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## Chronicling the Anabaptist Rediscovery of their Special Spiritual Heritage

Welcome to the first issue of *The Awakening!* We are looking forward in the years ahead to reporting on Anabaptist communities and people who are rediscovering their spiritual heritage that goes back, not just to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, but to the very first century. Wonderful things are happening today across North America as folks who want to serve and please God are being born again by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and experiencing the same blessings of the new birth that were enjoyed by the early Anabaptists and early Christians. If you have not yet experienced the new birth, you can, and we want to help you towards that end.

In this issue, Jonas Kurtz reports on the continued growth of the Johnsonburg, Pennsylvania Awakening, which has spread to other places, including Colorado.

In future issues, we intend to report on awakenings in other places. If you know of any, or are a part of one, please call Jonas Kurtz at (814) 952-7758, or write to him at P.O. Box 611, Punxsy, PA 15767. We want to hear from you to help us spread the good news and help you spread it too!

Also in this issue, I report on some of the many interesting replies to a letter that we sent to thousands of Amish households last year in June. I think you will be very interested to read excerpts from some of those letters, including two from Amish bishops.

In every issue, including this one, we intend to promote harmony among Christian groups and people who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and who are thus striving to obey His commandments—even if they hold to different convictions

regarding issues on which the Bible is silent. Jesus said that the world would know we are His disciples by our love (John 13:35), not by our divisions!

We hope that *The Awakening!* will always be a free publication, and we will rely on the provision of our Lord through His people to pay for all the related expenses. We thank and praise Him for providing what we needed to publish this first issue. If God is calling you to help us with the expenses of future issues, please let us know.

If you have family or friends who would enjoy receiving this or future issues of *The Awakening!*, please send us their names and addresses at P.O. Box 611, Punxsutawney, PA 15767. Thank you, and may God bless you!  
— David Kirkwood

Spring 2023

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

by David Kirkwood

Greetings from beautiful Pennsylvania, a state that was named after William Penn, a Quaker Christian man who, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, was instrumental in creating a safe place for persecuted European Christians, including Mennonites and Amish folks. For thousands of Anabaptists, Pennsylvania was an answer to their prayers. Today, Pennsylvania has the largest Amish population of all the states (81,500), leading even Ohio and Indiana. Anyone who lives in or near any Amish community knows what a blessing they are to local economies and everyone's well-being. They have a reputation of being family-centered, hardworking, and honest. I count myself blessed to live within the boundaries of Pennsylvania's third-largest Amish community, and within the vicinity of several others.

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

in this letter, as I think you will find them interesting. But first, I would like to apologize for a misunderstanding.

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

The primary purpose of my previous letter was to spread the good news that Amish people in Johnsonburg had recovered their Anabaptist spiritual heritage. They have been born again as described in the Bible and the 1632 Dordrecht Confession. And that same spiritual blessing has

occurred to *tens of thousands* of other Amish-born folks, some of whom are still Amish and some of whom are not.

I also wanted you to know the good news that, if you have not been born again, you can be. Jesus said that, unless we are born again, we cannot see or enter the kingdom of God (see John 3:1-16). So being born again is *very* important. If you are interested in learning more about what the Bible teaches about being born again, I would be happy to mail you two articles I've written on that subject, titled, "What Does It Really Mean to be Born Again?" and "Amish and Born Again." If you would be interested in learning what the Dordrecht Confession says about being born again, I would be happy to mail you an article I wrote about that titled, "An Honest Look at the 1632 Dordrecht Confession." Just write me with your request.

### "Who are you?"

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

I am a 64-year-old man, married for 43 years. My wife and I have 3 children and 13 grandchildren. My wife was born again at a very young age, and I was born again when I was a teenager. Over the past 43 years, I have served in vocational Christian ministry as a pastor and a Bible teacher.

All during that time, I have read and studied the Bible. That, of course, doesn't mean I might not be wrong about some things. But I have focused for 43 years on trying to understand the Bible and teaching others what I've learned. I have written a number of Bible-based books, including two daily devotionals, one titled *HeavenWord Daily*, that guides readers through the entire New Testament in one year, and one titled, *Family-Style Devotions*, that was written for parents to help their children study the life and ministry of Jesus. I believe the Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit and the most important book that exists. It contains the accounts of Jesus' ministry and His words. Everyone should be reading it every day.

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

and who are striving to obey the Lord Jesus Christ.

In addition, I've also found that I have a special and sincere love for Amish people. I can only think that love has been given to me by God. That is why I have a bumper sticker on the back of my car that says, "I love Amish people." And that is why I raised tens of thousands of dollars from Christian friends (who also love Amish folks) to pay for the printing, postage, and mailing expense to send my previous letter to 63,000 mostly-Amish households. That was a small price to pay, however, to help Amish people whom God loves rediscover their lost spiritual heritage. And it was a *very* small price to pay compared to what Jesus paid on the cross so that all of us could be born again and enter God's kingdom!

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

Another reason I'm telling you a little about myself is because I have heard that some Amish leaders are saying that I am a "wolf in sheep's clothing." Actually, however, I am a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, striving to obey His commandments, which is why I sent my previous letter, and why I am sending this letter. Two of Jesus' commandments are, "Go into all the world and

preach the gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15), and "Go and make disciples of all the nations... teaching them to observe all that I commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20). Again, those are commandments of Jesus. When I once asked an Amish bishop why the Amish don't obey those two commandments, he told me that Jesus only gave those commandments to His original apostles. That is like saying Jesus only gave the Sermon on the Mount to the first Christians. Please note: Jesus commanded His apostles to "go and make disciples of all the nations... *teaching them to observe all that I commanded you,*" so Jesus' apostles also taught their disciples to go and make disciples of all the nations... teaching them to observe all that Jesus had commanded them. It was an on-going, never-ending commandment, one that I am endeavoring to obey.

God has wanted every generation since the apostles to hear the gospel and become Jesus' disciples, which is why true Christians (those who are striving to obey Jesus) over the past 20 centuries—including your Anabaptist forefathers hundreds of years ago—proclaimed the gospel far and wide. And that is what I have been trying to do for the last 43 years. Our ministry has a Christian website full of Bible-based articles I've written that have been read by millions of people, and a YouTube internet channel where we've posted over 1,400 Bible-based videos that

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have collectively been viewed by millions of people. God wants other people to go to heaven besides me, and besides just Amish people, because Jesus died for the sins of the entire world (John 3:16; 1 John 2:2). That is why He commanded His followers to preach the gospel all over the world. If you are born again, you should be involved in spreading the gospel, not only to Amish people who are not yet born again, but to others who have not yet been born again. Again, Jesus *commanded* His followers to spread the gospel—and not just by how they live their lives, but by spoken proclamation, just as Jesus, the apostles, and the first Christians all did (see Matt. 4:17; Mark 16:20; Acts 8:1-4).

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

### Interesting Replies

Now I want to share some of the replies I've received from Amish readers to my previous letter. Those replies reveal a broad spectrum of belief and practice within Amish culture. Some replies were very kind, while others were rather unkind. Regardless, I appreciate everyone who took time to write to me, and I wish I

had time to send personal replies to all of them. I also wish you could read all of them. Some were deeply spiritual, very thoughtful, and referenced numerous Bible verses, while others reflected tragic biblical ignorance.

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

So, there are Amish people and communities that are deeply spiritual and Bible-focused, and there are Amish people and communities that are full of religious hypocrisy—like just about every other Christian denomination in the world. My

*burden is for those Amish folks who are not yet born again.*

### "We received your devilish letter..."

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

*We received your devilish letter. Their is no such thing as being born again, unless you are working for the devil. If we join Church and make that promise before God and people, that is the only time, their is nothing like being born again. I feel like turning you in for harassing other people and communities. If you think you are saved, keep it to yourself, why would you want someone else to know.... Once judgment day comes I am afraid HELL will be the place for your people. Those Johnsonburg people are breaking God's first rule, Honor thy Farther & Mother... I have not read you whole letter, but what I did read, it is the Devils path, not Gods ways as their is nothing like being born again. And when that Judgement day comes, it will not be Jesus, it will be God. As it looks like you don't understand the Bible, it says ONLY GOD knows when that will happen, not even Jesus or the Angels know. Jesus does or will NOT rule the entire world. GOD is in control of it all.... If you would keep your ass out of their [the Johnsonburg*

*Amish's] business and leive them alone, maybe they would be better off.... I think you got your brains in the wrong end of your body. We don't want to see another letter from you or we will turn it into the prosecutor. Their is one more thing the German Bible did not change since day one and it will not change, it is people like you that are changing it for your own good, not how God wants it.*

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

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

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

### **Letter from a Bishop**

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

*Dear David....,*

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

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

*We certainly need the new birth (everyone) which changes the way we think, which changes*

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

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

What an excellent letter! That bishop has a good understanding of the gospel, knowing that “we are saved by grace through faith” (Ephesians 2:8), and that salvation is “not a result of works” (Ephesians 2:9). He also understands, however, that God’s grace transforms those who have faith, so that they live lives

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characterized by good works, as Paul made so clear in Ephesians 2:10, and Jesus made so clear in His foretelling of the judgment of the sheep and goats (Matthew 24:31-46). If I were Amish, I'd want to have a bishop who believed like that bishop!

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

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

### "What peace!"

Here's an excerpt from a born-again Amish woman in

Pennsylvania who, like minister Jonas Kurtz, realized later in life that she had not been genuinely born again when she was baptized as a teenager:

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

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

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

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

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

### "We often were told that our Ordnung will not save us!"

Here's an excerpt from a corrective and gracious letter from a born-

again Amish man in Kentucky:

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

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

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

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

**"I would never discourage someone from studying the Bible"**

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

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

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

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

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

context.

**"I don't know if you've ever heard that there are 200 different ways to be Amish"**

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

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

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

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

*Do you feel it is the only way?*

*Do you feel that we cannot be a sincere, vibrant, hope-filled, alive Christian, as an Amish person? I know I've wondered. But not anymore. Up until I was 15 years*

*old I always read my Bible and kinda had a relationship with God, but I still didn't know Him personally. Didn't know Him to be the Life-Changer He is. When I was 15 I had a breakthrough in the way I viewed God. At that time I was dealing with a lot of hurt and pain. I felt dead, helpless, desperate, cold, hard, empty, and was living my life in such a way. I thought death look more appealing than life. Then, through His grace, He allowed me to see Him as "Jesus, my perfect Father." That changed my life. From there on it's been a journey. Continuously growing and changing in my love and knowledge for Him....*

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

*I believe that in every denomination under the heavens we all have our personal choice. Will we believe in Jesus? And you know, I cannot blame the people who leave the Amish. Because I know that there are preachers and people who preach the Ordnung more than the Bible. My church rarely preaches about anything other than the Word. I know there's Amish out there who simply don't know God and live their lives that way. And they're desperate for a change. But I wish the same thing you wish, that the change would*

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*happen in their hearts. They can serve Jesus as an Amish person or an English person, Greek, Jew, servant or freeman. And then impact the people closest to them with the Word of God, with the love of God.*

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

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

*I don't know if you've ever heard that there are 200 different ways to be Amish. But that's how it is.*

*Every church, every youth group is still different. Just like in all other cultures, every family, every church is different....*

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

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

**"I believe there will be people in Heaven from all corners of the world, including Amish and all true believers"**

Here's an excerpt from a great letter from a born-again Amish

man in Indiana:

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

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

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

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

**"I've been starved for spiritual nourishment in a language I can understand!"**

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

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

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

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

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

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

By the way, a number of those who wrote to me told me how

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

**"I could just cry sometimes because of the condition of some of our churches..."**

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

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

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

*There are many Amish churches and they are not all the same — we*

*are having splits among us and sometimes shunning gets done in an unscriptural way I believe — but I am quite content to let God judge everything — He searches the reins & the hearts — He knows what our goals are in life and what we are willing to endure for His sake.*

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

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

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

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

I'm sure that many Amish readers can identify with what she wrote. I like that she emphasized that, if we

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love Jesus, we will strive to keep His commandments.

### Another Letter from an Amish Bishop

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

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

*image, as being newly born again of God through the incorruptible seed from above.” This is what I was taught at a young age and in my great weakness still try to teach that to my community and congregation.*

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

*I feel blessed and privileged that I can study The Holy Bible in 3 different languages German, English and our Pennsylvania Dutch. I also have in my bookcase the English Bible in 3 different translations the King James Version, the New King James Version, and the Wycliffe translation. But having said that, I also realize that having all those different Bibles in my possession, or even being very knowledgeable*

*in the Holy Scriptures is still not going to get me to Heaven, but remember, “He that doeth the will of my Father which is in Heaven.”*

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

### Family Reconciliation and Harmony

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

Even though excommunication and shunning are practiced to different degrees of mildness and severity from community to community and family to family, no one enjoys any of it, either those doing the excommunication and shunning or those being excommunicated and shunned.

Amish folks are hoping that family members who have left will come to their senses and return to their Amish roots. Folks who have left their Amish roots are hoping that their still-Amish family members will come to their senses and escape just as they have. The hearts of those who are being shunned and those who are doing the shunning are broken. Both long for reconciliation. How tragic it is that so many families have been torn apart.

Of course, everyone longs for a harmonious relationship with all of the members of their families and extended families, and I think we'd all agree that is also what God desires. He wants us to be rightly-related to Him and rightly-related to each other, as those two things are the basis of the two greatest commandments—to love God and love each other (Matthew 22:35-40).

Jesus told us that, because of His coming to earth, families would inevitably be divided (Matt. 10:34-37). But the family division of which we foretold would be between *believers* and *unbelievers*, between those whose Lord is Jesus and those whose Lord is not Jesus. God never intended that families would divide over opinions, convictions, or Ordnungs. One bit of good news is that the gospel of Jesus Christ, as revealed in the New Testament, not only makes a way for reconciliation between God and people, but it also makes a way for reconciliation between people who were previously

at odds. In New Testament days, the gospel resulted in the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles (see Eph. 2:11-19), two groups that previously had very little to do with each other. But when both Jews and Gentiles were born again, they all then had the same Lord and Savior, the same Heavenly Father, and the same indwelling Holy Spirit. The early churches were full of reconciled Jews and Gentiles!

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

### **200 Replies**

Among all the Amish folks who

sent replies to my first letter, their love, or lack of it, clearly identified those who were born again and those who were not. Those who are born again expressed love and sincere appreciation for me in their letters, even though many, if not most, hold to different convictions than me regarding driving buggies or using electric appliances. I knew that if I met with any of those folks, we would enjoy wonderful fellowship with each other, as we are children of the same Heavenly Father, and we share the same Lord and Savior. In stark contrast, those letters that expressed hatred and animosity against me were clearly written by Amish people who have not yet been born again. If they were born again, they would love other people (like me) who are born again, and they would rejoice in any effort that is being made to help people who are not yet born again to be born again.

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

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

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

The good news is that children of the devil can be transformed into children of God by being born again! And when they are born again, they discover that they

*automatically* love all others who are born again, including those with whom they were previously at odds. That is how the gospel brings about reconciliation in families. Paul wrote, “Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another” (1Thes. 4:9).

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

### **Here’s an Example...**

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

*It is so touching to hear your mom humbly but seriously admitting that they as parents were wrong, and their parents were wrong too. Mom’s [new] faith is beautiful! And mom, if you read this, we love you, and Jesus does even more! Also, we never hold it against you*

*parents. This has been happening for many generations and obviously everyone wants to think their parents have sound doctrine so you all followed in the footsteps of the one before you. Praise God, He gave you and I and anyone that wants His beautiful gift of salvation and our blinders fell off!*

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

But doesn’t the New Testament teach the practice of excommunication and shunning? Yes, certainly, but the New Testament teaches excommunication and shunning of people who unrepentantly disobey *Christ’s commandments*, not people who share different convictions regarding issues on which the Bible is silent. We are

supposed to excommunicate and shun people who claim to be Christians yet who deny Christ by their blatant, unrepentant practice of disobedience to His commandments. They bring a stain upon the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, because Jesus is clearly *not* their Lord. You can read in 1 Corinthians 5, for example, about a man whom Paul instructed the Corinthian believers to excommunicate. That man was living in an unrepentant, immoral, sexual relationship with his stepmother. In the New Testament, there are no instructions to shun someone who has transgressed the Ordnung, because the early church of the apostles had no Ordnung. They focused on obeying the commandments of Christ, because that is what Jesus told them to do (Matt. 28:18-20).

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

But what about reconciliation with family members who have left the Amish who are *not* born again, and

not only are they not following the Ordnung, but they are also ignoring the commandments of Christ?

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

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

and family harmony that is not conditioned on agreement on issues about which the Bible is silent!

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

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

### **A Common Barrier to Family Reconciliation**

But isn't it wrong for your family members to have broken the lifetime-vows to the Amish church that they made at their baptism as teenagers? I've asked many formerly-Amish people what they say to their still-Amish family members when they

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face that accusation. They've given me various answers. The most common one is that they think their still-Amish family members are asking the wrong question. They say that their still-Amish family members should be asking *themselves* why they are part of a church that expects teenagers to make a lifetime vow to it, something that the original apostles never asked anyone to do and that is not found anywhere in the New Testament. Asking or requiring *anyone* to make vows to a certain church or doctrine is unbiblical.

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

Regardless, you will never ever enjoy family reconciliation if it is conditioned upon your formerly-Amish family members returning to Amish traditions. If you think they are going to hell because they are no longer Amish, there is nothing in the New Testament to support your view. If they are willing to reconcile apart from you leaving the Amish, but you

are not willing to reconcile unless they rejoin the Amish, you are the one standing in the way of reconciliation, not them. Can you imagine getting to heaven and seeing your born-again family members there whom you shunned? Wouldn't that be embarrassing, to say the least? When the Ordnung, by itself, breaks families apart and keeps them apart, then obviously it is not a good thing.

Many folks who wrote in response to my previous letter explained why they believe the Ordnung is a good thing. Many of their reasons are biblically sound. Yet the fact remains that the early Christians and the apostles who led them had no Ordnung other than the commandments of Christ. They also had the indwelling Holy Spirit to help them obey His commandments. And that was sufficient for them. Why are those two things not sufficient for Christians today? I have written an article that takes a closer look at the idea of Ordnungs, titled, "A Tale of Two Ordnungs." If you would like a copy of that article, I would be happy to send it to you. (Just write and request it.)

### Thank You!

Thank you for allowing me to share from my heart. My conscience is clear that I have tried my best to help Amish folks experience the blessing shared by all the original Anabaptists—your ancestors—the blessing of being

born again by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. As I shared in my previous letter, you don't need me to teach you. You have the Bible, hopefully in a language that you understand. If you don't, I would be happy to send you a free, English New Testament. If you need a large-print Bible, I would be happy to send you a large-print, red-letter King James Bible, but it will cost me \$30, so I would appreciate your financial help on that if you can afford it.

May the Lord bless you as you seek for His truth!

Sincerely in Christ,

David Kirkwood  
P.O. Box 611  
Punxsutawney, PA 15767

## The Johnsonburg Awakening Update

by Jonas Kurtz

**H**ave you heard of what has been happening since the beginning of 2022 in our small Amish community located near Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania? It has been referred to as "The Johnsonburg Awakening." We, a group of Amish brothers and sisters, have returned to the roots of our Anabaptist heritage. After taking an honest, open-minded look at the Bible, we have concluded, as did our Anabaptist ancestors, that nothing can save us

from our sins except for the blood of Jesus Christ. As a result of believing in Him in our hearts and receiving His gift of salvation, we have been spiritually reborn, and we now have a burning desire (and Spirit-empowered ability) to obey Him and keep all His commandments.

One of the commandments Jesus gave to us is in Mathew 28:18-20: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Our Anabaptist ancestors took that commandment very seriously. They obeyed Jesus, and they proclaimed that everyone should repent, be born again by faith in the Lord Jesus, and follow Him the rest of their lives. Those first Anabaptists were willing to die—and many did in fact give their lives—in order to obey all of the commandments of their Lord Jesus Christ.

Let me give you an update on what has been happening in Johnsonburg, and in other places, since the initial awakening that began in February.

We are continuing to reach out to people in our area with the good news about Jesus by holding six

weekly Bible studies and sharing the good news with others—Amish and English—any time we can. We continue to see people repent of their sins and receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

One of them is a 17-year-old young man who previously attended drinking parties. Now he is staying sober and sharing the good news with others!

A married couple became born again as a result of studying the Bible and looking for answers to questions that nobody else could sufficiently answer. Now, they too have been reborn and are living their lives in obedience to God’s Word.

Two couples who were born again early in the year have since moved to Colorado have started three bi-weekly Bible studies, and are about to begin their fourth one! They are encouraging those who attend their Bible studies to also start their own Bible studies.

A young couple from Ohio have also been born again and are leading new lives, full of joy.

These are just some of good things that have been happening. It has been wonderful to witness the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the Amish folks who have been born again. They have even gotten involved to reaching out each week to international students who attend Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

This past summer, we hosted a farm picnic for those international students. They were from India, Bangladesh, Nigeria, India, Panama, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Turkey, Egypt, Uganda and Saudi Arabia. We had a corn-roast and gave them horse and buggy rides. They loved it! We are building friendships with many of them and sharing our faith in hopes that they, too, will believe in our Lord Jesus Christ. And a few of us were recently involved in mission trips to Guatemala, where we were blessed to help serve poor widows, severely handicapped children, and families that make their living scavenging in a city dump.

We give God the glory for everything that has happened, and everything that continues to happen. He is the one who has changed us and made us into “new creations” (2 Cor. 5:17). It is our desire that everyone would be born again and experience all the blessings that were so common among our Anabaptist ancestors!

For God's glory,

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