



Chronicling the Anabaptist Rediscovery of their Special Spiritual Heritage

Introduction

By David Kirkwood

I would like to begin this issue of *The Awakening!* by thanking all of you who have made it possible. When we set a goal in late 2023 to publish four issues in 2024, it looked like an impossible task. The main hurdle was financial. We knew our goal would require raising about \$200,000 for printing and postage. But thanks to our faithful readers, the goal has become a reality with this fourth issue of *The Awakening!* Thank you for every gift, large and small.

We are trusting God to continue publishing in 2025, and more importantly, we are thanking God for every Amish life that has been touched in 2024 and that will be touched in 2025. So many Amish folks are rediscovering their Anabaptist spiritual heritage.

One of them is Bishop Melvin Byler of Anderson, Missouri. Don't miss his story that is found in the pages that follow. Jonas Kurtz and I had the wonderful

blessing of visiting Bishop Byler's congregation a few weeks ago. They are another part of the awakening that is occurring in many places across North America among sincere Amish people.

Another person who has rediscovered his Anabaptist spiritual heritage is Ervin Yoder of Colorado. Ervin tells his captivating story in this issue of *The Awakening!*, and I'm sure you will be blessed by it.

There are four points that we've repeatedly made in previous issues of *The Awakening!* that I want to once again re-emphasize at the beginning of this issue:

1.) Our goal is to help as many Amish people as we can to rediscover their Anabaptist heritage, the centerpiece of which was the new birth through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The new birth is a divinely-granted spiritual transformation that always results in heart-obedience to Jesus' commandments. Every Amish person wants to be part of Jesus' eternal kingdom, and the new birth,

followed by obedience to Jesus, is the heavenly key that was cherished by your Anabaptist ancestors. Praise God for all the Amish people who were already born again or who have been born again since we started publishing *The Awakening!* We will not be satisfied until every Amish person is enjoying all the benefits of the new birth. Today could be the greatest day of your life!

2.) We know that, within the Amish world, there is a broad spectrum of belief and practice. If you are an Amish person who is born again, please don't be offended that we are trying to reach Amish people who are not born again. Rather, please help us reach them so that they can enjoy the same blessing you enjoy. (By the way, if you are not concerned about those who are not born again, that is a sure sign that you are not yet born again.) And if you think that something we are trying to address has no application to your community, then know that we are not writing about your community!

3.) We do not believe that any Amish

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person or community needs to change any aspect of their lifestyle or culture, unless, of course, there is some aspect of their lifestyle or culture that in some way stands in contradiction to Scripture. Our only real concern about any Amish community's ordnung is when the ordnung is portrayed, either directly or by implication, to be a means of salvation, because that idea stands in direct contradiction to the Bible. Scripture tells us that the means to salvation is the Lord Jesus Christ and His sacrificial death and resurrection. Salvation is by grace through faith in Him (Eph. 2:8-10). Jesus is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Through the Lord Jesus Christ, God graciously offers forgiveness for all of our past sins, freedom from captivity to sin, empowerment to live a holy life through the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit, forgiveness for current sins that are confessed to God, and eternal life to those who "continue in the faith" (Col. 1:22-23). It is so wonderful that anyone who believes it can't keep quiet about it!

4.) In keeping with #3 above, we do not encourage any Amish person to leave the Amish. Rather, we encourage every Amish person to remain Amish, in order to maintain peace and harmony with their families, as long as remaining does not require the violation of conscience. However, we cannot prevent Amish communities whose leaders are spiritually dead (not born-again) from excommunicating and shunning Amish people within their communities who rediscover the faith of their ancestors and are born again. Any Amish community that excommunicates born-again Amish people testifies before God in heaven that its members are enemies of Jesus Christ, because He lives, by His Holy Spirit, in all of those who are born again. Remember, Jesus said to His followers: "The one who listens to you listens to Me, and *the one who rejects you rejects Me*; and he who rejects Me

rejects the One who sent Me" (Luke 10:16, emphasis added).

From the hundreds of responses, both positive and negative, that we have received to past issues of *The Awakening!*, we are persuaded that we are touching Amish hearts and minds with subjects and issues that deeply interest them. We all know that, in many Amish communities, asking questions is not encouraged, and is often discouraged. But that does not stop Amish hearts and minds—given to them by God—from silently questioning. That is why we are "breaking the silence" in every issue of *The Awakening!*, and our perception is that most of our readers appreciate that.

Those who write to ask to be removed from our mailing list are only a small minority of the Amish world. And their rejection of our magazine breaks our hearts—not for us, but for them. We think they will one day suffer great regret for rejecting the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ that was embraced and loved by their Anabaptist ancestors. To us, it is tragic that people who emphasize how important it is to honor their ancestors dishonor their ancestors in the most significant way possible, by rejecting their core biblical beliefs.

Thank you again for your encouragement and support that makes *The Awakening!* possible. May 2025 be the best year of your life! — David

To help us continue publishing *The Awakening!* in 2025, send all gifts to *The Awakening!*, P.O. Box 611, Punxsutawney, PA 15767. Thank you! Checks should be made out to Heaven's Family / Awakening.

To save us money on printing and mailing you issues of *The Awakening!*, please request future issues by email. Just send your request to Jonas@heavensfamily.org.

My Search for Peace

By Ervin Yoder

My story begins with the first time my father left, when I was just six years old. Our family lived in a semi-conservative Amish community in northwestern Pennsylvania. At that time, I didn't understand why my father left us. Now I know that it had to do with some issues in our church. I will spare you the details.

My mother, younger brother, our two sisters and I continued to attend our church. Since our services were segregated, my brother and I would sit with our grandfather. After church services, we would play with the other children until mom decided to head for home. After my father departed, however, I can remember other children mocking us for not having a dad. That became a regular occurrence. As a result, I became very protective of my brother and sisters.

After being gone for a year, dad returned home. The church decided mom and dad could not be trusted to manage their own finances, so they appointed a committee of three men to help them. Those men took over my parents' checking account, and they dictated where every dollar was spent. They even decided that my parents should sell our home property to eliminate some of their debt. The purchaser, however, was one of the three men who decided that my parents should sell the property, which looked very suspicious to my father. That was the last straw for him and the church. We packed up and moved to a nearby Amish community that was a little more progressive.

Three years later, when I was ten, dad left again. He was gone for several

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years this time, and he spent part of that time in prison. I don't know exactly why, but it had something to do with a bad business deal in which he was involved.

In his absence, our family, by then consisting of six children, struggled financially. Thankfully, our Amish church paid our house rent, but we still needed money for groceries and regular household expenses.

My youngest brother was only two at the time, so my mother could not work a job outside the home. I knew we needed income, so I decided I would take care of it. I also knew no one would hire a ten-year-old boy to work full time, so I worked on weekday evenings and all day on Saturdays mowing lawns, doing landscaping, and other odd jobs. Mom made chair covers for supplemental income. So, we were able to scrape by, but just barely. I became the man of the house. I took over the barn responsibilities, including hitching the horse and driving our family to church. I felt responsible for their well-being.

I listened with envy when other children talked at school about the fun things their family had planned for an evening or weekend, because I knew I would be heading home, grabbing a snack, and heading off to make money, and my weekend would be the same. I also struggled when people from our local church would go on vacations. I used to inwardly ask, "Can't they see how we are barely scraping by over here? Don't they care?" Looking back, I think if they had known what we were going through they would have offered more support.

I was about fourteen years old when dad returned. It was a relief to be a boy again and to let him take over the responsibility of our household. Although he had left us several times, I held very

little resentment towards him, and we have a good relationship to this day.

When I was fifteen and out of school, I began to work for a construction crew, and I was generally away from home five days every week. My boss was one of the ministers in our church. I suspect my mom thought I was in good hands working for someone in the ministry. Unfortunately, that was not the case. Several of the men on our crew were functioning alcoholics. Our boss (the minister) supplied all the alcohol anyone wanted, including me and my closest friend who also worked with us. I began to drink a little, but thankfully I never became addicted.

Our Amish community allowed rumspringa. I had a few close friends whom I hung out with, and several times they showed me their secret stashes of pornography. I knew it was wrong, and I didn't follow their example. I also had no interest in cycling through girlfriends like many of my friends were doing. I wanted to date one girl and ultimately marry her. Even though I knew I was not right with God, I prayed and asked Him to show me the girl He wanted me to marry. I woke up one morning sometime after that prayer with the distinct impression that I was going to marry a girl in our church named Lovina. At the time, Lovina was not even on my radar, but from then on, she definitely was! After waiting a few months, I asked her on a date. The rest is history!

I have related my story from age six to my marriage so you can better understand the rest of my story. Unlike some others whose stories have been featured in *The Awakening!*, my story is not one of redemption from a life filled with sin and hypocrisy. Still, like everyone else who has ever been born (other than Jesus), I was a sinner who needed a Savior. Even though I was not caught up in any dark sins, I still knew something

was off. I was not at peace with God. All of my life I was terrified of dying. I wasn't sure of gaining heaven, and I was afraid of deserving hell.

It is important for you to understand that at that time in my life, I had complete confidence in my Amish upbringing and understanding. I looked forward to joining the Amish church, getting married, and living the rest of my life as a member of my Amish community. I had no idea what would one day happen to me, or that I would ultimately be excommunicated because of God transforming my life.

Just as I had always planned, I joined the church at age 18. I don't remember being taught anything about salvation, forgiveness of sins, or the new birth during our nine Sunday morning and one Saturday afternoon sessions with the ministers. Perhaps those things were all mentioned, but in German of course, and it all seemed so confusing to me.

One thing that stood out to me from the sermon on the Sunday of my baptism was that the minister told us we would feel different once we were baptized. I was really looking forward to that different feeling I was about to experience! I was confident that I was on the right track, and I was anticipating that I was about to finally feel at peace with God. So, I was baptized. "Here it comes" I thought, as the bishop asked us to kneel in preparation to be sprinkled. "In just a moment, I will have peace." But when I was sprinkled with water, I felt nothing. There was still no peace in my heart. I was just as terrified of dying as I had ever been.

I got married shortly after and settled into married life. I knew I was still empty and broken, but I tried to ignore it. On the one-year anniversary of our marriage, our son Timothy was born. When Timothy took his very first breath, I temporarily felt something I

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had never felt before. It felt so close, and so real, that I looked around to see the source. It was a perfect peace. I somehow knew it was the presence of the Holy Spirit. But five seconds later, that peace left.

From that point on, I longed to experience that peace again, a peace that had temporarily lifted a heavy weight from my heart and mind. Although I was following the rules of the church pretty closely at the time, I decided I needed to try even harder to please God. That way I would earn His favor and hopefully experience that peace again.

So that is exactly what I did, but to my sadness and confusion, it did not produce the relationship with God I desired. In fact, it left me feeling darker. I was more afraid of dying than I had ever been, even though I was trying harder than ever to follow the church rules and traditions. I was failing! The more I failed the harder I tried, and the harder I tried the more I failed. That downward cycle continued for about six years.

During that dark time, I developed an increasingly-serious issue with lustful thoughts, something I had not struggled with prior to church membership. It was never ending. I was falling farther away from God since being baptized, not growing closer. As a result, I became an angry and withdrawn person. I did not want to talk to anyone apart from my family.

I decided that our local Amish church with all its problems was the issue. They were not enforcing the rules strictly enough, I thought. So Lovina and I moved to Colorado. That was in 2021.

Both Lovina and I thought our new Amish community was going to be different. We quickly learned otherwise. After only attending church twice we

realized we were right back in the middle of what we thought we had escaped in Pennsylvania. I became very angry. I had moved 1,500 miles for nothing.

Then, two of my brothers-in-law back in Punxsutawney, Raymond and Jonas, were born again, during what we refer to now as the “Johnsonburg Awakening.” They started calling their sister, my wife Lovina, on a regular basis to talk about the Bible. They convinced her that it is possible, according to Scripture, to know for certain that your past sins are all forgiven. When I would come home from work each day, she would share with me whatever they had shared with her. I became angry at her brothers.

I told Lovina that there is no way anyone can know that their sins have been forgiven and that they possess eternal life. She replied, “Read your Bible!” I said, “No way! There is no point in reading a book I don’t understand, and I’m not doing it!” But I was scared. Her brothers had scriptures, such as 1 John 5:13, to support their claim. But in my mind, there was no way I could ever accept that what I had been taught all of my life was wrong.

Then Lovina’s brother Raymond came out to Colorado to pour some concrete for our new basement. He told me all about the situation in the Johnsonburg Amish community, where people were attending Bible studies and learning things they had never known before. They were being delivered from alcoholism and pornography addictions and all sorts of things, but they were also being talked about in negative ways by some of the Amish people in their community. I was polite enough to listen, but I was not really interested.

One night I walked into the living room and found Raymond had laid an English translation of the Bible on my coffee table. I was wary of any Bible

but the German translation, so I resisted reading it. The next night, however, after Raymond was headed home, I picked it up and said to myself, “I am going to sit down and read this Bible and compare it with my German Bible to prove him wrong. I began to read through random parts of Matthew and John.

Then I read some of the book of Romans. I started thinking to myself, “Holy smokes, if this is true, I’m in trouble!” I was reading Paul’s words about the impossibility of anyone being made right with God by following the law. Of course, the “law” of which Paul wrote to the Romans was referring to the Old Testament Law of Moses. I had not been trying to keep that law, but I had been attempting to keep all the rules of the ordnung, hoping it would make be right before God.

Then I started reading Paul’s letter to the Galatians. By the time I got through that book I was done with my old self. I realized that no amount of doing good could undo the sins I’d already committed or ever make me right with God. But, if I simply surrendered my life to Jesus Christ as my Lord, He would dwell in me by the Holy Spirit and not only grant me eternal life, but would give me the power to overcome sin. I needed to take the energy I had been pouring into keeping the ordnung and pour it into living for my King.

I prayed right then and I said, “Lord I was wrong. I believe I must be born again to enter Your kingdom. I know this is Your Word and it is true. I am going to follow You no matter what it takes, even if it costs me my wife or my mom and dad. I will give You everything.”

That night, God reached down and delivered me. I started that evening as a servant of Satan, but I ended it as a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ! Just

like that, I felt the weight of my guilt lift from me. What a glorious feeling! It was very much like the wonderful feeling I experienced when our first child was born. It was surreal!

Actually, I thought that wonderful feeling might leave as it had before, but it didn't. I got up and went to the kitchen to get a cup of coffee. I floated into the kitchen and back, and the feeling didn't leave.

I went to bed thinking there is no way anyone can feel so good! The next day was Saturday, a day I would typically sleep in, but I woke at 5:30. The feeling of floating on air—a result of knowing my sins had been forgiven—was still there!

I went back to my chair and picked up that English Bible again and went right back to reading. Then I came across Colossians 2. I bolted up from my chair and showed it to my wife. "Look at this!"

Then I thought, "Hmmm, there is no way the German Bible says what I just read. I am 28 years old, and there is no way I missed something this foundational all these years. I have never heard of a sermon on these topics."

I nervously got out my old German Bible that I hardly understood and began to compare notes. Meanwhile I was thinking, "I'm going to learn that this English Bible is indeed misleading, and I was wrong about this whole born-again thing." But, to my excitement and surprise, the German Bible said exactly the same things as the English one. My eyes were finally opened!

For the next several weeks I kept expecting that wonderful feeling to leave, but it kept getting stronger. Today, I'm certain that the most amazing thing a person can experience is to be born again, to know their sins are forgiven, and to be free from guilt. To know that

you have eternal life. To no longer fear dying and standing before Jesus!

Eight days after I was born again, we went to church again, now as a completely different person. I quickly realized that I no longer fit it. Everyone was stuck where I had previously been stuck. Everyone was trying to be right in God's eyes by their own feeble efforts of keeping the ordnung, rather than receiving what I had read about in the Bible—God's *gift of righteousness* (Romans 5:17), which forgives and empowers. We could not go back. After we stopped attending for a while, they excommunicated us. We will never stop praying for them, that they will open their hearts to the new birth that we have experience and enjoy every day.

Eventually, we began meeting with like-minded born-again believers who were full of all the fruit of the Spirit that Paul wrote about in Galatians 5, including the fruit of peace. Like them, we are striving daily to obey all of the Lord Jesus's commandments, not ignoring any of them, including His commandment to make disciples of all nations in Matthew 28.

I know there are Amish churches in North America in which people are born again. In those churches, I am welcome. The people in those Amish churches invite us to sit at their dinner table with them. They have extended invitations for us to attend their communion services. They know, as do all born-again believers, that God does not view people as Amish or ex-Amish. He only views them as born again or not born again. He sees them as either indwelt by the Holy Spirit or not indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

If you don't know if your sins are forgiven or if you have eternal life. If you have been taught that you can't know if you would go to heaven if you were to die today, I have good news for you.

The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy: *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing* (2 Timothy 4:7-8, *ESV*).

Paul was certain that he was going to receive a "crown of righteousness." I'm sure we all agree that such a crown will only be given to people who have eternal life. So, Paul *knew* he had eternal life. He knew he was born again. He knew he was going to heaven when he died. He knew he was saved. He possessed assurance of his salvation. Paul was not just hoping to get to heaven. He was positive of his destination. And he declared that all those who look forward to the return of our Lord will receive the same "crown of righteousness."

Similarly, the apostle John wrote:

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life (1 John 5:13, *ESV*).

It is indisputable that John believed it is possible to know that you have eternal life. Throughout his first letter, he repeatedly affirms that fact by repeatedly mentioning the characteristics of those who are born again. For example, he wrote, "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren" (1 John 5:13).

All I'm attempting to do is to show you that it is possible to know your eternal destination before you die. Of course, I am not saying that a born-again believer can never stray. I'm just saying it is irrefutable that the Word of God says it is possible to have assurance of eternal life.

Like all born-again people, I want to

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help everyone I can discover and enjoy the new birth. If I can be of any assistance to you, please feel free to write me at P.O. Box 611, Punxsutawney, PA 1576, or call me at (719) 285-3563.

I know the train wreck my life was before I had the peace and purpose that accompanies the new birth. Everything has changed for me, and it can for you as well!

The 1632 Dordrecht Confession on Ordnungs

By David Kirkwood

Our article in the last issue of *The Awakening!* titled “Two Views of the Ordnung” provoked many replies, which I had invited. In this article, I will highlight one very thoughtful reply from a gracious reader.

We do not, of course, want to devote too much space in any issue of *The Awakening!* to an ongoing discussion about ordnungs, simply because our primary goal is for all of our Amish readers to regain their spiritual heritage and experience the same spiritual rebirth as their ancestors. Nothing could be more important than that.

Nevertheless, it has become obvious that, in some cases, ordnungs stand in the way of Amish people being born again, because ordnungs are sometimes viewed, more or less, as a means to salvation. In contrast to that, all of the early Anabaptists believed that God’s means to salvation was a genuine faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that resulted in a spiritual rebirth, characterized thereafter by heart-based obedience to His commandments. They, like the early church of the apostles, had nothing that remotely resembled modern Amish ordnungs.

Yes, there are a few places in the New Testament where the apostles addressed specific church problems by finding application in God’s commandments, and there is a case where Paul applied his own wisdom to a certain problem. Again, however, there is no example of the apostles creating hundreds of extra rules that governed every detail of Christian life, rules which baptismal candidates had to pledge to keep, and that all Christians had to pledge twice a year to keep, all under the threat of excommunication, shunning and damnation. The original apostles, as well as the original Anabaptists, only taught the commandments of Christ (as Christ had commanded them; see Matt. 28:18-20).

The letter to which I want to respond in this article was anonymous, but I suspect it was written by a young, Amish woman. I will refer to her as “Anna.” Her letter was well written, and she made some excellent points. At the top of her letter, she wrote, “The Awakening is a great idea, keep it up! ☺”

I won’t quote all of Anna’s reply, as it was lengthy, but just a few parts which I think will be of interest to our readers. Anna begins:

David, I know you don’t understand that reason for the guidelines, but please don’t pitch all Amish in the same box. There are 100 different Amish churches and some seem to think Amish tradition will be their ticket to heaven, but not nearly all think that way.

Anna is certainly correct about there being a hundred different kinds of Amish churches, something we have acknowledged in previous issues of *The Awakening!* I would personally label that spectrum as ranging from “more biblical” to “less biblical.” On one side are Amish groups like Anna’s that stress the new birth and following the commandments of the Lord Jesus Christ.

On the other side are groups that stress the ordnung and strictly enforce hundreds of traditions and rules. And there is everything in between those two. Anna continues:

Let me try explaining. So I’m a member of a Christian church and happen to live the Amish lifestyle. In our group we have a few guidelines with scriptural references, regarding “why” we feel it is important to keep them. For example, we practice “hands off, laps off and lips off” courtship. Both people who are dating need to be Christians (showing by their life walk) and be living a pure life, dedicated to God.

OK, so is it a sin to kiss before you’re married or share a hug? I won’t say it is! But for the sake of avoiding fornication (or sex before marriage) that’s why we have that guideline. For me, I’d rather not start something than having to stop! It’s easier to avoid sinning if I don’t put my foot in the crack. So what I’m saying is I’d rather not have hugged and kissed my special friend before marriage because it’s too hard to stop there!

I could not agree more with the wisdom of the dating “guidelines” to which Anna refers. They are guidelines that any committed, born-again Christian parents would teach their teenagers, and that any true born-again Christian young person (like Anna) would want to follow. They definitely stand in contrast to the lax and unbiblical standards practiced in some Amish communities that, for example, encourage “bed courtship.” My friend Jonas Kurtz, a former Amish minister, told me that he didn’t know of a single pure courtship in his particular Amish community, including his own courtship (which was before he and his wife were born again).

But Anna and every reader needs to remember that in Bible days, people were no different than they are today. Young people found themselves attracted to the opposite sex, including Christian young people. They had desires and were tempted to do what the Bible condemned as sin. Remember that Paul told unmarried believers that “it is better to marry than to burn with passion” (1 Cor. 7:9).

So, unmarried Christians were tempted then in the same ways they are today. But neither Paul, nor any other apostle, wrote a list of ordnung rules to govern courtship, rules that all young people were required to publicly pledge to keep, and that, if they were caught not keeping any of the courtship rules, were required to publicly confess their transgression before the church and then endured a temporary ban. And if they wouldn't confess their transgression before the church, they were excommunicated, shunned, and were told they were on the road to hell.

No, the apostles simply preached the gospel. Some who heard it repented, believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, and were born again. Those new believers were admonished by the apostles and elders to obey all of Christ's commandments, which included His commandments regarding sexual purity. And they were expected to “work out their own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12). If someone in the church was caught breaking one of God's commandments, Paul's instructions were clear: “Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted” (Gal. 6:1).

Of course, as any honest Amish leader will admit, ordnung rules regarding courtship do not prevent non-born-again Amish young people from finding

a way to yield to their wrong desires. By contrast, born-again believers only need knowledge of God's commandments, which they of course strive to obey because Jesus is their Lord and because they are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Adding more layers of rules or “fence laws” will not affect the secret behavior or the hearts of those who are not born again.

Anna is clearly a born-again young person. If, in the absence of any ordnung rules, her parents had talked to her about how to avoid dangers in courtship, she would be following their guidance. But beyond that (please read slowly), even if Anna's parents were not born again themselves, and even if they encouraged “bed courtship,” Anna would not be following the encouragement of her parents, but rather, she would be seeking to obey God and would be taking steps to avoid temptation—because she is born again and thus committed to the Lord Jesus Christ.

When church leaders attempt to influence the behavior of those who are not born again through a system of fear and shame, it is an exercise in futility. It is like trying to get a pig to act like a horse. You can harness a pig to your buggy just like a horse, but the pig will still act like a pig. That is why everyone needs to be born again. When they are, they are given by God a new spiritual nature (see 2 Cor. 5:17).

It is interesting that Anna, like others who have written to us, refers to ordnung rules as “guidelines.” Personally, I don't think that is an appropriate word to describe Amish ordnungs. If they are “guidelines,” there would be no threat of discipline by those who establish them. Guidelines are not laws. Guidelines help guide the way. If they are not followed, those who don't follow them suffer the natural consequences. That being so, no ordnung rule is a “guide-

line” as long as those who create the “guideline” also monitor compliance and impose penalties for transgressions.

From a positive standpoint, at least the courtship “guidelines” in Anna's community have some relationship to biblical principles, that is, to help young people avoid the sin of fornication. Praise God for that! They stand in contrast, however, to all of the ordnung rules in Amish communities that have no relationship to any biblical, ethical, or moral principles. I suppose that they could be considered harmless, except that Amish people are told that they will go to hell if they don't obey those extra-biblical ordnung rules. In those cases, the ordnung becomes a means to salvation. And the man-made rules of the ordnung have been elevated to be equal with God's commandments.

Let us consider, for a moment, a very fundamental moral law, God's prohibition against murder. It is one of the Ten Commandments. Every Christian should obey that commandment and for a number of good reasons: Genuine born-again believers love God, and because they love Him, they obey His commandments. And they also love their neighbors. Jesus is their Lord. They are also indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who empowers them to obey God.

So, what would you think of a church group that created rules to help prevent their church members from committing murder? Imagine a church that made rules that forbade anyone from owning a gun or knife, or prohibited anyone from arguing more than five minutes, all in order to help prevent their members from committing murder. That would be a sure sign that those church groups are full of people who are not born again and who have not made Jesus their Lord.

And that is why the original Anabap-

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tists had no ordnungs. They were all born-again believers who strived to obey Christ's commandments. That is why you won't find anything about any ordnung in the 1632 Dordrecht Confession. And because they had no ordnung, there is no record of them requiring ordnung vows of baptismal candidates or semi-annual ordnung vow renewals of everyone. Nor is there any record of them shunning anyone who transgressed the ordnung.

But here is the real shocker for modern Amish folks: Not only is there no mention of any ordnung in the 1632 Dordrecht Confession, that Confession actually contains a prohibition against any ordnung. Allow me to prove that to you.

The title of Article 5 of the Dordrecht Confession is: "Of the Law of Christ, that is, the Holy Gospel or the New Testament." Notice that there are three phrases in the title of Article 5: (1) "the Law of Christ," (2) "the Holy Gospel," and (3) "the New Testament." The second two are just alternate descriptions of the first one. Here is the title once again: "Of the Law of Christ, *that is, the Holy Gospel or the New Testament.*" So, Article 5 is all about the Law of Christ, which can also be referred to as "the Holy Gospel" or "the New Testament."

What is the Law of Christ? It is a biblical phrase found in 1 Cor. 9:19-21 that clearly refers to all of Christ's commandments, just as the phrase "the Law of Moses" in the same passage refers to all the commandments God gave through Moses. The original Anabaptists focused greatly on the commandments enumerated in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, believing that they introduced the higher standards of the gospel.

So, Article 5 is all about the believer's obligation to obey Christ's command-

ments. In quoting Article 5 below, I have noted, in brackets, every time the Law of Christ is referenced either directly or indirectly, and I have also capitalized Article 5's clear prohibition against creating any additional rules beyond Christ's commandments:

Of the Law of Christ, that is, the Holy Gospel or the New Testament: We also believe and confess that before His ascension He instituted His New Testament [the Law of Christ], and, since it [the Law of Christ] was to be and remain an eternal Testament, that He confirmed and sealed the same [the Law of Christ] with His precious blood, and gave and left it [the Law of Christ] to His disciples, yea, charged them so highly with it [the Law of Christ], that neither angel nor man may alter it [the Law of Christ], NOR ADD TO IT [the Law of Christ] nor take away from it [the Law of Christ]; and that He caused the same [the Law of Christ], as containing the whole counsel and will of His heavenly Father, as far as is necessary for salvation to be proclaimed in His name by His beloved apostles, messengers, and ministers—whom He called, chose, and sent into all the world for that purpose—among all peoples, nations, and tongues; and repentance and remission of sins to be preached and testified of; and that He accordingly has therein declared all men without distinction, who through faith, as obedient children, heed, follow, and practice what the same [the Law of Christ] contains, to be His children and lawful heirs; thus excluding no one from the precious inheritance of eternal salvation, except the unbelieving and disobedient [to the Law of Christ], the stiff-necked and obdurate, who despise it [the Law of Christ], and incur this through their own sins, thus making themselves unworthy

of eternal life (Jer. 31:31; Heb. 9:15-17; Matt. 26:28; Gal. 1:8; I Tim. 6:3; John 15:15; Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47; Rom. 8:17; Acts 13:46).

Without dispute, the original Anabaptists believed that eternal salvation was granted to those who repent, believe, and then obey the Law of Christ. To them, that was all that was required. Nothing more. And they also firmly believed that no one should add anything to the Law of Christ, as we just plainly read.

But that is exactly what has been done in Amish circles. Every Amish person is required to pledge, at his baptism, to keep all the extra-biblical rules of the ordnung, and unrepented transgressions against the ordnung are treated as sins that result in eternal damnation. The original Anabaptists would be horrified by such an idea or practice. It would remind them of all the additional man-made rules of the Roman Catholic Church that were tied to salvation, rules from which they had been delivered.

Moreover, the day before Amish youth are baptized, Amish leaders read the 18 Articles of the Dordrecht Confession to them, with some explanation of each article, in order to establish the doctrinal basis for their baptisms. Then, the next day, those same Amish leaders, in direct contradiction to Article 5, require all the baptismal candidates to pledge that they will keep hundreds of ordnung rules that have been added to the commandments of Christ!

In any case, when ordnung-promoting Amish leaders claim that the 1632 Dordrecht Confession—found in practically every copy of *The Martyrs' Mirror*, a book found in many Amish homes—is the standard for their doctrine and practice, they are ignoring Article 5, because it condemns the addition of any rules to the Law of Christ.

Let's now return to Anna's letter:

I agree, any woman who truly loves God sincerely won't flaunt her body and dress immodestly or walk in a way that draws attention to her beautiful figure. Men can't help that God created them with the desire to have a beautiful woman. It's no sin. That's why fathers and mothers HAVE to teach their children, especially girls, to be discrete and modest. (I didn't say hide their bodies behind shapeless ill-fitting feed sacks.) But teaching them the proper way to walk and dress at a young age, to avoid becoming a stumbling block for men when they grow to become ladies. No, men can't blame it all on women, for impure thoughts or for abusing or raping a girl. Because she was a temptation with her beautiful figure. Fathers, you are responsible to teach the importance of modesty. Your wife can help explaining to the children, but it's you who must say, "No, you can't wear that sweater, it's too form-fitting," teaching purity and modesty.

Notice that Anna confirms what I have already affirmed, that those who love God will keep His commandments: "Any woman who truly loves God sincerely won't flaunt her body and dress immodestly or walk in a way that draws attention to her beautiful figure." So Anna, who clearly loves God, doesn't need an ordnung dress code to ensure her modesty. And it also sounds as if her born-again parents rightly imparted their godly wisdom to her. So again, no ordnung dress code is needed in her case. Anna is not modest because of social or religious pressures that coerce her to do what she'd prefer not to do—and doesn't do when no one is looking. She is modest because she is born again, loves God, and loves her neighbor. That is true for every truly born-again woman.

And did you also notice how Anna wisely addressed some of the spectrum of opinion that exists among Amish people regarding women's proper dress? She declares that men have no right to blame their own misconduct on women, as some Amish men do. She doesn't think that women must hide their bodies "behind shapeless ill-fitting feed sacks," so she believes that some display of natural female attractiveness is OK. I agree with her. I am reminded that there is no doubt that Abraham's wife, Sarah, dressed very modestly in her day, probably even wearing a veil over her face, but it was still obvious to everyone that she was a beautiful woman—so much so that her husband, Abraham, feared being murdered by other men who would desire her (see Gen. 12:10-16). Sarah is praised by the apostle Peter as being a "holy woman" (1 Pet. 3:5-6). She was an attractive holy woman.

As Anna continues, it become clear that the Amish community of which she and her family are a part is different from many other Amish communities, at least regarding excommunication and shunning:

For example, a member of our church left, and literally went out into the world, lived a sinful life, and we did NOT excommunicate him, but rather fasted and prayed on his behalf for his soul.

Notice that Anna stresses that the wayward man "literally went out into the world" and he "lived a sinful life." So, the man didn't just leave their church and start breaking a few man-made rules and traditions. No, he started breaking God's commandments and behaving like people whose Lord is not Jesus. Still, Anna's church did not immediately excommunicate him, an act that surely would have affirmed, in his mind, his decision to leave, and one

which may well have sealed his eternal damnation. Rather, they loved him as a wayward brother and were able to restore him, as the New Testament teaches (see 2 Cor. 2:5-11; Gal. 6:1; 2 Thes. 3:14-15; Jas. 5:19). Anna continues:

He's a God-loving Christian man today (and NO, he's not Amish!). God does perform miracles today. We [originally] drove that man away by not truly loving him, listening to him, helping him overcome struggles, fulfilling his needs. He was "made fun of" among the young boys and finally couldn't take it. He was bitter and hateful to all the church with the exception of one family other than his own family. After his closest friend died (from our church) he became depressed and asked for help, but didn't receive what he needed, and because he was dramatic, making things worse than they were, when in reality they WERE that BAD to him. A year or so after he left, and was living in sin and miserable, he was in an accident. Scenes of his life passed before his eyes, and he realized how he strayed. He begged God for a second chance to live for Him, and God granted him that request.

First, notice that, unlike so many Amish churches, Anna's church hasn't excommunicated and shunned a man just because he is no longer Amish. He's a "God-loving Christian man," so they, as the Bible teaches, love him as a brother in Christ, even though he is now a member of a non-Amish church. That is an indication that Anna's Amish church consists of truly born-again believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, and not just religious tradition-followers.

Second, apparently Anna's church humbly acknowledged that they were at least partly responsible for the man leaving. To at least to some degree,

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the church had mistreated him, and that is what drove him away and into the world. Thankfully, the church took responsibility, prayed for the wayward man, and God answered their prayers. What a beautiful story! But I've heard scores and scores of horror stories from wonderful, God-loving Christian people whose former Amish churches excommunicated them and shun them today, including their own Amish family members. What will those Amish people say in heaven to the people whom they shunned on earth (if, that is, those Amish people who shun God's children are permitted into heaven)?

The New Testament, of course, does include instructions regarding who should be disciplined through shunning. They are those in the church who have sinned. That is, they have broken one or more of *God's* commandments. And they are those who have not repented after being lovingly confronted. They are not those who have broken an ordnung rule and not repented, if for no other reason than the fact that the early church had no ordnung rules. When church members are disciplined for breaking ordnung rules, that indicates that ordnung rules have been made equal to God's commandments.

OK, we will close this discussion for now. If you have thoughts about the ordnung that have not been expressed in this issue and the previous issue of *The Awakening!*, please write. We may include your thoughts in a future issue.

What Church are David and Jonas Members of?

By Jonas Kurtz

A number of our good readers have written to ask us about the church of

which David and I are members. And they want to know what, if any, ordnung it follows, how we handle sin in the church, and so on. Some of those questions are often asked from a viewpoint that a church without an ordnung has no means for retaining order. The assumed result is that sin is running rampant and everyone is living for the desires of their flesh.

What follows is one of those letters—a very gracious one by the way—and my response. I will refer to the author of that letter as “John.” My reply is about four times longer than John's letter, because I attempted to not only answer his questions, but also give the reason for my answers. I hope you find it helpful!

John: Dear David, Christian greetings sent your way! We received another issue of *The Awakening!*, and as always it was interesting to read through. But I do have some serious concerns or questions you might say. And it's hard to know where to start.

Jonas: Dear John, first of all, thank you so much for your kind and encouraging response to *The Awakening!* We receive hundreds of responses to each issue, not all of which are positive, so it is always nice to receive kind letters such as yours.

Second, I should inform you that this is Jonas writing to you and not David. I am the co-publisher of *The Awakening!* We both have busy schedules, so we try to answer letters as we can, but that sometimes require that I reply on David's behalf and vice versa. In the future, we plan to have a better system in place to do a better job in serving those who write to us.

David and I live about 30 minutes from one another and fellowship at the same church, so we move in the same circles. We are part of a small network of house

churches where we live in Punxsutawney, PA, that meet on a weekly basis. Once a month, those smaller churches gather for what we call “City Church.” It is at that gathering that David and I fellowship at since he is not a part of my house church. You may find it interesting that David pastored three churches (that met in buildings) over a 20-year period in the Pittsburgh area during his younger years. David was not raised Amish, as I was.

David and I also work together, and we are in contact practically every day. We also meet once a week at David and his wife's home with the rest of the local staff of *Heavens Family*, a non-profit organization that David founded 21 years ago that serves the poor around the world. All this to say, I do fellowship closely with David and know him well enough that I believe I can respond to this letter on his behalf.

John: 1st I wish you would have answered the question from Andy [in the last issue of *The Awakening!*] on whether your church has any guidelines or ordnung on anything such as dress or smartphone use for kids or any guideline of any kind. This is not a trick question, I'm not trying to trip you. I have just wondered for some time what church you go to. I would love if you could explain to me how your church handles wayward members, or deals with its poor, or if someone falls in sin such as porn or having an affair.

Now I doubt that you have a rule on prayer coverings but if you do what happens if someone consistently violates that rule. And most important in my mind is how do you deal with members that have fallen and stay down. Continue to live in sin like we read in Romans I believe, about the man that lived with his stepmother. Like I said I'm not trying to get you so to speak, just the more of your issues I read the more curious I have become.

I would love to get into the nuts and bolts of this discussion on ordnungs because it is all so interesting to me. But in this letter time and space probably won't allow it. My intent in this letter is to simply to ask some questions on your church and so I don't want to make this too long. If I receive an answer from you maybe I can write back with some of my "praise points" and concerns.

Jonas: If by asking if our church has any rules or guidelines you are referring to rules beyond the commandments of Christ, we do not. Since Jesus is our Lord, we believe obedience to His commandments is very important, and we certainly hold each other accountable to that.

Each week the end of our small church gathering and Bible study, we ask every person to share how they plan to obey that week what they learned from the Bible study. Then, the following week when we gather, one of the first things we do is "look back" at everyone's commitment from the previous week. Each person shares on how it went for them in the past week, in terms of the previous week's commitment.

You may be wondering, "What if they didn't keep their commitment from the previous week?"

When we ask people to make commitments, we ask them to first listen to the Holy Spirit within them to see if God shows them something specific to do. If they do receive some specific guidance from the Holy Spirit, we ask them to tell everyone. The following week, if someone says that they failed to obey what God specifically told them to do a week ago, we ask them how we can help them do it this week. When the Lord specifically tells someone to do something, we try to be extra intentional in making sure it happens.

Now, most of the time when we are

sharing how we want to obey God in the next week, we are sharing things that we did not hear specifically from the Holy Spirit within us, but rather things that we know we are supposed to always be doing according to Jesus' commandments as found in the Bible.

For example someone might say, "I would like to share the gospel with my neighbor" or, "I want to take a meal to a certain person who is ill and show them that I care." When we return the following week and someone did not accomplish what they intended to, we don't discipline them! Rather, we encourage them, and we try to equip them to accomplish it in the next few weeks. So, I just want you to understand that we take obedience to Jesus very seriously. But we don't have an ordnung other than Jesus' commandments, just like the first Christians, and just like the first Anabaptists.

All that being said, we have had several instances of someone falling into serious sin that brings a stain on the church. This leads to your next question of how we handle wayward members. When we become aware of such a thing, we use the principles found in Matthew 18. A brother (or a sister if the erring believer is a female) in the church will visit the erring believer with the goal of helping that person address their sin and overcome. We have yet to see such a person persist in their sin once they have been confronted. In every instance, they admitted their sin and repented. However, if they were to persist in sin and still want to be a member of our body, we would be forced to excommunicate them, as the Bible instructs, in hopes that it would lead to their repentance and restoration to the church.

Something else we do in my house church to guard against sin is: The men meet every other week, and the women also meet on alternating weeks, for

what we refer to as our "accountability groups." First, we go out into our community to share the gospel with those who need to hear it (that is, everyone who is not born again), then we gather over a meal and share our burdens with one another. Sometimes struggles with sin are confessed, and so we encourage one another to follow after the Spirit rather than yield to the flesh. We are a spiritual family, so we really do care for one another.

All of this to say, we are not unaware of the danger of sin, but I am firmly persuaded that no amount of extra-biblical rules have the ability to help any believer overcome the old sinful nature or desires. I also firmly believe that extra-biblical rules distract us from obeying the commandments of the Lord Jesus Christ. Many Anabaptist churches have become so focused on their particular rules—on what they do and don't wear, on what they do or don't own—that their focus is on those things rather than on the Law of Christ.

For instance, in my former Amish community, it was against the rules to do missionary work because so many who did that abandoned Amish culture, or they were judged as becoming proud, or we just had never done those things. It was also extremely frowned upon to share the gospel. Instead, we were asked to "Live a Light." While it is biblical that we are to be a light to the world, that in and of itself does not fulfill the Great Commission, that is to go and make disciples of all nations. Being a light to the world is a component of disciple making, but it is not the fulfillment of it. We directly, and in many cases knowingly, disobeyed what is perhaps Jesus' most profound commandment, simply because it didn't fit into our way of life.

I realize that many Amish people believe that Jesus only gave the Great Commission (found in Matthew 28:18-

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20) to the original apostles. But in that commission, Jesus told His apostles to “make disciples, teaching them to obey everything I’ve commanded you.” So obviously, one of those things Jesus’ apostles taught their disciples was to “make disciples, teaching them to obey everything Jesus commanded His apostles”! All believers can, and should, be making disciples. Remember that Jesus taught all His followers in His Sermon on the Mount: “Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; *but whoever keeps and teaches them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:19, emphasis added).

Another problem I’ve noticed regarding extra-biblical rules is how those rules are enforced. This has resulted in the majority of Amish Churches using excommunication in an extremely unbiblical manner. Families have been destroyed, and children have been estranged from their parents and vice versa. All this in the name of “preserving unity.” Surely it makes the angels weep!

The ordnung, or guidelines, or extra biblical rules, are the number one reason there are hundreds of different Amish groups today. I’m sure you’ve seen it: A handful of families will disagree with something. Either they will want certain rules to be more liberal or more conservative. So, they move away and start their own community. The new community will be governed by its own set of rules that everyone agrees to be necessary to bring peace and unity. However, 10, 20, or 30 years later, that community has some members who disagree with something, so the cycle begins again.

In fact, right now in the largest Amish settlement in North America—Lancaster County, Pennsylvania—a

four-way split is in progress, all due to disagreement about extra-biblical rules. My prayer is that all who are suffering through that situation will be motivated to read their Bibles without an Amish lens and realize that there is nothing that resembles Amish ordnungs in the New Testament. I also pray that everyone realizes that they should not just blindly trust their leaders to choose which part of the split they should join!

Granted, sometimes disagreements are about *how* someone is excommunicated or disciplined. Still, likely the reason that person was excommunicated or disciplined had to do with the ordnung. So, some splits occur, not directly because of the ordnung, but over how the ordnung was applied or enforced. This has resulted in scores of Amish communities that only fellowship within their own unique circle.

I live within 15 minutes of three Amish communities, none of which will fellowship with one another, and all because of differences in their ordnungs. They all practice the same form of gathering, they all hold to the Anabaptist grundzatta (principles), yet each is convinced that they are the ones who have it right, that they have the most biblical ordnung that will result in the most biblical fellowship. They can’t all three be right!

My point is, the ordnung, or the guidelines, or extra-biblical rules, or whatever name you choose to give it, has been the number one reason for division in Amish churches. The very thing that is portrayed as bringing them together in unity has driven them apart. As I mentioned, it has shattered families, destroyed relationships, helped to hide horrible sin, and it has hindered the spreading of the gospel. How can such a thing be pleasing to God?

Now let me add that I am aware of a few Amish churches in which many of

the members are truly born again. In those churches, those who transgress against the ordnung are not excommunicated. And, salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, not through faith in the culture, is emphasized. In those churches, even I, as an excommunicated Amish man, am welcome to attend their churches, and even during communion services.

I have, perhaps, been a bit harsh in making my appraisal, and I don’t want to sound as if I think anyone who is a member of a church with an ordnung has no hope of eternal life. I believe there will be many from Plain/Old Order churches in heaven. But I also believe they will have to answer in some cases for making the ordnung equal to the commandments of Christ, and for disobeying the Great Commission.

Wouldn’t it be wonderful if ALL Amish communities would announce they are going to drop the ordnung and focus on helping everyone experience the new birth and equipping them to obey all that Jesus commanded?

I am well aware that, if every ordnung was dropped, many current Amish people would shed their outward layer of godliness and drift into sin (biblical sin). But those folks are already a part of the world. They just wear Amish clothing. As I’m sure you know, “the world” is not about owning or not owning cars, cell phones or tractors. It is not about having or not having hot running water, and so on. “The world” consists of everyone who is not submitted to Jesus and is therefore not obeying His commandments. And it all comes down to the condition of people’s hearts. If a person truly loves God, he will obey God from his heart even in the absence of extra-biblical rules. And if a person doesn’t love God, he won’t obey God from his heart, even if he keeps extra-biblical rules..

Personally, I would rather be with a group of 10 people who want to obey God because they love Him than be with a group of 10,000 people who are bickering over ordnung rules!

John: I do appreciate what you are trying to do and there was one point I wanted to bring out in this letter also that I am hoping you can respond on and that is on cars. You wrote that it seems silly that we do not own cars yet ride in them. And I can see where you are coming from because it does not seem to make sense unless you can understand it the way I believe for myself. I don't believe there is anything sinful with their car in and of itself. But with the lifestyle that I choose to live, if I had a car that life would be gone. That is a whole discussion by itself and I would love to have a response from you.

Prayers needed. Praying for you!

Jonas: I think the fact that you believe your way of life would fall by the wayside if you began to drive a car might show it is built upon a foundation other than God. On the other hand, I don't want you to think you can't be a Christian unless you drive a car! But I will say this: I have been driving a car for two years now, and I have a stronger circle of fellowship with like-minded believers than I ever had before. Of course, that is not a result of driving a car—it is a result of being born again and having fellowship in the Spirit. We would have the same degree of fellowship if we would all drive horses and buggies. I believe it would be no better and no worse. Unity and fellowship come from within not from without.

I hope all I have written makes sense to you. I have not written to be contentious, but simply to relay things to you as I see and have experienced them. I believe you sincerely want to serve the Lord. I encourage you to be a "Berean"

(see Acts 17:10-11). Do not just believe what I have written, but diligently search the Bible to determine for yourself if my words are true.

I would certainly be open to more conversation, and I would love to have a letter from you with those "praise points" you mentioned! Feel free to call me weekdays at (814) 952-7758.

For God's Glory

Jonas Kurtz

When Bishop Byler Became Bothered by His Bible

By David Kirkwood

Jesus told us to go to the "uttermost parts of the earth," and a few weeks ago, it sure felt as if Jonas Kurtz and I obeyed that commandment! We found ourselves in southern Missouri, near the backwoods town of Anderson.

We were invited there by an Amish bishop named Melvin Byler, who has been reading *The Awakening!* from the first time we published it in summer of 2022. In 2019, Bishop Byler and his family started a new Amish community in Anderson that grew to 34 families. Everyone agreed with the community ordnung. It was just three handwritten pages—very short by comparison to many Amish ordnungs. Bishop Byler had written it himself, copying part of it from an ordnung that guided an Amish community in Oklahoma. Here's a section from the second page that spelled out the dress code:

Men & boys reasonable length hair, not shingled, etc. a beard for men, hats or sock hat. Hats or sock hats & vests & shoes for church & holiday etc gatherings or gatherings where one would dress up. Long sleeves for church.... Use tobacco with respect to others & each to his own conviction.

Women & girls head coverings, for a covering not style, encourage girls to wear in school & at home as they get older. Tying strings [of white caps] in our church gatherings. Dresses etc Modest and Plain, front opening mindful of exposure, not too short arms, nor ruffles & not too tight. For Sunday & holiday gatherings, etc long-armed dresses and caps. White cap in home district, Black stockings & shoes & Bonnetts, also women & girls not to wear men's clothes.

The new Anderson community was given an abandoned church chapel that had been constructed in the 1940s. They repaired it and added a large room to serve as a single-room Amish school.

Although the Anderson Ordnung prohibited car ownership and driving, it did permit tractors—up to 100 horsepower. The Anderson families are spread over such a broad area that some men drove their tractors—pulling wagons on which wives and children sat—to Sunday church gatherings. On Sunday mornings, a combination of 34 tractors and horse-drawn buggies were parked around the church building.

Everything was going well except for one thing. Bishop Byler, who was born again and thus indwelt by the Teacher (the Holy Spirit), began

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being bothered by his Bible. He started noticing that the early Christians appeared to have done things quite differently than his new church was doing. The early Christians—all culturally Jewish—did not start churches, invent hundreds of new rules beyond Christ’s commandments, and then shut their church off to others from the outside. Rather, they did the opposite. They were constantly adding new people to their churches, including people from Gentile cultures who were very different than them. And even though the early Jewish Christians all maintained their cultural practices, they did not force those practices upon the new Gentile Christians. They only expected them to follow Jesus’ commandments.

Then Bishop Byler started receiving *The Awakening!* (as did others in his church), which encouraged him in his growing understanding of biblical Christian life that was practiced, not only by the first Christians, but the first Anabaptists. When he began suggesting to his congregation, however, that perhaps they should just follow the example of the early Christians and early Anabaptists, it started an uproar. In the end, twenty families left. It was a terrible ordeal, but the church survived.

The folks who remained decided to abandon their ordnung and just strive to obey the commandments of Jesus. Many were genuinely born again under Bishop Byler’s ministry. For the first times in their lives, they experienced the Holy Spirit working in them.

The church began to meet every week instead of every other week. They started worshipping and preaching in English instead of German. They be-

gan to welcome people from outside and from other cultures to attend their church gatherings.

They also started buying their own cars and pickup trucks rather than pay for English taxis. Some of the men no longer have Amish haircuts. Some no longer wear traditional Amish clothing. Jesus—not traditions or an ordnung—became their Lord.

At the Sunday morning gathering that Jonas and I attended, most of Bishop Byler’s flock still looked very Amish to me. And I so enjoyed singing the absolute slowest versions I have ever experienced of “What A Friend We Have In Jesus” and “Come Thou Fount Of Every Blessing”—as if they were ancient Anabaptist hymns!

The Sunday meeting was not segregated by gender. Families all sat together. People brought their Bibles with them and followed along with the sermon.

Jonas delivered the Sunday morning sermon, and he wore his Amish clothes, so he fit right in. His sermon was, in part, about the cost of following Jesus, and everyone was encouraged, as many are being shunned by Amish family and friends because they are now following Jesus without an ordnung. His sermon was so good that I had to restrain myself from saying “Amen” out loud about 30 times. Everyone in the congregation listened intently, but kept very quiet, as I understand Amish people generally do during church gatherings.

After church we all enjoyed a delicious Amish lunch, eating in the chapel and school room, and then fellowshiped for a few hours before going home. But everyone (and more) returned at 4pm for the every-Sun-

day afternoon Bible study, at which I was invited to share. By the end of my message, I had taught everyone how to enthusiastically say “Amen!” when the preacher makes a good point (since I made some good points!). They seemed to enjoy it so much that I think they’ll be encouraging Bishop Byler during his sermons—and naturally reaping the blessing of better sermons by an encouraged bishop!

After the afternoon Bible study, we all enjoyed another tasty Amish meal, followed by more hours of fellowship. It is so obvious that this is a group of people who really love one another. They are a born-again family. Jonas and I didn’t really want to leave when we did, at 7pm, and they didn’t want us to leave. It was a wonderful day with the family of God.

As we walked outside into the night, there was Bishop Byler’s pickup truck, plus about 20 other cars and pickup trucks that were parked around the church. Not long ago, it would have been mostly horses, buggies and tractors with wagons. To me, those cars and trucks represented the new freedom that all of the drivers now have in Jesus Christ. They are free from their former traditions that have no relationship to biblical, moral or ethical principles, rules that they thought they had to obey in order to one day get into heaven.

I know that a few of our readers may accuse Bishop Byler of just wanting more things, but I can assure you this is not the case. I noticed how simply and humbly he and his family still live. Now they are born-again, Spirit-indwelt followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, focused on obeying His commandments!

What is “the World” and Its Lure?

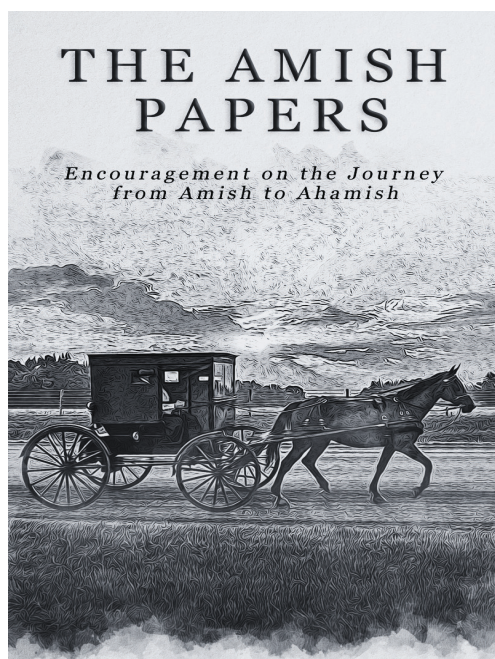
We are happy to announce the release of a free biblical teaching for all our readers that we think will be edifying to them.

In this recently-published teaching, David Kirkwood examines three of Scripture’s warnings about “the world” (Rom. 12:2; Jas. 4:4; 1 John 2:15) within the context of the New Testament to answer the important

question, “What were the apostles Paul, James, and John warning about when they warned about ‘the world?’” Readers may be surprised to discover that, according to the Bible, some people who consider themselves to not be “worldly” are actually very “worldly”!

The fastest way to receive your free 14-page copy of “What is ‘the World’

and Its Lure?” is by requesting an electronic version by email. Just send your request via email to jonas@heavensfamily.org. To receive your free printed copy, please send your request to: The Awakening! Magazine, P.O. Box 611, Punxsutawney, PA 15767.



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. They believed that the new birth and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit were essential components to Christian living and eternal life.

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 they were God’s spiritual children. They knew their names were recorded in heaven.

All of this good news is established in the very first chapter of *The Amish Papers*, a chapter titled, “An Honest Look at the 1632 Dordrecht Confession.” That famous confession, of course, is the original doctrinal statement subscribed to by all Anabaptists, including all Plain/Old Order groups.

Later chapters—that will be of interest to all Plain/Old Order readers who are seeking for grace and truth—continue to build on the foundation

of Scripture and the beliefs of the original Anabaptists. Chapter titles include:

- What Does it Really Mean to be Born Again?
- Unless You Become Like a Child Born Again and Amish or Ahamish?
- Why Even Good Amish People, and Not Just Bad Amish People, Need to Repent and be Born Again
- To Everyone Who is Hoping to be Good Enough to Get into Heaven
- A Tale of Two Ordnungs
- Hope for Family Reconciliation
- Two Kinds of Righteousness

If you are Plain/Old Order, and you desire a joyous relationship with God, coupled with Spirit-empowered victory over sin, doubt, fear, depression and addictions—blessings that were enjoyed by your Anabaptist ancestors centuries ago—this is a book you will want to read. To request your free digital copy, email Jonas at Jonas@heavensfamily.org. To receive a paper copy, please send \$10 to P.O. Box 611, Punxsutawney, PA 15767. Checks should be payable to Heavens Family/Awakening.

Chronicling the Anabaptist Rediscovery of their Special Spiritual Heritage

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Ordnungs**

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