consequently to treat some members with contempt, to the point of excommunicating and shunning them. Ordnungs do not promote tolerance but intolerance.

Causing a Brother to Stumble

Paul continues:

Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way. I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died. Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil; for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense. It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles. The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin (Rom. 14:13-23).

Here Paul mentions one other point of difference among Christians in his day—the drinking of wine. From an historical perspective, it would seem doubtful that the issue was over the propriety of alcohol (as it is in some Christian circles today), but rather that some wine was perhaps dedicated to idols. Regardless, just as was the case regarding eating meat and keeping the Sabbath, Paul did not lay down an ordnung rule regarding wine. In *every* case, the only rule was to love one another, which requires tolerating those whose convictions differ regarding matters in which Scripture is not definitive.

In this final paragraph of Romans 14, Paul makes an additional point. He first addresses the meat-eaters, in whose camp Paul admitted he belonged because he knew that no meat is "unclean" even if it has been sacrificed to an idol. He would never want, however, to cause one of the vegetarians to "stumble." That is, he didn't want to do anything that might contribute to influencing a "weaker brother" to violate his conscience.

For example, imagine a group of meat-eating Christians sharing a meal when a vegetarian joins them. Wanting to fit in, he might, against his conscience, eat meat. Although his eating meat was actually not a sin, because he *thinks* eating meat is a sin, to him it is an act of disobedience. As Paul wrote, "To him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean" (v. 14b).

Therefore, walking in love requires those who are "stronger" to always consider their "weaker" brothers and sisters when they are together. That, in fact, was Paul's summarizing point at the beginning of Romans 15:

Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification (Rom. 15:1-2).

And as Paul concludes the entire section, it becomes even more clear that the dividing issues in Rome were between Jewish and Gentile believers:

Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God. For I say that Christ has become a servant to *the circumcision* [Jews] on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers, and for *the Gentiles* to glorify God for His mercy (Rom. 15:7-9, emphasis added).

This exposition should make it clear that Romans 14-15 cannot be used to compel people to keep every rule of the ordnung so as not to offend others. All of Paul's instructions were direct-

ed towards churches full of members who held differing convictions. In Plain churches, everyone is required to publicly declare, at their baptism and twice annually thereafter, their agreement with the hundreds of rules of the ordnung. The Plain people do not exhibit toleration of differing convictions on these extra-biblical matters, because differing convictions are not permitted! *Ordnungs are thus antithetical to everything Paul taught in Romans 14 and 15.*

1 Corinthians 8–10

Paul covers this same issue in his first letter to the Corinthians, and he makes the same points, so I will not repeat them. But here is his summary statement:

All things [like eating meat sacrificed to idols] are lawful, but not all things [like eating meat sacrificed to idols in the presence of vegetarian believers] are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things [like eating meat sacrificed to idols in the presence of vegetarian believers] edify. Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor. Eat anything that is sold in the meat market without asking questions for conscience' sake; "for the earth is the Lord's, and all it contains." If one of the unbelievers invites you [to eat with him] and you want to go, eat anything that is set before you without asking questions for conscience' sake. But if anyone says to you [that is, if any Christian vegetarian warns you], "This is meat sacrificed to idols," do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for conscience' sake; I mean not your own conscience, but the other man's (1 Cor. 10:23–29a).

Those are wise words aimed at meat eaters. But next, Paul addresses the "weaker brethren" who were passing judgment upon him because he ate meat without any scruples:

For why is my freedom judged by another's conscience? If I partake with thankfulness, why am I slandered concerning that for which I give thanks? (1 Cor. 10:29b–30).

So Paul addressed *both* groups, calling each side to love one another and be tolerant of their differences. Ordnungs, however, eliminate any need for toleration between sides by legitimizing one view that is intolerant of anything else.

If, as Weaver and Zimmerman claim, these passages in Romans and 1 Corinthians have application to Plain ordnungs, who then are the "weak brothers" in Plain churches who believe that something is wrong when it is not actually wrong according to the standard of God's Word? And who are the "strong brothers" who, like the apostle Paul, don't share the convictions of the "weak brothers" because they simply follow the revelation of God's Word?

If any analogy can be drawn, the weak brothers would have to be most Plain leaders and all who join them in slavishly following hundreds of man-made rules. The strong brothers would be those who realize that God's commandments are sufficient for those who love God and that no ordnung is necessary to motivate church members who love Jesus to live holy lives. However, Plain churches do not follow Paul's call for toleration, because they show no toleration for "strong brothers." The strong brothers are often excommunicated in Plain churches. How does that practice harmonize with Romans 14–15 and 1 Corinthians 8–10? It does not, nor does it harmonize with Paul's concluding statement in 1 Corinthians 10:31–33:

Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved (1 Cor. 10:31–33).

Ordnung-keepers are consumed with pleasing, and not offending, others who keep the group's ordnung. There is no other group with which they are concerned.

So, is my goal to persuade all Plain people to abandon their ordnungs? No, my goal is to persuade all Plain people

to *truly* believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. When they do, pleasing Him will become the most important thing in their lives, and they will focus on obeying His commandments. They may end up holding different convictions regarding issues on which the Bible is silent, but they will tolerate those of different convictions. Some Plain folks, for example, will have no scruples about owning and driving cars. Others might still choose to avoid owning a car. But they will all love each other, and the Plain folks who own cars will be happy to provide taxi rides to those who don't! That is just one example of how Christians of different cultures and convictions can demonstrate to the world that they are all one in Christ!

A Closer Look at Two Bible Translations

By David Kirkwood

As with everything in the Amish World, there is a spectrum of conviction regarding acceptable Bible translations. Some groups avoid any translation other than Martin Luther's German Bible, which he translated between 1522 and 1534. Some add to that the King James Version, translated into English by 47 linguistic scholars between 1604 and 1611. A few Old Order groups are open to modern English translations, but they are definitely a minority.

Obviously, the Bible is the most important book in the world, as it contains not only the words of men who were directly inspired by God to pen their words, but also the actual words of God Himself. What book could be more important to read, study, believe, obey or teach to others? Nothing is comparable to the Bible. It is the Word of God.

For that reason, over the centuries, the Bible has been translated into well over 3,500 different languages. If people are to read, study, believe, obey and teach God's Word, they must have a Bible in a language they understand. It was for that reason Martin Luther translated the Bible into German. The large majority of German-speaking people in his day

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could not understand the Latin Bible that was read in Roman Catholic churches. Even though they attended church services, God's truth was being hidden from them! Luther resolved to remedy that with an understandable German translation.

His task, however, was not as easy one, because German was not a unified language in his day. Rather, it was a collection of regional dialects that were often mutually unintelligible. (As an example, Pennsylvania Dutch is a German dialect from the Palatinate region.) So, Luther chose to translate the Bible into "Early New High German," a dialect that was used in administrative documents of the Saxon court and was widely understood across German-speaking regions. Luther wanted to make the Bible accessible to as many German people as possible, and with the help of a moveable-type printing press, he succeeded. His translation was a major contribution to the Protestant Reformation and the "Radical Reformation" of the Anabaptists. Finally, German people could read the Bible for themselves and discover the good news of the gospel that had been hidden from them in the hand-copied Latin Bibles from which Catholic priests read at church services (and which no one but the ultra-rich could afford to own).

What is tragic is that many of today's Amish people find themselves in a similar predicament as their Anabaptist ancestors did prior to 1522, when Luther completed his translation of the New Testament. Although some readers of *The Awakening!* have written to tell us that everyone in their community is proficient in Luther's German (what is often referred to today as "High German"), many have written to tell us that their community's collective understanding of Luther's German is limited. So, when Luther's Bible is read in church gatherings or Luther's German is used in sermons, understanding is limited.

Some of our readers have even told us that English Bible versions are forbidden by their ordnung, or that church members are strongly discouraged from reading the Bible themselves, or told

that reading it "too much" is considered dangerous.

Even more surprising are those who have written to us to tell us that Martin Luther's German Bible is the *only* trustworthy translation, and that all other translations contain errors. Or they make a similar claim regarding the King James Version.

If those two claims were actually true, we couldn't help but wonder about all the Christians in the world who lived prior to 1522, when Luther translated the New Testament into German, or who lived prior to 1611, when the King James Version was published. Were there no trustworthy Bible translations in the world until 1522 and 1611? And what about all the people who lived prior to those years who did not speak either English or German? Were there never any trustworthy Bible translations in any other languages besides those two? The answers to those questions are obvious to anyone who thinks about it for three seconds!

I'm sure every reader would agree that, if we had the original documents, what Bible scholars refer to as the "autographs," that comprise the Bible, we could trust those documents. Imagine having the actual letters penned by Paul, for example. We wouldn't have to worry about intentional or accidental alterations made by scribes who produced copies by hand. But the fact is, we don't have the autographs of *any* biblical book. All were written on perishable materials, either scrolls of papyrus (made from cut and glued strips of papyrus plants), or parchment/vellum (made from skins of sheep, goats or calves). So we have no choice but to rely on copies, and copies of copies, and copies of copies of copies, and so on.

Even if we did have the original autographs, we would still have a problem. We would have to understand the language in which they were written. Otherwise, we would need to rely on a translation of the original languages.

All of this is to say that we, like most Christians over the past 2,000 years,

have no choice but to rely on the integrity and accuracy of ancient scribes as well as language translators. We don't have the autographs, and most of us don't understand the biblical languages.

The Autographs

The various books of the Old Testament were *primarily* written in ancient Hebrew (which is different in many ways from modern Hebrew) and *partially* written in Aramaic. The books of the New Testament were written in Koine (pronounced KOY-nay) Greek, the common Greek dialect of the Mediterranean world during their time. No doubt the reason that Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, Peter, James and Jude all wrote in Koine Greek is because it was the most common language in the Roman Empire. Even though most all of those New Testament authors spoke Aramaic as their everyday language, and most of them would have been somewhat familiar with ancient Hebrew, *they wanted as many people as possible to understand what they wrote*. People who understand the fundamental message of the Bible want everyone in the world to be able to understand it. People who have no such concern have no understanding of the fundamental message of the Bible.

Interestingly, when the New Testament authors quoted in their writings from the Old Testament, they most often quoted from a *Greek translation* of the Hebrew and Aramaic known as the Septuagint. That means that, at least 1,400 years before the Martin Luther German Bible and at least 1,500 years before the King James Bible, all the New Testament authors believed that the Greek Septuagint was a trustworthy translation of the Hebrew and Aramaic Old Testament. If you could read ancient Greek (which is significantly different from modern Greek), you could feel safe reading the Septuagint, as it was trusted by the New Testament authors.

The oldest copies that exist of any Old Testament books are the Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered between 1947 and 1956 in caves near the Dead Sea in Israel. Some of those scrolls are dated as old as 250 B.C. They were written primarily

in ancient Hebrew. If Moses penned the first five books of the Old Testament around 1290 B.C. (the latest date suggested for Israel's Exodus from Egypt), there was at least a one-thousand-year separation between them and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Clearly, the Dead Sea scrolls were copies from generations of previous copies. Yet they were trusted as accurate.

The oldest copy that exists of any New Testament book is a very small papyrus fragment of John's Gospel, found in Egypt in 1920 and dated between 125-150 A.D., which would have been 25 to 60 years after John penned his Gospel. No one knows how many generations of copies preceded it.

The oldest copy that exists of an *entire* Bible is the Codex Sinaiticus, written in Koine Greek and dated around 325-350 A.D. A codex is an ancient bound book with pages made of papyrus or parchment. 2nd-century Christians pioneered the use of codices rather than scrolls, as they allowed easier access to specific pages, two-sided writing, and compact storage.

The Codex Sinaiticus was discovered in 1844 at Saint Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai, in Egypt. About 400 of the original 730 leaves survived the centuries. Today, most of it is on display at the British Museum in London. Like everything that was written prior to the invention of the printing press, it was manually penned by scribes who copied from another source or sources. It is, understandably, a cornerstone for modern Bible translations.

Similarly-dated to the Codex Sinaiticus is the Codex Vaticanus. Penned by scribes in Koine Greek on vellum, it contains most of the Old Testament (Septuagint) and New Testament, although some portions are missing or damaged. 730 of the original 759 leaves survived. It has been guarded at the Vatican Library in Rome since at least 1475, but was not made accessible to scholars until the 19th century. It is another cornerstone for modern Bible translations.

I hope you have noted the fact that three

very significant discoveries of ancient biblical manuscripts (Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Vaticanus and the Dead Sea Scrolls) all occurred in relatively modern times. So none were available to Martin Luther or to the King James scholars when they translated the Bible. And these three examples are representative of literally *thousands* of other ancient biblical manuscripts, both complete and fragmentary, and in various ancient languages, that have been discovered since the publication of Martin Luther's German translation and the King James Version. All of this is to say that modern Bible translators have exponentially more ancient Bible manuscripts to utilize as they endeavor to produce translations that are faithful to the originals.

More specifically, both Martin Luther and the King James scholars used what is called the Masoretic Text for their Old Testament translations. Written in Hebrew and Aramaic, the Masoretic Text was penned close to 1,000 years after the Dead Sea Scrolls. *That means the Dead Sea Scrolls are 1,000 years closer than the Masoretic Text to the autographs of the five books of Moses.* Which would you suspect is more faithful to the originals?

The good news is that ancient scribes were so conscientious in their labor of hand-copying manuscripts over the centuries that, although there are thousands of textual variants between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Masoretic Text, most are minor and do not significantly alter meaning. So, Martin Luther and the King James translators suffered no great disadvantage by not having the Dead Sea Scrolls as a source for their Old Testament translations.

And the same is true for their New Testament translations. For his New Testament translation, Martin Luther's primary source was the second edition of what is called the "Textus Receptus," a Greek New Testament compiled by a man named Erasmus and published in 1519, which itself was derived from a limited number of earlier Greek New Testament manuscripts, such as the 12th-century Codex Basilensis. Although modern Bible translators have thousands of ad-

ditional ancient manuscripts to use that Martin Luther did not have, Luther still gave the German people an excellent translation of the New Testament that could help them understand the gospel and follow Christ's commandments by the power of the Holy Spirit. But to claim that Martin Luther's translation is the only Bible that can be trusted by anyone today is patently absurd.

It is the same story for the King James version. The King James translators also used the Textus Receptus as their primary manuscript source for their English translation of the New Testament, although unlike Luther, who only had the second edition of the Textus Receptus (1519), they also had the 3rd, 4th and 5th editions (1522, 1527, and 1535). They also utilized the 1550 Stephanus' Editions and the 1589 Beza's Editions, which both refined the text of the Textus Receptus by utilizing additional earlier New Testament manuscripts. Although they did not have access to thousands of ancient New Testament manuscripts, both full and partial, that are used by modern Bible translators, they gave the English-speaking world an excellent translation that has helped multitudes understand the will of God. But to claim that the King James Version is the most faithful English translation to the autographs is just plain silly.

"King James Only" advocates often point out that the King James Version contains as many as 25 New Testament passages that are either absent, shortened, or bracketed as questionable in most modern translations. On that basis, they claim that groups of modern Bible translators, most of whom are respected linguistic scholars, are conspiring to "remove parts of God's Word." Those differences, however, are primarily based on the fact that the King James New Testament was based on the Textus Receptus, whereas most modern translations are based on the *much-earlier* Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus.

For example, Mark 16:9-20 and John 7:53-8:11 are absent in both of those 4th-century Bibles. Why is that? They were either omitted from those earlier manu-

scripts or, more likely, were added in the later ones, and the most likely reason is because some zealous scribe or scribes decided to include an oral tradition that they thought was historically accurate and spiritual valuable. By the way, both passages are included in my modern New American Standard Version, but they are placed in brackets, and notes in the margins indicate that some of the oldest manuscripts do not contain the bracketed verses.

Again, the King James Version was first published in 1611, whereas the New American Standard Version was first published in 1960. In the 349 years between those two publications, Bible translators not only had the benefit of the discovery of thousands of ancient biblical manuscripts written in the original languages and in many languages, but also the benefit of 349 years of linguistic scholarship that revolved around the study of ancient Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, including the study of ancient secular manuscripts written in those same languages.

Which is the Best Translation?

So what version of the Bible should you read? Since the goal is to understand what you read so you can believe and obey, you should find a version that is written in your primary language. For most Amish people, that would be Pennsylvania Dutch or modern English. (So that eliminates Martin Luther's German Bible as well as the King James Version, which is written in Elizabethan English from the 1600s.)

You can purchase a Pennsylvania Dutch version of the entire Bible which, by the way, is based on the Masoretic Hebrew Text for the Old Testament and the Textus Receptus for the New Testament (just as was Martin Luther's translation and the King James Version).

If you want to read an English translation, I recommend the New American Standard for accuracy to the original languages. But there are many trustworthy English translations.

You should also understand that there

are three different philosophies that are employed by groups of scholars (or individuals) who do Bible translation.

The first is referred to as "Formal Equivalence" or "Word-for-Word," and it aims to stay as close as possible to the original text's wording, structure and grammar. The emphasis is not readability but accuracy. Both the King James, New American Standard, and Pennsylvania Dutch Translation fall into this category.

The weakness of Formal Equivalence is that ancient idioms are sometimes difficult to understand. For example, the New American Standard mentions the "evil eye" (or "bad eye") and leaves readers scratching their heads who don't know that "evil eye" is a Hebrew idiom for "greed" (see Prov. 28:22; Matt. 6:22; 20:15).

The second philosophy is "Dynamic Equivalence" or "Thought-for-Thought," and it focuses on conveying the meaning or intent of the original text to help readers better understand. Readability trumps word-for-word accuracy. The New International Version, Good News Translation, New Living Translation, and Martin Luther's German translation all fall into this category. Interestingly, the Pennsylvania Dutch Translation falls partly into this category to accommodate common expressions of Amish readers.

I should pause here to say that I use the New American Standard to study the Bible, and I use the New Living Translation in my morning devotions when I read through the Bible in one year.

The third translation philosophy is "Paraphrase," which prioritizes the general message of the text being very relatable and culturally relevant to the target audience. Paraphrase Bibles are for casual readers and children. They are often rightfully accused of theological compromise.

Martin Luther's Bias

All of us are biased to some degree, which is why Bible translations by groups of linguistic scholars would seem to be less biased than translations

by individuals (except when groups of scholars all belong to one denomination). Martin Luther translated the New Testament essentially by himself when he was hiding from Roman Catholic authorities in the Wartburg Castle. His theological bias is definitely revealed in his translation of Romans 3:28, in which he added the word "alone" (which is not found in the Greek) after the phrase "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith."

I suppose Luther would justify his addition by claiming that his translation philosophy was that of Dynamic Equivalence. It is, however, somewhat odd that modern Anabaptists embrace Luther's translation, as they generally disagree with the Protestant doctrine of "justification by faith alone" as it is often advocated, citing James' clear declaration, "You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone" (Jas. 2:24). That verse is one of the reasons Luther referred to the book of James as "an epistle of straw" in his 1522 Preface to the New Testament.

What is also odd about modern Anabaptists' use of Martin Luther's German Bible translation is the historical record of Luther's opposition against the early Anabaptists. He wrote strongly against their belief in the separation of church and state, and of their rejection of infant baptism, accusing them of fanaticism and undermining the sacraments and social order. He considered them to be heretics. His written opposition fueled the harsh treatment of Anabaptists by both religious and secular authorities. In Saxony, where Luther lived, Anabaptists faced imprisonment, exile, or execution. Luther did nothing to curtail the persecution that was influenced in part by his own verbal hostility. It is a wonder that any modern Anabaptist would revere his translation of the Bible!

Luther was not only verbally hostile to Anabaptists, but also to Jews of his day. He wrote a booklet in 1533, when he was 60 years old, titled, *The Jews and Their Lies*. Here is an excerpt:

What shall we Christians do with this rejected and condemned people, the

Jews? Since they live among us, we dare not tolerate their conduct, now that we are aware of their lying and reviling and blaspheming. If we do, we become sharers in their lies, cursing and blasphemy. Thus we cannot extinguish the unquenchable fire of divine wrath, of which the prophets speak, nor can we convert the Jews...

I shall give you my sincere advice:

First, to set fire to their synagogues or schools and to bury and cover with dirt whatever will not burn, so that no man will ever again see a stone or cinder of them. This is to be done in honor of our Lord and of Christendom, so that God might see that we are Christians, and do not condone or knowingly tolerate such public lying, cursing, and blaspheming of his Son and of his Christians...

Second, I advise that their houses also be razed and destroyed. For they pursue in them the same aims as in their synagogues. Instead they might be lodged under a roof or in a barn, like the gypsies. This will bring home to them that they are not masters in our country, as they boast, but that they are living in exile and in captivity, as they incessantly wail and lament about us before God.

Third, I advise that all their prayer books and Talmudic writings, in which such idolatry, lies, cursing and blasphemy are taught, be taken from them.

Fourth, I advise that their rabbis be forbidden to teach henceforth on pain of loss of life and limb...

Fifth, I advise that safe conduct on the highways be abolished completely for the Jews. For they have no business in the countryside, since they are not lords, officials, tradesmen, or the like. Let them stay at home....

Sixth, I advise that usury be prohibited to them, and that all cash and treasure of silver and gold be taken from them and put aside for safekeeping. The reason for such a measure is that, as said above, they have no other

means of earning a livelihood than usury, and by it they have stolen and robbed from us all they possess...

Seventh, I commend putting a flail, an ax, a hoe, a spade, a distaff, or a spindle into the hands of young, strong Jews and Jewesses and letting them earn their bread in the sweat of their brow, as was imposed on the children of Adam (Gen 3:19). For it is not fitting that they should let us accursed Goyim [Gentiles] toil in the sweat of our faces while they, the holy people, idle away their time behind the stove, feasting and farting, and on top of all, boasting blasphemously of their lordship over the Christians by means of our sweat. No, one should toss out these lazy rogues by the seat of their pants...

If this does not help we must drive them out like mad dogs, so that we do not become partakers of their abominable blasphemy and all their other vices and thus merit God's wrath and be damned with them. I have done my duty. Now let everyone see to his. I am exonerated.

Personally, I would be suspect of any Bible translation whose primary translator wrote words like that!

In Conclusion

As we have written in previous issues of *The Awakening!*, you really don't need *The Awakening!* to discover all the truth we are trying to communicate in every issue. It is waiting for you to discover in the Bible! But you need a Bible that is translated into the language of your heart. If you have never read the Bible before, I recommend that you obtain a Pennsylvania Dutch translation or the New Living Translation. Ask the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus said would guide us into all truth, to help you understand what you read. You will not be disappointed!

A Ditch on Both Sides

By David Kirkwood

Regular readers of *The Awakening!* know that we have never encouraged in this publication any Amish person to leave the Amish. On the contrary, we have repeatedly encouraged those who are authentically born again to remain Amish for as long as they can, in hopes that they can lead others in their communities into the new birth—a wonderful blessing that is enjoyed by everyone who truly believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, which means making Him their Supreme Lord and Master.

Tragically, among Amish communities that do not possess the same faith as their original Anabaptist ancestors, but who are blinded by unbiblical tradition and living in spiritual darkness, those who experience the new birth among them are often excommunicated and shunned. Leaders in those kinds of Amish communities often claim that those who experience the new birth have been deceived by the devil, but the truth is, those leaders are the ones who are deceived by the devil. Recall that the religious leaders in Jesus' day claimed that He was of the devil (see Matt. 9:34; 10:25; 12:24)!

In any case, there is nothing we can do to prevent such blind leaders of the blind from excommunicating those who are born again. And when they excommunicate those who are born again, they actually excommunicate Christ who lives in all born-again believers by the Holy Spirit. That action betrays the true, tragic spiritual condition of those spiritual leaders. They are servants of Satan, citizens of his kingdom of darkness, and on the broad road to destruction.

There are, of course, legitimate reasons for Amish people to leave the Amish. But even in such cases, we find it very difficult to recommend that they leave, because we know something of the price they will have to pay. They will be excommunicated and shunned by

their family and friends (the severity of which varies from one Amish community to another, depending on the local ordnung). They will likely lose their jobs if they are employed by Amish people. They will lose their employees if they employ Amish people. They will lose business relationships and opportunities. They will forfeit inheritances. They may lose their marriage if their spouse does not agree with them. All of that is a big price to pay!

The fear of all of those negative consequences has a lot to do with why so many Amish people remain Amish. Amish culture is fear-based, and it is designed to prevent anyone from leaving. Those who do make the painful decision to leave don't make their decision quickly, but after months or years of inward debate. Many who are reading these words right now are in that place.

Of course, tens of thousands of Amish people who have not left Amish culture have left their Amish community to move to another one. In fact, many move multiple times during their lifetimes. The reason often has something to do with dissatisfaction regarding the ordnung. And the reason there are so many ordnungs among the Amish and so many disagreements about ordnung rules is because all ordnung rules are man-made. They are all subjective. None can be found in the Bible.

As we have written so many times in *The Awakening!*, the early church of the apostles had nothing that remotely resembled an Old Order ordnung containing hundreds of extra-biblical rules, much less extra-biblical rules on which they hinged salvation (and neither did the earliest Anabaptists and the large majority of historical and modern churches outside of Anabaptism). The apostles believed that salvation is received by grace through faith (see Ephesians 2:8-10) and that the commandments of Christ—by which obedient believers validate their faith in Him—were more than sufficient. The apostle Paul, in fact, summed all of them up into just one commandment! (see Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14). In matters in

which there was no specific commandment, the apostles encouraged those of different convictions to walk in love towards one another and respect each other's convictions (see the article in this issue of *The Awakening!* titled, "What to Do When Convictions Differ"). They did not invent hundreds of rules that they expected everyone to follow under the threat of excommunication, shunning and ultimate damnation.

All of this is to say, when any spiritual leader sets up extra-biblical standards for obtaining salvation and eternal life, he is exalting himself above God, who alone has the authority to set up such standards. No true man of God would ever add extra requirements for salvation, as just the thought of misleading someone in regard to what they must do to be saved would cause him to tremble with fear. And when leaders refer to enforced man-made standards of salvation as "guidelines," they show how dishonest they are. If they were truly only "guidelines," they would be recommendations that are optional to follow, not rules enforced under the threat of excommunication, shunning and ultimate damnation.

This is one of the main reasons that, over the decades, thousands of people who have been raised in Old Order communities have left—fully knowing the price they would pay. Just like Amish people who move to a different Amish community because they reject some of the ordnung rules of their current community, some leave Amish life completely because they reject all of the ordnung rules, since those rules have no biblical foundation, and many have no moral or ethical foundation either.

Others have left because they realized that the ordnung was an idol that had more sway over their lives than did the Lord Jesus. So they left out of obedience to their Lord Jesus Christ. They repented of their unbiblical teenage vows (there is no biblical example or admonition in the New Testament of anyone making vows to a particular church or set of man-made rules), and they have continued following Christ and His command-

ments ever since. Most are also holding to some personal convictions, but they no longer judge and condemn those whose personal convictions differ from theirs. And they are enjoying all the blessings of the new birth, the indwelling Holy Spirit, and the loving lordship of Jesus! How I wish that every reader was experiencing that same joy!

Of course, some have left, not because of any biblical or spiritual conviction, but for some other reason. And when they have left, they have "gone to the world" by biblical definition, that is, they gave themselves over to lifestyle that the Bible (rather than Old Order tradition) condemns.

Now That You Have Left...

Most of those who have left their Old Order communities have not only had to navigate all the challenges of rejection by their families and former friends, but also of integration into a new world. In their rejection of hundreds of man-made rules that formerly governed every detail of their lives, some former Amish have sadly swung to the opposite extreme, rejecting all rules and inventing a Jesus whose grace allows for anything and everything. Even more tragic is the fact that many American churches are waiting to encourage them in their error.

If there is one thing that I would first warn former Amish people against, it would be to beware of all the "false-grace churches" that pollute the American landscape. They are found in every city and practically every town, large and small, in America. The emphasis in those churches is not the making of disciples who obediently follow Jesus' commandments (as He commanded; see Matt. 28:18-20). Rather, the emphasis is on making people happy and comfortable in their sin. Holiness and devotion to Christ are rarely mentioned from the pulpits of such churches, and when they are, they are portrayed as impossible goals that help us "see our need for God's grace."

This is a very strange theology for any church that claims its doctrines are based on the Bible. Because not only

is the forgiveness for all our past sins a divine gift, but so is the indwelling HOLY Spirit. Both are given to us at the moment of our new birth. God does not place His HOLY Spirit in His children so that they can continue to be unholy. His HOLY Spirit empowers those who are born again to be holy and to attain the standards that are required for eternal life. Jesus plainly warned His earliest followers in His Sermon on the Mount: "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20).

If false-grace preachers ever dare read that particular verse from their church pulpits, they quickly annul the truth of Jesus' words by explaining that all those who believe in Christ are "imputed with His righteousness," so that when God looks at them, He doesn't see their sin, but rather sees Christ's sinlessness (in blatant contradiction to Jesus' words to sinning Christians in Revelation 2-3). And by that alleged means, their righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, regardless of how they actually live their lives! That is such a horrible twisting of the words of the sacred Son of God, who continued His Sermon on the Mount by elaborating on the very standards that He expected His disciples to attain. As long as it is interpreted within its biblical and historical context (remembering that Jesus' audience consisted of Jews who had been brain-dirtied by the twisted teaching of the Mosaic Law by the scribes and Pharisees), it serves well as a guide for following Jesus.

A Second Warning

This leads me to a second warning for former Amish folks who find themselves navigating a new life outside. They will sooner or later be exposed to other forms of aberrant teaching that have the potential to lure them down a dangerous doctrinal path. That is why it is so important to study and know what the Bible teaches. The Bible can be made to say anything by means of isolating individual verses from their immediate and wider context. For example, did you

know that the Bible says that "There is no God"? Yes, it certainly does, in Psalm 14:1. But once we read the immediate context, those four words take on a different meaning: "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God'" (Psalm 14:1). You can see how important it is to read every verse within its context.

All spurious doctrine is concocted by preachers who isolate verses or passages from their context. To correctly interpret any verse, we must make certain that our interpretation of that verse harmonizes with every other relevant verse in the Bible. So read your Bible every day! Study it as much as possible! Judge every sermon you hear by how well it harmonizes, not with just one or two Bible verses, but with the entire Bible. Do your best to find a church that is focused on following Jesus and obeying His commandments by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Also, beware of "extra-biblical teaching," that is, teaching that is based on someone's alleged revelation from God, or prophecy, or vision. All such things should be judged by comparison to the revelation God has given to us in the Bible.

To help believers grow in their understanding of the Bible, I have penned a number of books over the years, several of which we have made available at the end of this magazine. One of them, titled, *HeavenWord Daily*, is a daily devotional that takes readers through the entire New Testament in one year's time. Another book, titled, *Family-Style Devotions*, was written to help parents teach their children about every detail of the life and ministry of Jesus. I encourage you to take advantage of those resources.

Grow Better, Not Bitter

It is understandable that those who have been excommunicated and are being shunned by their own Amish family members and former Amish friends will be tempted to become bitter. There is no way to downplay the pain of rejection by the people who should love you more than anyone. If you have left

the Amish in order to follow Jesus, it is particularly painful to be treated as an outcast by people who claim to be Christians (but who actually are not).

Jesus told His followers that broken relationships between family members would be an inevitable consequence of His coming, warning that "a man's enemies will be the members of his household" (Matt. 10:36). But He never told His followers to make peace with those enemies by compromising their faith in Him. Rather, He warned, "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). No price is too high to pay for the blessing of knowing and following Jesus.

The same Person who told His followers that their enemies might be their family members also told them to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt. 5:44). Peter similarly instructed believers to avoid "returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead" (1 Pet. 3:9). Family members may excommunicate and shun you, but you don't have to excommunicate and shun them—even though that temptation to retaliate may be real. Quoting from the book of Proverbs, Paul instructed the Roman Christians, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head" (Rom. 12:20). That is, by showing kindness to family members who have made themselves your enemies, you will shame them into reconsidering their hurtful actions against you.

We will never lead our religious but unsaved relatives into genuine faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and the new birth by compromise, but by our obedience to Christ and our love for them. So guard yourself against bitterness, and focus on being better in your behavior than they are. As someone once said, "The difference between being bitter or better is the letter 'I.'"

And don't forget that, although you may have lost your former family, you have gained a new family of fellow believers,

all over the world, who love Jesus like you. Jesus was rejected by many members of His own physical family, but here was His perspective on that: “My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it” (Luke 8:19). When we join Jesus’ family, we join all those who are following Him, and all true believers love each other (John 13:35; 1 John 3:14).

Thankfully, there are some Amish communities that have repented of the practice of excommunicating and shunning those who have left but who are striving to follow Christ, as those communities have realized that they would otherwise be idolaters who exalt their ordnung above Christ’s commandment to love their brothers and sisters in Christ. If you have left one of those kinds of Amish communities, you can be thankful that your Amish family and friends are not shunning you. So you will still have opportunities to attend family functions and honor your parents if they are still on this earth, and you should, of course. If they require you to pretend that you are still Amish when you visit them, you will have to let your conscience be your guide. Personally, I would agree to such an arrangement only if they would agree to pretend they are not Amish when they visited me. (And they might secretly enjoy such an equitable arrangement!)

Preserving Tradition

By Jonas Kurtz

Over the past eight issues of *The Awakening!*, we have written a lot about ordnungs in light of the Bible. That topic has certainly generated the most response from our readers, which is no surprise to us. Preserving the ordnung seems to have become one of the sole purposes of the Amish world.

That being said, there are many traditions that Amish people put a lot of value in preserving, that are not spelled out in any ordnung. For example, I don’t know of an ordnung that requires the “lob-leid” be sung every Sunday morning. I’ve never been a part of a council meeting where that was brought up, and

I have never heard of it being brought up in any other council meeting anywhere. The same can be said for singings, how the church disciplines, the ministry going on the “abroth” on Sunday morning, men and women sitting separately during church services, having to attend work bees or “frolics” when someone’s house or barn burns down, and so on. Although not explicitly stated in any ordnung, these things are very much a part of the fabric of Amish life and culture and preserving them is seen as all important.

The original reason for many of those practices is often not known. For example, why does the bishop go through the vö-stelling before enumerating ordnung requirements at council meeting when there was just a sermon on the same topic? Why does he do the same before the first sermon at communion when the rest of the day will be spent going into great detail on the things he just mentioned? It all seems to be a redundant waste of time, but I don’t know of any community that would consider changing it. “There must have been a good reason for it or else our forefathers wouldn’t have started doing it” is the common thought. “Let’s preserve what our forefathers practiced.”

The descendants of men and women who lived for the advancement of the gospel of eternal life through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, are now living for the preservation of cultural traditions. Rather than risk rejection by family and friends—as their forefathers did—by questioning church traditions that have no foundation in Scripture and that are often at odds with the gospel, they live to preserve church traditions that have no foundation in Scripture and that are often at odds with the gospel, and they reject family and friends who question those traditions! How tragically ironic it is that modern Anabaptists are no longer persecuted for questioning church traditions; they have now become the persecutors of anyone who questions church traditions.

While the focus of our forefathers was the Lordship of Jesus Christ and obedience to Him, the primary focus of the

majority of Amish communities has now become the preservation of culture. For example, because of their focus on obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ, the first Anabaptists rejected the traditional Latin Bible translation, used by the Roman Catholic church, that most of them could not read or understand. They adopted the newly-translated German translation by Martin Luther, because German was their language (see the related article in this issue of *The Awakening!*). Today, Amish communities still cling to Martin Luther’s German translation solely because of tradition, in spite of the fact that German is not understood, at least not sufficiently, by so many Amish people. The focus is not understanding the Word of God, but preserving tradition.

Similarly, some Amish communities disobey authorities—whom we are all commanded in Scripture to obey—only to preserve their rules and traditions. I’m not talking about disobeying authorities who are commanding people to disobey God (as our ancestors did); I am talking about disobeying authorities who have the interest and safety of the people at heart.

Case in point: In 2022 the state of Ohio passed a law requiring all horse-drawn buggies to be equipped with a yellow flashing tail light. The reason was because, between the years of 2009 and 2019, there were 723 buggy-related accidents in Ohio that resulted in 17 deaths. That comes out to a one buggy accident about every five days. The Ohio lawmakers had the safety and lives of the public in mind, including the safety and lives of Amish people.

Can any reader honestly say that obeying such a simple law, would cause one to disobey God? Is there any biblical evidence to support the idea that God is displeased with the use of flashing yellow lights to contribute to the safety of the traveling public?

I know that the majority of Amish readers will wholeheartedly agree that there isn’t. But some of the more conservative Ohio Amish members have taken offense against this law saying, (and I quote one of them), “Some people may think it is

only a tradition that we don't use battery-operated lights on our buggies. This may well be the case with some groups, but as for me, my religion doesn't allow me any battery-operated lights on my buggy." He went on to explain that installing a battery light would not be trusting in God for his safety and well-being, and if he were to install a light he would "trust the light more than God."

His view not only contradicts the Bible's prohibition against putting God to a test (as quoted by Jesus during His temptation by Satan), but it contradicts so many other Amish practices that contribute to their safety and the safety of others.

These particular conservative Amish groups have decided that they can't obey the yellow tail light law because it would undermine their tradition, and so they have not installed the required lights. Their stance has resulted in many violations and fines (which they are refusing to pay), not to mention the continuation of preventable accidents. They are in direct disobedience to God's commandments to obey authorities (Romans 13) and to love their neighbors as themselves (Mathew 22:36-40), the second-most-important commandment according to Jesus. Amish leaders who continue to enforce disobedience to the authorities on this matter should be held personally responsible for every injury and death that results from a buggy accident in their communities.

A few years ago, there was a similar situation among a conservative group near me that refused to install septic systems in accordance with local law. They eventually moved to another state because they would not compromise their "faith" by installing septic systems. The local authorities were only trying to help them love their neighbors by preventing sewage to be mixed in ground water sources.

I know that these examples of Amish zeal to preserve tradition are extreme, and they do not represent the beliefs or practices of the majority of our readers. I do believe, however, that many readers are a part of a community that is guilty of being more focused on preserving Amish tradition than serving God by obedience to Jesus' commandments.

Worse, some Amish traditions annul God's commandments.

For example, does your community excommunicate people who leave but who are not living in open sin (as referenced in 1 Corinthians 5) and are continuing in faith? Then preserving tradition has annulled obedience to Jesus. Does your community continue to preach sermons and read scripture in a language that most struggle to understand? Then preserving tradition has annulled obedience to Jesus, who can only be obeyed if people understand what He has said. Does your community discourage missions? Does your community discourage sharing the gospel freely and inviting non-Amish to church? Then preserving tradition has annulled obedience to Jesus, who died for everyone in the world, who does not want "any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9), and who commanded His disciples to preach the gospel to everyone.

The first step towards fixing a problem is acknowledging that a problem exists. If you are honest enough to do that, then the next step is to surrender yourself completely to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and be born again. If this has not happened to you yet you will find that it is the best thing that could ever happen!

I then suggest that you seek the Lord on how to proceed. Is it possible that you can help other Amish people to put Jesus before Amish traditions? If it is, then do your best to try for as long as they allow it. Of course, you may find yourself excommunicated by those who love their tradition more than they do Jesus. In that case, "leave the dead to bury the dead," as Jesus instructed.

In closing, may I say that there is nothing wrong with many of the traditions of Amish culture. In fact, there are many good traditions that are actually expressions of obedience to Jesus' commandments, things such as work frolics, community benefit auctions and health care sharing. And there are also many neutral traditions such as the vö-stelling, men and women sitting separately, and a Sunday church lunch. But there are also traditions that stand in opposition to Scripture. Those are the traditions that

should be dropped.

And when Paul wrote, "stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught" (2 Thes. 2:15) and, "Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you" (1Cor. 11:2), he certainly was not endorsing traditions that contradicted Scripture or the gospel! Paul had turned away from many Jewish traditions when he wrote the words we just read (see Gal. 1:14)!

As always, our goal in every issue of the *The Awakening!* is to help our Amish readers rediscover their special spiritual heritage in order to enjoy the same blessings as their Anabaptist ancestors did. Once you are born again, the Holy Spirit comes to live in you, and the first thing He does is begin to teach you the truth, because He is, as Jesus said, "the Spirit of truth" (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13). We beg you, open your heart!

A Letter From a Reader

I want to say thank you, for publishing *The Awakening* newsletter. Each issue has been a great encouragement to me in my life as an old order Amish man. It is an answer to many prayers I have whispered over the last 11 years, that God would somehow get my Amish brothers and sisters to see their error of believing and teaching that extra biblical rules are a necessity.

I have come to realize that many of our people (Amish church members) will not believe the truth, simply because they love the world they are so sure they are separated from. Deceived people are the hardest to reach. By God's grace *The Awakening* can help. It is filled with truth, something that too many of our churches and homes are lacking these days.

I did have some doubts on what your stance would be on Grace. Your last newsletter put that to rest. Praise the Lord! I had somewhat assumed you to have a more charismatic stance on grace. Keep up the good work! The narrow way is not an easy way.

Resources For You



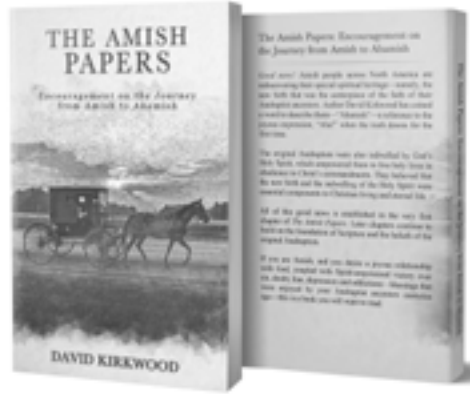
Why Be Plain? A Biblical Response

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*.



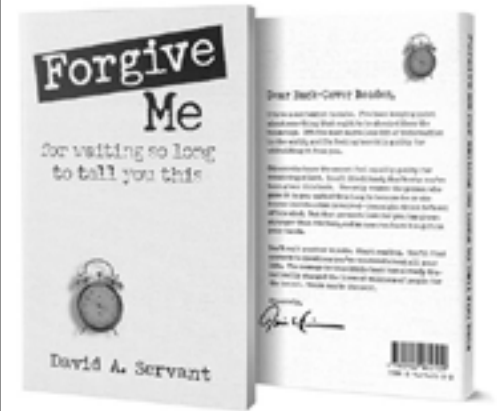
The Amish Papers *Encouragement on the Journey from Amish to Ahamish*

Good news! Many Amish people across North America are rediscovering their special spiritual heritage—namely, the new birth that was the centerpiece of the faith of their Anabaptist ancestors. Author David Kirkwood has coined a word to describe them—"Ahamish"—a reference to the joyous expression, "Aha!" when the truth dawns for the first time.

More good news! The original Anabaptists not only universally enjoyed a spiritual rebirth that transformed every aspect of their lives, but they were indwelt by God's Holy Spirit, which empowered them to live holy lives in obedience to Christ's commandments.

Even more good news! The original Anabaptists possessed assurance of eternal life. That is, because they experienced the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives every day, they had no doubt that their names were recorded in heaven and they were God's own spiritual children.

All of this good news is clearly established in *The Amish Papers*, which begins with a chapter titled, "An Honest Look at the 1632 Dordrecht Confession." Later chapters continue to build on the foundation of Scripture and the beliefs of the original Anabaptists.



Forgive Me *...For Waiting So Long to Tell you this*

David wrote *Forgive Me for Waiting so Long to Tell You This* to help believers share the gospel with people whom they love. He presents a compelling case to persuade readers to believe in and follow the Lord Jesus Christ by proving, both logically and scripturally, that He was a unique historical person who was also the divine Son of God. If you are searching for assurance of eternal life coupled with a real relationship with God, or if you know someone who is, this is a book for you.

Order Books

You can get your free *digital* copy of any book by visiting DavidServant.com and navigating to the free books tab, or by emailing Jonas at Jonas@heavensfamily.org.

You can also order a physical copy by mailing us with your payment enclosed, at Heavens Family, PO Box 611, Punxsutawney PA 15767. Any checks should be made payable to Heavens Family.

Why Be Plain? A Biblical Response\$13.00
The Amish Papers.....\$10.00
Forgive Me.....\$7.00
HeavenWord Daily.....\$20.00
Family Style Devotions.....\$20.00
God's Tests.....\$10.00

Why Be Plain? A Biblical Response and *The Amish Papers* are also available on Amazon.com



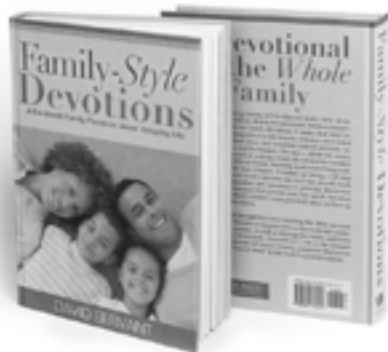
HeavenWord Daily

A Year of Growth Through the New Testament

By devoting just three minutes each morning or evening—five days a week—you can read through the New Testament in exactly one year. That is just one New Testament chapter each day. If you devote another three minutes, you can read through David Kirkwood’s corresponding commentary and grow spiritually every day.

HeavenWord Daily guides you through the New Testament following a unique reading plan. One of the four Gospels is read each quarter, while the epistles and Acts are read chronologically. So, as you read through Acts, you’ll read each epistle at the time it was written in relationship to the book Acts, providing important historical context.

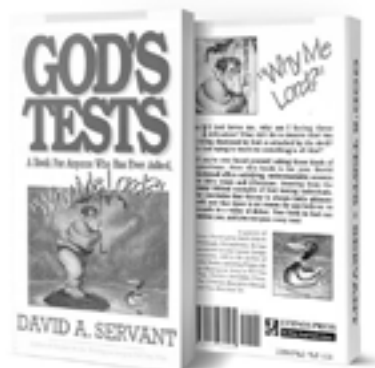
HeavenWord Daily is not a fluff devotional, but rather a “motivational do-votional,” full of insight and inspiration.



Family-Style Devotions

A Five-Month Family-Focus on Jesus’ Amazing Life

This five-month devotional, written especially for families with young children, centers around the life of Christ, touching on most everything written about Him in the four Gospels. Each daily devotional includes questions and an application for parents to provoke discussion with their children. The Introduction also includes some practical ideas and tips on how to conduct daily family devotions that everyone will enjoy. Your family will be learning about Jesus and growing together!



God’s Tests

For Anyone Who Has Asked “Why Me Lord?”

“If God loves me, why am I facing these difficulties?” “What did I do to deserve this?” “Am I being chastened by God or attacked by the devil?” “Is God trying to teach me something?”

If you’ve ever found yourself asking those kinds of questions, this book is for you. David offers satisfying, understandable, and biblical answers to life’s trials.

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!* You can write to us at *The Awakening!*, P.O. Box 611, Punxsutawney, PA 15767. You can call or text Jonas Kurtz at 814-952- 7758 or email him at Jonas@HeavensFamily.org. **Note:** From Oct 12th to October 31st Jonas will be traveling to Pakistan and Myanmar in relation to his work for the ministry of Heaven’s Family. Between these dates he will be unavailable for phone calls and letters,

but will be able to respond to emails.

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. We have successfully honored several thousand such requests over the past three years of publishing. If you have requested removal but are still receiving *The Awakening!*, it could be because you anonymously asked to be removed, and we thus have no idea who you are. Or it could be that you included your name within a list of names that you asked

to be removed, but you didn’t identify who you were on that list. We honor all individual requests for removal, but we don’t honor requests for groups to be removed, as no one has the right to prevent others from hearing the gospel. The reason we publish *The Awakening!* is in the hope that Amish people will experience the new birth, without which no one will see or enter God’s kingdom, according to Jesus!

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

The Awakening!



Inside:

- **Five Lovely Days in Lancaster**
- **What to Do When Convictions Differ**
- **A Look at Two Bible Translations**
- **A Ditch on Both Sides**
- **Preserving Tradition**